



FOSTERING BETTER READING COMPREHENSION IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: EXPLORING PRE-READING ACTIVITIES AND INTEREST LEVELS

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Abstract: This study examines how impact of reading engagement and preparatory reading tasks on students' understanding. During the 2024-2025 school year, students participated in an experimental study project. While the control group used various methods, the experimental group received instruction that followed specific procedures. Before proceeding, both groups used tests to evaluate their grasp of subject. They took a post-test once the sessions were completed. This study continues with the distribution of reading interest. The research material reached a reading comprehension test of 30 items, and a reading interest a survey instrument comprising 30 questions.. The statistical significance of the data was determined using T-test and ANOVA. In the treatment group, 29 participants exhibited substantial reading time, while one student had limited reading time. Twenty-six children in the control group showed strong interest, and four children showed moderate interest. This study discovered that a notable statistically significant difference in reading comprehension outcomes was identified the experimental and control cohorts. This demonstrates that pre-reading activities can effectively improve student comprehension and increase the number of interactions with the subject.

Keywords: *Pre-Reading Activities; Reading Comprehension; Reading Interest.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an activity that helps individuals grasp what they read based on their attitudes, knowledge, and past experiences Johannson (2022). This indicates that reading is more than just producing words. Reading integrates skills and processes, making it a process-driven outcome. In emphasising how crucial reading comprehension refers to understanding the meaning behind a text or sentence. This is an interactive experience between the text and readers Usman (2020). With their existing background knowledge, it increases their chances of becoming proficient readers. Comprehension is one of the aims of the reading process, allowing readers to transfer the text's knowledge and information. Reading comprehension refers to constructing meaning from text Smith (2021). All reading teaching aims to help readers grasp material. Reading comprehension involves efficiently retrieving

relevant information from a written text. Reading and comprehension are inseparable.

There are many factors that can influence students' reading comprehension, one of which is reading strategies. By helping students become more active in textbooks, they have been shown to read strategies such as summaries, questions, and predictions Afflerbach (2016); Pressley (2002), the strategies allow students to better organize and store information and improve their ability to understand and recall important ideas from the text Guthrie, J. T., Wigfield, (2004); Lenski, Susan, and Lewis (2008). Research emphasises the relevance of metacognitive tactics that help students to think about what they are reading, which leads to better comprehension outcomes. In addition, the integration of reading strategies into lessons can promote deeper understanding and help students become more independent and more effective readers O'Reilly (2014).

Reading comprehension crucial for language development, especially for students acquisition for learners of English as a non-native language. Nevertheless, many learners face difficulties when trying to understand written texts, which can hinder their academic success and language development. According to Chandran (2019) students with strong reading comprehension skills are better equipped to handle such challenges because they are able to apply effective strategies. Common obstacles include a lack of reading interest, limited vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, unclear reading purposes, and weak reading strategies.

Yokubjonova (2022) and Jimenez (2023) said that Reading embodies one of the most paramount challenging language skills to acquire because it necessitates the development of multiple sub-skills to be completed correctly.

Therefore, it is essential to support learners by breaking the reading process into manageable steps, allowing them to build confidence gradually and improve over time.

While recognizing these challenges is important, identifying practical and effective teaching strategies is equally crucial. One interesting way is to use pre-reading activities. These activities prepare students before they engage with a text by activating their prior knowledge and establishing a purpose for reading. This strategy not only increases engagement but also enhances comprehension.

Pre-reading activities are particularly important in EFL contexts, where students may lack exposure to the cultural or thematic background of a text. As Anaktototy (2020) suggests, stimulating learners' background knowledge early in the reading process helps them process and retain new information more effectively. Consequently, this article explores the role and influence of preparatory reading techniques on elevating reading understanding level for EFL learners.

Pre-reading can be useful for training students in developing and providing the information they have. Thuy (2019); Hattan, (2024); Letwory & Latuheru (2024) ; (Ary, 2010) Pre-reading exercises aim to activate students' prior knowledge, give necessary language assistance, and motivate them to engage with the text.

These activities allow students to choose whether to read more of a text to gain new insights and improve comprehension Lailiyah et al (2019) and have a substantial effect on enhancing reading comprehension Jamilah (2018). Some

classification of preparatory reading tasks utilized on this research include the following:

Brainstorming. The teacher brought up a term related to the subject matter of the book that will be covered in class during the brainstorming session. This result is consistent with Angreni (2024) description of the brainstorming activity process, in which the teacher offers the keyword of a book to be read. Words and ideas that are related to the teacher-provided keyword must be mentioned by the students. The educator stated that the aim of this exercise was provide the pupils a general idea the thematic focus that would be discussed in the readings.

Pre-Teaching Vocabulary. During pre-reading phase, the educator did some vocabulary pre-teaching. Chowford and Ara (2021) said that teachers use pre-teaching vocabulary to assist students develop fluency and accuracy in comprehension by connecting language to the text. While, Srisang (2021) effective reading comprehension in a foreign language requires a combination of vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge. This activity was implemented in two different ways. The teacher selected seven text-related words in the first stage. The teacher then displayed the words' jumbled letters. In order to guess the words, students should collaborate. The teacher presented sentence word pieces at the second level of the pre-reading exercise. Students make educated guesses about the sentences' meanings. The thematic material of the text was predicted by the students.

Pre-Questioning. As part of the pre-reading activity, The instructor prompted students to formulate predictions drawing from certain passages from the text. To make this easier, the teacher broke the class into small groups. The results of the research by Sari et al (2021); Riswanto (2021) investigated pre-questioning significantly enhanced reading comprehension skills among tenth-grade students, as evidenced by improved test scores. The teacher presented certain materials and divided them to groups. Students discussed the scrambled portions in groups. During a small group discussion, students should ask questions and offer predictions about the story's characters. Students shared knowledge from their own parts of the text with friends who had other parts. They also questioned the information provided by their other acquaintances.

Visual Aids. Using visual resources in preparatory reading activities are beneficial for students to foster and develop their existing schemata knowledge. Navarro (2008) said Visuals

are important in helping English language learners develop schema. These assets could include images, movies, or other types of media. According to Porter (2014) visual materials can help students recall earlier knowledge. In summary, visual resources serve as important aids in pre-reading because they activate current information and scaffold new understanding, thereby boosting students' engagement and comprehension.

Pre-reading activities engage students, provide motivation to read, and allow teachers to assess comprehension Osei, G. S., (2016) Implementing pre-reading activities can facilitate students development into proficient readers. Dickson (2022). According to Mujahidah & Ramli (2019); Nesrim (2020) using the pre-reading strategy improves comprehension and performance when reading narrative literature. Research indicates that pre-reading activities can enhance student' reading comprehension abilities Rondon & Tomitch (2020).

Reading can provide valuable information for everyday life. Rintaningrum, (2019) pre-reading activities can enhance their talents and insights. While Hussain & Hassan (2020); Fitzgerald & Barger (2021) engaging students in consistent use of These activities can assist students in developing reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, creativity, and higher-order thinking abilities, and problem-solving abilities Damaianti 2020); Prahani, B. K., (2020) this technique and behaviour is not harmful.

After the researcher conducted an interview with one of the English teachers at SMPN 33 Padang, there were various causal factors that resulted in students having difficulty understanding reading, namely students lack vocabulary in English, understanding terms and structure of reading in English. Then, there is also a lack of background knowledge among students regarding the reading topics being taught. The challenges students face in comprehending reading texts are still largely connected to teacher-related factors. Where, teachers are still lacking in using appropriate reading teaching strategies. This results in students being less interested in reading activities and experiencing difficulties in understanding English reading texts. While, based on Maingi (2015) research, teachers should educate students guidelines for applying appropriate strategies to distinct reading comprehension tasks aimed at enhancing comprehension. Researcher want to address this issue by conducting a study at this school, as it is

directly pertinent to the investigation of preparatory reading tasks and their effects on student comprehension and interest in reading.

According to Sutarto (2020) suggest that increasing student interest can improve their attention to learning, particularly in reading. In line with Aprilia (2020) interest is a natural love and excitement for something or activity, not forced. Based on Herika, Yundayani et al (2024); Ismail et al (2023) a person who enjoys reading will learn about the content and read it, either alone or with external stimulus. Reading interest motivates individuals and is essential for text comprehension, enabling students to achieve their reading goals. Pre-reading skills influence children's task orientation and motivation for specific activities, including reading and play. For example, inadequate pre-reading skills in children have been linked to a lack of enthusiasm in kindergarten reading activities Salminen (2019).

There are lots of research that investigated pre-reading activities, Tanjung (2022) and research investigated by Silvia et al (2022) that showed the same result from the various pre-reading techniques that have been discussed, the technique used by the teacher is very successful in their process of learning. Next, Lailiyah et al., (2019); Zarfaz (2021) showed also that students who were exposed to pre-reading strategies demonstrated significantly higher reading achievement than students who did not receive any treatment.

According to the referenced research above, this study differs from other studies in namely some studies only examine several types of pre-reading activities. However, this study examined every kind of pre-reading. The fact that it just looks at The effect of preparatory reading on understanding is a notable distinction. While this study examines pre-reading of reading comprehension and reading interest. Because with a high level of reading comprehension, it is certain that the interest in reading is also high. For this reason, these two things are interrelated and can't be separated.

METHOD

The influence of preparatory reading tasks on students' reading proficiency and interest were examined in this study using a quantitative experimental research approach. Experimental research is commonly used in language education to evaluate the impact of instructional strategies by comparing outcomes between a treatment group and a control group (Adamou, 2021; Ramadhana,

2021; Rogers & Revesz, 2020; Yoder, 2019). The participants were eighth-grade students at SMPN 33 Padang, West Sumatra, during the 2024/2025 academic year. The population consisted of seven classes, from which two were selected using cluster random sampling. This technique was chosen for its practicality, as it allows researchers to work with intact class groups without disrupting the school schedule or classroom routines. Class VIII-5 was designated as the treatment group, with Class VIII-3 designated as the comparison group. Each group was composed of 30 pupils.

The treatment group's teaching methodology involved a method that incorporated various *preparatory reading techniques*, such as *idea generation*, *vocabulary preview*, *initial questioning*, and employing visual aids. These strategies were designed to activate students' background knowledge, enhance vocabulary understanding, and increase engagement with the reading material. In contrast, the control group was taught using a conventional method that relied primarily on teacher explanation and post-reading discussions, without any structured pre-reading activities.

Two tools were employed for data collection: a questionnaire gauging reading interest and a reading comprehension examination. The reading comprehension examination consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions assessing students' abilities to identify main ideas, infer meaning, determine the author's purpose, and understand vocabulary in context. The test was pilot tested on 30 students from a different school with similar characteristics. Item analysis was conducted to assess difficulty and discrimination indices, and poorly performing items were revised or removed. The final version of the test demonstrated strong reliability, possessing a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82.

The reading interest research instrument consisted of 30 Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), configured to assess students' attitudes toward reading, their reading habits, and their motivation to read. A sample item was: "I enjoy reading stories in English even if they are difficult." The questionnaire was reviewed by content experts and piloted with a separate group of students. Based on

the findings and input, modifications were applied to enhance transparency and coherence. The finalized instrument demonstrated robust internal consistency, evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85. Participants were subsequently delineated into high and low categories based on their performance reading interest groups based on their total scores using percentile thresholds. Those scoring at or above the 75th percentile were classified as having high reading interest, while those at or below the 25th percentile were considered to have low interest.

The data were analysed with IBM SPSS version 23. The data were characterized using measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and variability (standard deviation) generated first, followed by normality and homogeneity tests to support parametric testing assumptions. An independent samples t-test served to examine reading comprehension outcomes across experimental and control groups. Furthermore, a two-way ANOVA was performed to look exploring the combined influence of pre-reading engagement and reading interest on students' understanding. The study tested two hypotheses: (1) that pre-reading activities would result in significantly better reading comprehension outcomes compared to conventional instruction, and (2) that pre-reading activities and reading interest would have a significant interaction in influencing students' reading comprehension outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student comprehension metrics were gathered using a reading comprehension test, while information on their reading interest obtained via a survey instrument.

The students' score of pre-test and post-test reading comprehension.

The following data present the results of the pre-test and post-test reading comprehension outcome measures between the treatment and comparison groups. The findings are classified into five indicators; very poor, poor, fair, good and excellent. Furthermore, the classification of the score could be summarized in the table:

Table 1. *Pre- test and post- test reading comprehension scores*

No	Score Range	Classification	Experimental (Pre- test)		Experimental (Post-test)		Control (Pre-test)		Control (Post-test)	
			Freq	F (%)	Freq	F (%)	Freq	F (%)	Freq	F (%)
1	< 40	Very Poor	1	3,3	0	0,0	1	3,3	1	3,3

2	41-55	Poor	11	36,7	1	3,3	10	33,3	5	16,7
3	56-70	Fair	13	43,3	4	13,3	14	46,7	9	30,0
4	71-85	Good	5	16,7	17	56,7	5	16,7	13	43,3
5	86-100	Excellent	0	0,0	8	26,7	0	0,0	2	6,7
Mean			58		78		58		67	

Before and after the treatment, comparative reading comprehension performance of students in the experimental and control cohorts were categorised. Initially, both groups had a comparable distribution of scores, with the majority of students falling into the *Poor* and *Fair* categories. Specifically, in the experimental class pre-test, 36.7% of students were classified as *Poor* and 43.3% as *Fair*, with an average score of 58. Similarly, the control class pre-test showed 33.3% in *Poor* and 46.7% in *Fair*, also averaging 58. However, after the implementation of preparatory reading tasks applied within the treatment group, significant improvements were observed. In the experimental group's post-test, the number of students who participated in *Good* category increased sharply to 56.7%, and 26.7% achieved an *Excellent* score. Only 3.3% remained in the *Poor* category, and none scored in the *Very Poor* range. The average score rose significantly to 78, indicating a substantial improvement in reading comprehension due to the pre-reading strategy. In contrast, the control group, which received conventional instruction, showed only modest improvement. The *Good* category increased to 43.3%, while *Excellent* remained low at 6.7%. The average score rose only slightly from 58 to 67.

These findings strongly show that pre-reading activities are more effective than traditional ways in improving pupils' reading comprehension. The

significant gain in higher-level score categories (*Good* and *Excellent*), as well as the 20-point improvement in the experimental group's mean score, highlight the pedagogical importance of activating students' prior knowledge and engaging them intellectually before reading.

The students' score of students' reading interest

Based on the analysis of data from both the experimental and control classes, students were categorized into two groups: high and low reading interest. The classification of students according to their reading interest is presented in the table below.

Table 2. *Students' categorized of reading interest*

No	Group	Reading Interest	
		High	Low
1	Experimental Class	29	1
2	Control Class	26	4
TOTAL			

According to the table above, the experimental class had 29 students with strong reading interest and 1 student with poor reading interest. Meanwhile, in the control class, there were 26 children who were very interested in reading and four who were not. The experimental and control courses, each with 30 students, were chosen as the research sample.

Table 3. *The result of independent sample t-test of students' reading comprehension*

		Reading Comprehension	
		Equal variances assumed	Equal variances not assumed
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	1,112	
	Sig.	,296	
t-test for Equality of Means	T	4,109	4,109
	Df	58	56,849
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000
	Mean Difference	12,467	12,467
	Std. Error Difference	3,034	3,034
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		Lower	6,393
		Upper	18,543

The table above indicates that the 2-tailed With a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the $\alpha=0.05$ level, there is compelling evidence of a statistically significant disparity between the cohorts. It means

that the pre-reading activities employed in class VIII at SMPN 33 Padang outperformed conventional teaching in terms of students' reading comprehension. Therefore, the null hypothesis

(H0) is repudiated, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (Ha).

*Table 4. The result of two-ways ANOVA analysis
Tests of between-subjects effects*

Dependent Variable: Reading Comprehension					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	2131.094 ^a	3	710.365	3.918	.019
Intercept	158343.781	1	158343.781	873.427	.000
Learning Method	1845.281	1	1845.281	10.179	.003
Students Interest	282.031	1	282.031	1.556	.223
LearningMethod * Students Interest	3.781	1	3.781	.021	.886
Error	5076.125	28	181.290		
Total	165551.000	32			
Corrected Total	7207.219	31			

a. R Squared = .296 (Adjusted R Squared = .220)

From the data presented in the table above, was discovered that the significance value of 0.886 is greater than alpha 0.05. It signifies that the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is repudiated, and the null hypothesis (H0) is upheld. As a result, Engagement prior to reading and reading enthusiasm have no effect on students' reading comprehension in class VIII at SMPN 33 Padang.

According to the findings above, using pre-reading activities improves students' reading comprehension more than conventional instruction in class VIII at SMPN 33 Padang. This suggests that preparatory reading strategies boost youth reading understanding. Because pre-reading activities are used in reading activities, they can assist students in comprehending the text, particularly descriptive material, as well as answering text-related questions.

The findings of this research is relevant to a study conducted by Zarfsaza & Yeganehpourb (2021) that Both groups improved the post-assessment, presumably influenced by the preceding pre-reading engagement; however, the experimental group performed better, leading the finding that precisely timing these engagements enables an evaluation of learners' information processing capabilities prior to their application within the reading task. Next, Solomon (2023) ANOVA results revealed that both upfront vocabulary instruction and collaborative ideation significantly influenced the reading comprehension performance of Kenyan English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, with pre-teaching vocabulary showing a stronger impact than brainstorming ($p < .05$). The study recommended that teachers incorporate pre-

teaching of unfamiliar vocabulary and/or topic brainstorming as effective pre-reading instructional strategies.

Finally, according to the study's findings, a substantial variation is observed in students' reading understanding before and after the implementation of pre-reading activities. These activities proved to be effective and were successfully employed in teaching Class VIII students at SMPN 33 Padang. Pre-reading activities can assist students in analysing and improving their reading comprehension of the text.

The findings related to the second hypothesis reveal that there is no significant interaction between students' reading interest and the instructional techniques involving reading comprehension and pre-reading activities. The two-way ANOVA yielded a significance value of 0.886, exceeding the predetermined alpha level of 0.05. This indicates that students' interest in reading does not significantly influence the effectiveness of preparatory reading strategies on their reading understanding. It was therefore possible to deduce that the alternative hypothesis (Ha) was repudiated, and the null hypothesis (H0) was upheld. This part of the hypothesis is the same as the third hypothesis. Other supporting articles are still needed to support this statement, namely the need to use more articles showing the same results. However, researcher have not found any articles related to this matter, so further research needs to be continued.

CONCLUSION

The research concluded that preparatory reading strategies lead to a significant improvement in

students' reading understanding in descriptive texts. Specifically, brainstorming activities that activated students' prior knowledge and the use of visual aids (such as pictures related to the text) were particularly effective in preparing students for reading tasks. These techniques enabled learners to build mental frameworks before engaging with the texts, leading to improved understanding and performance.

The mean post-test score of the experimental group (78) notably exceeded that of the control group (67), highlighting the impact of these targeted strategies. Moreover, a higher proportion of students in the experimental group reached the *Good* and *Excellent* performance levels after the intervention.

However, the absence of a significant interaction between reading interest and instructional strategy ($p = 0.886$) suggests that while pre-reading activities are beneficial, their effectiveness may not depend on students' initial interest levels. This could be due to limited variation in interest or external factors influencing engagement. Recommendations for future research include conducting longitudinal studies to assess whether the positive effects of pre-reading strategies are sustained over time. Additionally, future investigations should explore how different types of pre-reading activities align with various text genres and learner profiles, including those with low reading interest or differing cognitive styles. Understanding these dynamics may lead to more personalized and effective reading instruction strategies.

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