

AN IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN PROMOTING READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

Reading is a fundamental skill that should be fostered during the early grades and serves as a crucial component for successful learning in subsequent classes. The essence of reading lies in the ability to comprehend the text. This study aims to analyze significant factors that contribute to enhancing the teaching of reading for comprehension. The research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive methodology. The research process encompasses various stages, including planning, conducting research, implementing strategies, analyzing data, and finally, composing reports. The participants in this study consist of two supervisors, two literacy coaches, two principals, and six teachers who specialize in early-grade education. The findings derived from interviews and observations highlight nine key elements that play a vital role in improving the teaching of reading for comprehension. Among these elements is the cultivation of a habit of establishing connections between the content of the book and the world outside of it.

Keywords: literacy, comprehension, reading

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension skills are basic skills that must be mastered by everyone. These skills need to be mastered from early year to be able to adapt and succeed in facing future studies. Comprehending is the key to acquiring new knowledge (McDonald Connor et al., 2009; Ocskus Lori D, 2012). Comprehension as an active process and that is required when listening to information from various media. Reading skillfully can train comprehension effectively. So that it can be said that reading comprehension is a basic skill that must be mastered by everyone to be able to understand other forms of knowledge sources. Therefore, reading skill is an important factor affecting the quality of education and the quality of one's life into adulthood.

Skilled readers are lifelong learners. Reading comprehension has a very important role in improving the quality of human life. Human beings who are skilled and have strong reading comprehension will be lifelong learners. All forms of values, thoughts, knowledge or attitudes are transmitted through a process of understanding. The internalization of values and the formation of attitudes begin with the process of reading comprehension. The Three Reading skills will allow a person to develop his knowledge, values, skills, and vision. The purpose of reading is to understand the written text, integrate new ideas, and infer what is already read.

The above exposure is in line with policy directions and strategies in the field of education. The main goal of today's education is the mental revolution through the improvement of the culture of literacy in education. Literacy is inseparable from the world of education. Literacy is a means for students to know, understand, and apply the knowledge they get in school. Literacy skills are the main goal of the direction of the mental revolution in education. Literacy skills are indispensable. This is linked to the need for 21st century

competence which requires every individual to be able to think critically, creatively, 2 communicatively, and be able to work together. Basic literacy is a 21st century skill that should be mastered by all nations of the world (Faizah et al., 2016; Nihayah & Shintia Revina, 2020). The Prague Declaration (Prizes, 2018) proclaims the importance of information literacy, namely the ability to seek, understand, critically evaluate, and manage information into useful knowledge for the development of one's personal and social life. In the demands of the 21st century, information is important. The Alexandria Declaration in 2005 affirmed that information literacy is the ability to realize the need for information, identify and find the information needed, critically evaluate information, and communicate that information effectively, legally, and ethically.

One of the basic literacy skills emphasized in the early grades is language literacy with a reading literacy dimension. The reading literacy ability hinted at in the early grades is that students are required to be able to understand texts analytically, critically, and reflectively (Children, 2021). The purpose of reading is to read with understanding. However, reading with comprehension is a complex skill built from a variety of sub-skills that are gradually acquired.

Reading skills are not just reading letters into words or sentences, but also understanding the content of the text. Usually children are said to be able to read based on their ability to recognize letters, spell, read words, and read sentences. Actually, this skill is not always in line with his ability to understand the content of the text. Children who understand the content of the text must be able to read, but children who can read do not necessarily understand what is read. Therefore, the ability to read must be accompanied by the ability to understand texts. Given the importance of the role of reading comprehension, the government implemented an illiteracy eradication program organized by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemdikbud). Indonesia is recorded as a country that has high success in eradicating illiteracy. UNDP data in 2014 noted that Indonesia's literacy rate reached 92.8% for the adult group, and 98.8% for the adolescent group. This shows that Indonesia has successfully passed the stage of literacy crisis in the sense of literacy. The results of the 2015 census of the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) showed that the number of illiterate people in Indonesia was 5,629,943 people or 3.9% (Kemendikbud, 2019). This illiteracy rate has decreased when compared to the previous year.

Although Indonesia has passed the stage of the literacy crisis, the challenge faced is the low interest in reading which has a direct impact on low understanding. Being able to read is different from understanding what is read. Being able to read is one thing, and understanding what is read is another. Low reading ability occurs continuously so that data shows that more than 55% of 15-year-olds are in the PISA (The Program for International Student Assessment) test in the category of functionally illiterate. This student can read the text but is unable to answer questions about the text (Hutasoit, 2019). PISA is a reference to see children's reading skills. The PISA test in 2018 was attended by 600 thousand students aged 15 years from 79 countries. The PISA test results released in 2019 show that Indonesian children's reading ability is ranked 72nd with an average score of 378. This score is below the country-wide average score of 487.

Indonesian children's reading ability has decreased since achieving their highest score of 402 in 2009, then 396 in 2012, and 397 in 2015. The reference shows that although

comprehension is a key skill to be mastered in the early grades, the reality is that students' reading skills are very low. (Kemdikbud, 2020) put forward some notes from the results of the 2019 PISA test analysis on the reading ability of Indonesian children. It was explained that Indonesian students are good at understanding single text but weak in understanding multiple text. Indonesian students are good at searching, evaluating, and reflecting on information but weak in understanding information. This means that Indonesian students can understand simple texts but have difficulty understanding more complex texts or connecting one piece of information with another. The results of PISA in 2018 are an accumulation of the quality of Indonesian education. To see the causes of low PISA results for reading literacy can be drawn up to the early grades of elementary school. This finding is supported by the results of a literature study conducted by the Center for Research and Policy on Education and Culture, Research and Development Agency, Ministry of Religion and Culture (Pratiwi et al., 2020a) stated that the achievement of the ability of Indonesian students aged 15 years for reading literacy is quite concerning. Indonesia is below the OECD average. Other data states that 21% of 10-year-olds in Indonesia cannot read and understand texts (Yarrow Noah, 2019). In other words, grade 4 elementary school children have not been able to read fluently or can read but have difficulty in understanding the content of the text. This of course will hinder his learning skills so that it will affect his academic ability.

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Low reading skills result in low student achievement in other subjects as well as the ability to think critically, creatively, and communicatively, the ability to cooperate, and the ability to solve problems. The low reading skills and literacy needs in this global era require the government to implement the School Literacy Movement (GLS) program gradually taking into account school readiness. This readiness includes the readiness of school capacity, the availability of reading materials, facilities, and literacy infrastructure. The stages in implementing GLS are (1) habituation, namely the growth of interest in reading through 15-minute reading activities (2) development, namely improving literacy skills through activities to respond to enrichment books, and (3) learning, namely improving literacy skills in all subjects using enrichment books and reading strategies in all lessons.

Thus, the estuary of the teaching of reading is the use of reading strategies to improve understanding. Reading must be accompanied by an active thought process to understand it. The more types of text that are read, the process of understanding will become automated process. The active thought process when reading encompasses many things, including interpreting vocabulary, connecting pre-existing knowledge, relating information in the text, and taking the essence of the text.

Reading comprehension can be defined as an active reader process in which students know why, how, and when to implement certain strategies to become effective readers (Duke & Pearson, 2009). Reading comprehension is a clue to a student's level of proficiency and cognition in learning. Reading comprehension can be seen from students' achievements in controlling strategies that will help them make meanings or realize when meaning cannot be mastered then the reader must adjust his strategy in constructing meaning in reading (Paratore et al., 2007). This low reading comprehension results from the absence of explicitly teaching reading strategies. Reading strategies are tools to improve the comprehension of different types of texts in learning. This statement is supported by (August et al., 2009) who add that an effective reading program is when teachers provide concrete examples using effective strategies such as connecting with the initial knowledge, inferring, visualizing, and predicting.

The goal of reading is to understand written text, integrate new ideas, and conclude what has been read (Alan E. Farstrup and S. Jay Samuels, 2011). Reading skills are not just

reading letters into words or sentences, but also understanding the contents of the text. Usually, children are said to be able to read based on their ability to recognize letters, spell, read words, and read sentences. These skills are not always in line with their ability to understand the contents of the text. Children who understand the contents of the text must be able to read, but children who can read may not necessarily understand what they read (Tahmidaten & Krismanto, 2020). Therefore, the ability to read must be accompanied by the ability to understand the text. The role of teacher's teaching strategies plays an important role in students' success in reading comprehension (Ayu et al., 2022).

Even though Indonesia has passed the literacy crisis stage, the challenge it faces is low interest in reading which has a direct impact on low comprehension. Being able to read is different from understanding what is read. Being able to read is one thing, and understanding what is read is another. Low reading ability occurs continuously so the data shows that more than 55% of 15-year-old children in the PISA test (The Program for International Student Assessment) are categorized as functionally illiterate. These students can read texts but are unable to answer questions about the texts (Hutasoit, 2019).

(Kemendikbud, 2019) put forward several notes from the results of the 2019 PISA test analysis on Indonesian children's reading ability. It was explained that Indonesian students were good at understanding single texts but weak at understanding multiple texts. Indonesian students are good at finding, evaluating, and reflecting on information but are weak at understanding information (INOVASI, 2020). This means that Indonesian students can understand simple texts but have difficulty understanding more complex texts or connecting one piece of information with another. The 2018 PISA results are an accumulation of the quality of Indonesian education. To see the causes of low PISA results for reading literacy can be traced back to the early grades of elementary school. This finding is supported by the results of a literature study conducted by the Center for Education and Culture Research and Policy, (Pratiwi et al., 2020b) stated that the achievement of ability of Indonesian students aged 15 years to read literacy is quite concerning. Indonesia is below the OECD average.

Previous findings explain that the role of the teacher is very important in determining students' success in reading comprehension. Teaching practices carried out by the teacher determine the level of success of students in understanding reading (Samuels & Alan E. Farstrup, 2011). Reading comprehension is a complex process and forms a cycle. Students need to have sufficient knowledge to understand, and in understanding reading, students will gain new knowledge that forms understanding. In short, knowledge and understanding are intertwined. Most knowledge is obtained through the process of comprehending. Before students can read to learn, students need to learn to read. Factors in improving the teaching of reading for comprehension need to be identified. This study aims to find out the factors that can improve the teaching of reading comprehension in the early grades.

METHODS

Factors that can improve reading teaching in the early grades need to be well identified. Therefore, understanding the elements that can improve reading teaching so that it can directly improve students' reading comprehension is indispensable. This study aims to analyze elements that can improve reading teaching by emphasizing understanding.

Qualitative research can show how a person behaves, their history, social movements and relationships with each other. Data for qualitative research can be obtained by calculating the results of the questionnaire distribution, but the analysis is carried out qualitatively (Putri & Ain, 2022). The location of this study is at SDN 1 and 2 Kenayan Tulungagung. The implementation of this research starts with design and research. Implementation, data analysis, and report writing. The subjects in the study were two supervisors, two literacy experts, two principals and six early-grade teachers.

Data collection techniques are carried out through interviews, literature reviews, and observations. The presented data were gained by conducting interviews and discussions with supervisors, principals, early-grade teachers, and early-grade literacy experts. This discussion is carried out by conducting a focused discussion on the topic of reading teaching in the early grades to improve reading comprehension. Literature reviews on topics relevant to the current literature are carried out to strengthen the results of the discussions. The sources of informants in the discussions and interviews were first, second, and third-grade teachers at SDN 1 Kenayan and SDN 2 Kenayan, two school superintendents, two principals, and two senior literacy coaches from the Indonesian Children's Literacy Foundation. Observation techniques are carried out in the early grades of the two elementary schools where balanced reading teaching has been applied which specializes in reading comprehension skills. The research is documented in photos and videos, including the activities of researchers, teachers and students. The research instruments can be seen in table 1.

Indicator	Subindicator
Preparation for reading	The teacher prepares a teaching plan.
	The teacher sets up a reading area.
Class management	The teacher manages the class with clear rules and procedures.
	The teacher gives all students the to participate in meaningful discussions.
A teaching plan for reading	The teacher follows the learning steps.
	The teacher reviews the new vocabulary.
	The teacher asks understanding questions.
	The teacher exemplifies the use of strategies.
	The teacher reads with expression.

Table 1. Research Instruments

The data analysis method in this study used a general analytical model from Miles and Huberman. Data analysis in this study was carried out in two stages. First is data collection. In this stage, researchers record all phenomena found in the field through observation, interviews and data documentation as well as a literature review. Interviews and discussions were conducted with teachers, principals and literacy experts. The second stage is data reduction. At this stage, the notes from discussions and interviews were reviewed to obtain core elements. A literature review was also carried out to support the findings of the study results. This process is carried out repeatedly to show the possibility

of misclassification. The presentation of the data has been classified taking into account the focus and objectives of the study.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results of the observations showed that teachers in grades one, two, and three taught reading activities at a special time of one hour every day. This reading activity is included in the balanced reading program component which consists of different activities. In grade one, the teacher conducted phonics activities three times a week. In this activity, the teacher emphasizes the identification of letter sounds. The second activity is interactive reading which is also carried out three times a week. Interactive reading activities emphasize the introduction of interesting storylines, comprehension, story reflection and vocabulary. The books that are read in interactive reading activities are fiction and non-fiction books with engaging plots. The second reading activity that is carried out is reading together. In reading together, the teacher uses a book in which the text and pictures are in large print. The focus in reading together is modelling reading strategies. Because the focus is on modelling reading strategies, the ledger, easel, and bookmarks are the main components. The next reading activity carried out by the teacher is guided reading activity. In this activity, the teacher carries out reading activities according to the needs of students. The books used in guided reading activities are guided reading books. This guided reading activity is the core of the balanced reading program. In this activity, students are grouped into homogeneous groups. The teaching and books used by the teacher to teach each group have been carefully adapted. For this activity, each group is guided once a week. Groups are moved dynamically every two months. In grades two and three, the teacher also does all of the reading components except the phonics activity. Phonics activities are only taught in first grade for fourteen weeks as a foundation before students can read fluently. In grades two and three the reading activities carried out were interactive reading, shared reading and guided reading. In addition, five minutes before going home the teacher reads five new words every day. This is done so that students can read words that children often use in everyday life automatically. In grades two and three the reading activities carried out were interactive reading, shared reading and guided reading. In addition, five minutes before going home the teacher reads five new words every day. This is done so that students can read words that children often use in everyday life automatically. In grades two and three the reading activities carried out were interactive reading, shared reading and guided reading. In addition, five minutes before going home the teacher reads five new words every day. This is done so that students can read words that children often use in everyday life automatically.

The results of the discussion explained that several things would affect the teaching of reading with comprehension. The first is to model explicit reading strategies for students. This modelling must use storybooks that are close to the child's life. The second is getting students to understand, discuss, and understand pictures to support understanding. The third thing is making predictions and connections. Prediction is thinking about what will happen next in a section of the book. Making predictions will challenge students to find out what will happen next. Students should also get used to checking predictions made. What makes the prediction right or wrong. Connection is making a connected line between the book and

yourself, the environment, and the outside world. The fourth thing that is very important in reading comprehension is reading fluency. Students must be able to read at the right tempo. Not too fast and not too slow. Books that are read too quickly make students unable to remember the information contained in the book. Books that are read too slowly will make students forget the information they get. The Fifth Thing is teaching text conventions. The basic text convention is the use of periods, commas, question marks, and exclamation points. This punctuation greatly affects reading comprehension, therefore text conventions must be taught explicitly. Books that are read too slowly will make students forget the information they get. The sixth thing is teaching text conventions. The basic text convention is the use of periods, commas, question marks, and exclamation points. This punctuation greatly affects reading comprehension, therefore text conventions must be taught explicitly. Books that are read too slowly will make students forget the information they get. The seventh Thing is teaching text conventions. The basic text convention is the use of periods, commas, question marks, and exclamation points. This punctuation greatly affects reading comprehension, therefore text conventions must be taught explicitly.

The results of the literature review show that several important things can encourage students' reading comprehension quickly. The first thing is to give students access to a variety of quality reading books, both fiction and non-fiction (Kirby, 2007). Students with high comprehension tend to read more books than students with low reading comprehension. Reading a variety of books will increase your vocabulary, teach a variety of skills, and develop a habit of reading. Students should be given reading books that are not too difficult for them but also challenging (O'Rourke, 2017). The second thing to consider to improve students' reading comprehension is to provide motivating and contextual texts (Falco Valorie & P, 2011). Motivation correlates strongly with learning in general. Students who are motivated in reading show respect and engage in meaningful discussions. Reading motivation is strengthened by complex interactions between books and students. Books that are close to children's lives will provoke meaningful discussions. The next thing is to teach reading strategies for comprehension (Shea, Mary & Roberts, 2016). Effective teachers will help students to develop strategies to become active readers. Teachers can teach when, where, and why to use certain reading strategies. Teachers also need to teach the structure of the text. Knowledge of the structure of the text plays an important role in understanding the text. Text structures that need to be taught include characters, time settings, problems, solutions, and resolutions (Routman, 2003). These things build a complete story. The easiest way to find out students' understanding of the text is to ask students to describe the beginning, problems, solutions, and ending of the story. Another important thing to do is to invite students to have meaningful discussions. Comprehension is an active process and requires a collaborative process to construct meaning.

This study found that several elements can improve teaching reading comprehension. The first is a quality and structured reading program whose implementation is based on in-depth research. The balanced reading program conducted by early-grade teachers at SDN Kenayan 1 and 2 is an example of how teachers have implemented teaching reading that is quality, structured, and has been based on solid research. The first thing the teacher does is a phonics activity. This activity focuses on recognizing and identifying letter sounds. Knowing the sound of letters makes it easier for students to combine words into

syllables, syllables into words, and also finally be able to read sentences fluently faster. With phonics knowledge, when students see a new word, students can read the word easily. This is following the theory described by (Dickinson et al., 2004)

After students have a strong phonics foundation students do interactive reading activities. In this activity, students are exposed to various genres of quality children's storybooks with interesting plots. Meaningful discussion activities are carried out before, during, and after reading. During interactive reading, the teacher discusses the pictures to aid understanding and also asks why and how questions. The teacher also asks connection and prediction questions. This practice is very good for improving students' reading comprehension. According to research conducted by (Gruhn et al., 2020), vocabulary mastery and the ability to make predictions and connections while reading will improve students' comprehension skills. In addition, when students are exposed to various genres of books, students will quickly get used to analysing various types of texts.

Joint reading activities provide modelling of how to use various strategies in reading using a large book. The activity of modelling reading strategies plays a very important role in reading comprehension. The reading strategy must be explained explicitly (Su & C, 2001). Explicit strategy modelling can equip students to apply reading strategies when students read independently.

Guided reading activities are very important in improving reading comprehension. This activity teaches children to read according to their abilities. The books used are appropriate so that children are not frustrated in reading. Besides not being too difficult the book is also not too easy so students feel challenged in reading this book. In other words, the books used in guided reading are books with the right level. Choosing a book with the right level is very important in improving students' reading comprehension (O'Rourke, 2017; Wren, 2002). Another thing that is done in guided reading activities is teaching reading strategies that suit the needs of children. Differentiated teaching makes students increasingly able to show their optimal capacity. In guided reading, the teacher also has the opportunity to hear each student read.

Important teaching elements in improving students' reading comprehension are also related to the characteristics of good readers. Teaching can be adjusted concerning the characteristics of a good reader. Good readers are active readers. In other words, good readers are used to reading different types of books and reading is enjoyable. Teachers can consider this aspect when wanting to improve students' reading comprehension. The second thing is those good readers have a purpose in reading. A good reader can scan the text to get the information he wants. Good readers are always making meaningful guesses about what will happen next. A good reader also actively forms good questions as he reads. While reading, a good reader fills in his scientific gaps. Good readers can understand the meaning of words that are not yet known by using various clues or markers, both picture markers and context. A good reader not only gains knowledge while reading but also before and after reading. All the important elements of a competent reader must be considered as trigger questions when the teacher makes a teaching plan so that the teacher can improve students' reading comprehension.

Suggestions for future research in this area could include investigating the effectiveness of different teaching strategies in improving reading comprehension. For

example, comparing the outcomes of explicit modeling of reading strategies versus other instructional approaches could provide valuable insights into the most effective methods for enhancing comprehension skills. Additionally, further exploration of the impact of motivation and contextual texts on reading comprehension could shed light on ways to create a more engaging and meaningful reading experience for students. Research on the explicit teaching of text conventions, such as punctuation, could also be conducted to examine its influence on comprehension. Moreover, investigating the relationship between access to a variety of quality reading materials and reading comprehension levels could provide a better understanding of the role of book selection in fostering comprehension skills. Finally, exploring the connection between the characteristics of good readers and reading comprehension could offer insights into how to cultivate these attributes in students to improve their overall reading comprehension abilities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the observations and discussions in this article highlight the importance of a structured and comprehensive reading program for improving students' reading comprehension. Teachers in grades one, two, and three allocate one hour every day to teach reading activities as part of the balanced reading program. These activities include phonics activities, interactive reading, reading together, and guided reading, each tailored to meet the students' needs and promote different aspects of comprehension.

The findings emphasize several key factors that influence reading comprehension. Teachers should model explicit reading strategies using storybooks that resonate with students' lives. Students should be encouraged to understand and discuss pictures to enhance comprehension. Making predictions and connections fosters critical thinking and engagement with the text. Additionally, reading fluency, teaching text conventions, and inviting meaningful discussions play significant roles in improving comprehension skills.

The literature review underscores the importance of providing students with access to a variety of quality reading books and motivating and contextually relevant texts. Teaching reading strategies and the structure of the text are crucial for active reading and understanding. Guided reading activities that match students' abilities and challenge them appropriately contribute to comprehension development. Moreover, considering the characteristics of good readers, such as reading diversely, reading purposefully, making predictions, asking questions, and using context clues, can inform teaching practices and enhance students' reading comprehension.

Future research should investigate the effectiveness of different teaching strategies, including explicit modeling of reading strategies, to identify the most impactful methods for enhancing comprehension skills. Exploring the impact of motivation, contextual texts, and explicit instruction on text conventions, such as punctuation, can provide insights into creating a more engaging and meaningful reading experience. Additionally, examining the relationship between access to quality reading materials and reading comprehension levels will deepen our understanding of the role of book selection. Furthermore, exploring the connection between the characteristics of good readers and reading comprehension can guide efforts to cultivate these attributes in students and improve overall comprehension abilities.

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