

# Teacher Experiences in Teaching Reading Comprehension: A Qualitative Study in English Classes at UPT SMP Negeri 10 Medan

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze teachers' experiences in teaching reading comprehension in English classes at UPT SMP Negeri 10 Medan. This research employs a qualitative approach using interviews, observations, and a Likert-scale-based questionnaire to explore various aspects of reading comprehension instruction. The main focus of this study includes the strategies used by teachers, the effectiveness of learning media, student engagement in interactive activities, and the challenges faced in understanding reading texts. The findings indicate that teachers employ various strategies such as skimming and scanning, group discussions, and role-playing to enhance students' reading comprehension. The use of learning media such as videos, images, and mind mapping has been proven to help students better understand texts. Group discussions are also an effective method for improving reading skills, particularly in fostering a deeper understanding of texts. However, this study also reveals several challenges, including limited vocabulary, low reading interest, and difficulties in comprehending complex text structures. The implications of this study highlight the importance of utilizing diverse and innovative teaching methods to cater to students' needs. Additionally, vocabulary enrichment and the selection of reading materials relevant to students' lives can enhance their motivation and comprehension of English texts.

**Keywords:** *Reading Comprehension Instruction, Teacher Strategies, Learning Media, Group Discussions, Reading Motivation.*

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengalaman guru dalam mengajar pemahaman bacaan di kelas Bahasa Inggris di UPT SMP Negeri 10 Medan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menggunakan wawancara, observasi, dan kuesioner berbasis skala Likert untuk mengeksplorasi berbagai aspek pengajaran pemahaman bacaan. Fokus utama penelitian ini meliputi strategi yang digunakan oleh guru, efektivitas media pembelajaran, keterlibatan siswa dalam kegiatan interaktif, dan tantangan yang dihadapi dalam memahami teks bacaan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menggunakan berbagai strategi seperti skimming dan scanning, diskusi kelompok, dan bermain peran untuk meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan siswa. Penggunaan media pembelajaran seperti video, gambar, dan mind mapping terbukti membantu siswa lebih memahami teks. Diskusi kelompok juga merupakan metode yang efektif untuk meningkatkan keterampilan membaca, terutama dalam menumbuhkan pemahaman teks yang lebih dalam. Namun, penelitian ini juga mengungkap beberapa tantangan, termasuk kosakata yang terbatas, minat baca yang rendah, dan kesulitan dalam memahami struktur teks yang kompleks. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya memanfaatkan metode pengajaran yang beragam dan inovatif untuk memenuhi kebutuhan siswa. Selain itu, pengayaan kosakata dan pemilihan bahan bacaan yang relevan dengan kehidupan siswa dapat meningkatkan motivasi dan

*pemahaman mereka terhadap teks bahasa Inggris.*

***Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran Pemahaman Membaca, Strategi Guru, Media Pembelajaran, Diskusi Kelompok, Motivasi Membaca.***

## **1. Introduction**

English is a widely utilized international language in a variety of fields, such as science, technology, commerce, and education. English continues to be a vital language for international communication, especially in the digital age where cross-border cooperation is growing more prevalent, as noted by Graddol (2019). Additionally, English is essential for promoting worldwide communication in support of several facets of global growth. Since English is the primary language used in science and technology, it is imperative that emerging countries encourage literacy in this language, according to Crystal (2021). Because of its significance, being able to communicate in English has become essential in today's world, even for Indonesian students. According to Harmer (2020), proficiency in the English language is essential for equipping students to participate in a more globally oriented educational and employment environment. Likewise, according to Tomlinson (2022), learning English improves students' cognitive abilities, allowing them to think critically and accept different viewpoints, in addition to increasing their competitiveness in the global economy. English has consequently been added to the curriculum at all educational levels, including junior high.

In order to achieve well-rounded language competency, junior high school students are encouraged to acquire the fundamental English language abilities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Incorporating these abilities is essential to building a solid foundation for language development, claim Johnson and Farrel (2023). When these four skills are combined, students' communication comprehension and information processing efficiency both improve.

Reading comprehension is the most strategically important of these four fundamental abilities. Reading comprehension abilities foster language competency and lay the groundwork for critical thinking, claims Carrell (2021). Anderson (2020) supports this by stating that deep reading skills enable students to acquire greater analytical abilities across a variety of academic situations by helping them identify the relationships between ideas inside a text. The ability of students to decipher, evaluate, and comprehend the meaning contained in a book is known as reading comprehension. This process entails more than just word recognition and literal comprehension; students are also required to decipher implied meanings, make inferences, and assess the data in the reading material. According to Goodman's research, students who read well are better able to make connections between the text's content and their existing knowledge, which improves their comprehension of new and pertinent material (Goodman, 2022). Proficiency in reading comprehension fosters the growth of critical and analytical thinking skills, which are important for learning English as well as applicable to many other topics.

But in reality, teaching reading comprehension frequently encounters a number of challenges that reduce the efficacy of training. Observations and earlier studies at UPT SMP Negeri 10 Medan indicate that a number of factors contribute to students' poor reading comprehension abilities. First, one of the biggest challenges is frequently students' lack of enthusiasm and drive to study English-language materials. Reading can be tedious and challenging for many kids, particularly if the materials they are given don't align with their interests or ability levels. Second, teachers' methods of instruction are frequently repetitive and unduly centered on technical elements, such grammar or vocabulary, which do not foster critical thinking abilities or in-depth text comprehension.

However, restrictions on instructional resources and learning media can have an effect. Students may become less motivated to actively participate in the learning process if the teaching materials are unvarying or irrelevant to their everyday life. Furthermore, teachers frequently find it challenging to experiment with more creative and student-centered teaching strategies due to a lack of time and a demanding curriculum, which leads to a less ideal learning environment.

The need for educators to have a deeper understanding of students' learning experiences in all areas of learning, including reading comprehension, is growing in tandem with the growth of student-centered learning techniques. In order to create pertinent and successful teaching strategies, this method seeks to position students as the key topics of the learning process, using their wants, challenges, and perceptions as fundamental references. Teachers are supposed to create more flexible teaching methods that are in line with students' real needs by learning about their experiences during the learning process. Despite its significance, there is still a dearth of research on students' experiences learning reading comprehension, particularly when it comes to secondary school

English language instruction.

By investigating students' experiences learning reading comprehension in secondary school English classes, this study seeks to close that gap. This study will utilize a qualitative approach to examine how students perceive the learning process, the difficulties they encounter, and the methods they employ to comprehend texts they read. This study's main goal is to have a thorough grasp of how students perceive and assess the reading comprehension learning process so that teachers may use the findings to create more interesting and relevant lesson plans for their students.

In order to improve reading comprehension, teachers have been employing strategies including questioning, predicting, retelling, and imagining, according to a study by Nguyen (2022). It also demonstrated that most students provided adequate input on the strategies their teachers employed. These results suggest that in order to promote better engagement, teachers should explain the instructions to students before they read the text and adapt their reading comprehension teaching strategies to each student's aptitude and personality.

Then, according to Natsir and Anisati (2020), the interviews showed that the teachers' efforts were crucial in helping the children become proficient readers. In the process of teaching and learning, students' attitudes toward reading were equally crucial. Teachers' approaches to students who were struggling with reading did not align with the strategies recommended by some experts. These strategies included teaching students how to read with interest, how to predict meanings, how to gain knowledge about the subject, and other techniques. Because of the circumstances and state of the classroom, these tactics were not used. To put it briefly, students may become more proficient readers if teachers make the right efforts to enhance the learning environment. The findings of this study employing the Directed Reading Activity (DRA) technique are then in accordance with Ummah (2020). DRA is a method for improving and enhancing students' reading abilities. To put it briefly, this method helps students learn from a text they have read. In order for students to comprehend the text connecting the different student information more readily when it is implemented. This technique was seen to be successful since it was able to create a teaching and learning process before it was to develop its own understanding and this assumption. In addition to improving the atmosphere in the classroom, students receive training on how to work well with others, have discussions, think critically, and comprehend what they have read.

In particular, this research is anticipated to provide multiple contributions. First of all, it will enhance the body of knowledge in the field of English language instruction by offering insights into the elements affecting students' reading comprehension abilities from their own point of view. Second, by identifying students' reading comprehension learning needs, educators and policymakers can better tailor policies and instructional strategies to match students' needs in the classroom. Third, it is anticipated that this study will encourage educators to create more innovative and adaptable teaching methods in order to boost students' motivation and interest in their studies. Therefore, this study may help raise the standard of reading comprehension instruction in secondary schools, allowing students to become more proficient in the subject and hone their analytical skills. It is anticipated that improving children' reading comprehension abilities will eventually lead to greater academic achievement and better equip them to handle obstacles in a world that is becoming more and more competitive.

## **2. Literature Review**

Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process involving decoding, vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, and higher-order thinking skills (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). According to Kintsch's (1998) Construction-Integration Model, comprehension occurs when readers actively construct meaning by integrating new information with prior knowledge. Duke and Pearson (2002) highlight that effective reading comprehension requires both direct instruction in comprehension strategies and opportunities for extensive reading practice. The ability to understand texts is influenced by linguistic knowledge, text structure awareness, and cognitive engagement (Snow, 2020).

Teaching strategies for reading comprehension employ various strategies to enhance students' reading comprehension. According to Pressley and Afflerbach (1995), successful readers use metacognitive strategies such as predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying. Explicit instruction in these strategies has been shown to improve comprehension outcomes (Dole et al., 2016).

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) emphasize the importance of Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI), which integrates motivation, cognitive strategies, and content knowledge to foster deeper comprehension. Similarly, Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) encourages students to take an active role in the reading process through predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing.

Teachers often face challenges in teaching reading comprehension, including students' limited vocabulary, lack of motivation, and difficulties in processing complex texts (Paris & Hamilton, 2019). According to Shanahan et al. (2021), struggling readers require differentiated instruction and scaffolding to develop comprehension skills effectively.

Additionally, classroom environments, instructional materials, and assessment methods play a crucial role in shaping reading comprehension instruction. Research by Duke et al. (2018) indicates that text complexity and student engagement levels significantly impact reading outcomes. Teachers are central to fostering reading comprehension skills through effective pedagogy, motivation, and scaffolding techniques (Moats, 2020). According to Shanahan and Shanahan (2012), disciplinary literacy approaches help students navigate subject-specific texts, while explicit strategy instruction improves comprehension across various text genres.

Teachers also serve as facilitators, guiding students to develop self-regulation and independent reading skills. Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory underscores the importance of social interaction in learning, suggesting that teachers' scaffolding supports students' comprehension development within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Recent studies emphasize the integration of technology in reading instruction. Digital reading platforms and adaptive learning technologies enhance engagement and personalized learning experiences (Coiro, 2022). Gamification, multimodal texts, and artificial intelligence-driven tutoring are reshaping the landscape of reading comprehension education (Gee, 2021). Furthermore, culturally responsive teaching strategies (Ladson-Billings, 2014) ensure that diverse learners' backgrounds are acknowledged in reading instruction, fostering deeper engagement and comprehension.

### **3. Method**

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore teachers' experiences in teaching reading comprehension (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions and teaching practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A phenomenological approach is a qualitative research method that aims to explore and understand individuals' lived experiences of a particular phenomenon. This approach, rooted in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1970), focuses on how people perceive, interpret, and make sense of their experiences.

In the context of your study on teachers' experiences in teaching reading comprehension, a phenomenological approach helps uncover deep insights into their instructional challenges, strategies, and reflections. According to van Manen (2016), phenomenological research involves descriptive and interpretative analysis of participants' experiences to identify essential themes. This approach is particularly useful for understanding personal and subjective perspectives, making it suitable for exploring teachers' real-world experiences in the classroom.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews allow for deep insights into teachers' perspectives, while classroom observations provide direct evidence of instructional practices (Patton, 2015). The data collection process involved:

1. Conducting interviews with English teachers at UPT SMP Negeri 10 Medan.
2. Observing reading comprehension lessons to analyze instructional methods.
3. Collecting relevant teaching documents, lesson plans, and reading materials.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process includes:

1. Transcribing and coding interview data.
2. Identifying key themes related to teaching strategies, challenges, and best practices.
3. Interpreting findings based on existing theories and literature.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Results**

The research findings are based on interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis identified key themes related to teaching strategies, challenges, and teachers' reflections on their

experiences in teaching reading comprehension.

Different approaches are used to implement reading comprehension teaching strategies, according to the findings of teacher interviews. "I use scanning and skimming strategies to help students quickly grasp the text's content," one educator said. I also use group conversations to gauge their level of understanding. This suggests that educators utilize a strategy that emphasizes reading comprehension and speed. According to the curriculum, active reading strategies, comprehension exercises, and frequent assessments are all part of the standards for teaching reading comprehension. Students, on the other hand, stated that they comprehend texts more readily when they are presented with examples from real life and when explanations are given during class discussions.

According to the research findings, the experiences of teachers at UPT SMP Negeri 10 Medan in teaching reading comprehension in English classes are a reflection of the application of a variety of successful strategies, the use of a variety of learning resources, and the difficulties in raising students' reading motivation and comprehension.

Teachers use scanning and skimming strategies to assist pupils quickly understand a text's basic ideas before getting into specifics when teaching reading comprehension. These techniques help pupils comprehend texts more effectively and improve their comprehension in general. Group discussions are also employed as a means of evaluating how well pupils comprehend the assigned readings. According to the results of the interviews, the majority of teachers employ these two strategies on a regular basis, which is consistent with curriculum standards that place an emphasis on comprehension exercises, active reading strategies, and frequent assessments. Students also gave these strategies positive feedback, saying that when given real-world examples and classroom discussions, they find it easier to understand texts.

In addition to instructional techniques, interactive exercises are essential for raising students' reading comprehension levels. To assist students better understand reading materials, teachers involve them in group discussions, role-playing, and collaborative text summary. The purpose of these interactive exercises is to boost student interest and promote reading-related critical thinking. The curriculum establishes the norm for activity-based, interactive learning that incorporates games, simulations, and conversations. Students gave these activities positive feedback, saying that role-playing and group discussions greatly improved their ability to understand literature. To guarantee successful learning, teachers also separated the class into smaller groups, gave guiding questions, and led discussions. This illustrates how teachers operate as guides as well as facilitators, ensuring that students engage in active interactions to reach their maximum comprehension.

Another important element in improving pupils' reading comprehension is the usage of educational media. To help students better understand reading materials, teachers use a variety of media, including mind maps, videos, and images. Through interactive and visual methods, the many learning resources help students make connections between texts and their own experiences and strengthen their understanding. According to the curriculum, educational materials must be interactive, pertinent, and supportive of learning goals. According to student interview results, the majority of students favor mind mapping and video explanations because they are simpler to comprehend and enhance the learning experience. This suggests that students' interest and engagement in reading are positively impacted when technology and visual-based approaches are used in reading comprehension instruction.

Students continue to struggle with reading comprehension despite the use of numerous techniques and exercises, including limited vocabulary and intricate text structures. These difficulties frequently cause readers to become confused about a text's main idea, especially when it contains scholarly terminology or long, complex sentence structures. In order to overcome these challenges, teachers employ contextual teaching methods to teach text structures and introduce new word lists each session.

This approach is in line with curriculum standards that stress the value of flashcards, context-based activities, and regular reading routines. Although students admitted that they usually have trouble understanding complicated sentence patterns and challenging terms, they also make an effort to increase their vocabulary comprehension by learning new words and utilizing them in sentences. In addition to helping them increase their vocabulary, this method improves their ability to think critically and comprehend texts on a deeper level.

Reading motivation is another aspect impacting pupils' comprehension of texts. According to teachers, they choose interesting books, offer reading difficulties, and give prizes to pupils who make an effort to comprehend what they are reading. One crucial tactic for encouraging a good reading habit in pupils is to select readings that correspond with their interests. The curriculum establishes that reading materials should be relevant to students' lives and encourage independent reading. Students responded positively to this approach, expressing

greater motivation when given texts that are interesting and aligned with their preferences. Additionally, they preferred short stories or illustrated texts as these materials help them comprehend the content more effectively. This suggests that the relevance and appeal of texts play a significant role in increasing students' reading interest.

## **4.2 Discussion**

Overall, the strategies implemented by teachers in teaching reading comprehension align with curriculum standards and receive positive responses from students. However, several challenges still need to be addressed, particularly regarding vocabulary limitations and understanding complex text structures. Therefore, a more varied approach in teaching strategies is necessary, such as the use of digital technology, project-based learning methods, and more intensive reading exercises.

The study found that teachers employed various strategies, including:

1. Explicit Strategy Instruction where teachers provided direct instruction on predicting, summarizing, and questioning (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Explicit Strategy Instruction is a teaching method that directly teaches reading strategies to students through explanations, modeling, and structured practice (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Teachers use this approach to guide students in understanding how to use reading strategies, such as:
  - a) Predicting: Students are taught to predict the content of the text based on the title, images, or keywords before reading.
  - b) Summarizing: The teacher teaches students how to identify the main ideas in a text and rearrange them into a summary.
  - c) Questioning: Students are taught to ask questions while reading to enhance their understanding.
  - d) Clarifying: If students have difficulty understanding the text, they are trained to look for contextual clues or ask the teacher.

This approach is effective because it provides students with critical thinking skills that help them understand texts more deeply and improve their independent reading abilities.

2. Reciprocal Teaching: Teachers encouraged student discussions and collaborative learning (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). In Reciprocal Teaching, the teacher initially models this strategy, then gradually gives students the responsibility to practice it independently in small groups. This method is effective in improving reading comprehension because it encourages social interaction and reflective thinking about the text.
3. Scaffolding Techniques: Teachers used guided reading and gradual release of responsibility to enhance comprehension (Vygotsky, 1978). Scaffolding is a teaching technique based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which states that students can achieve a higher level of understanding with the help of more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers or peers. In reading instruction, scaffolding can be done by:
  - a) Guided Reading: The teacher guides students in understanding the text by providing questions or prompts.
  - b) Think-Aloud: The teacher demonstrates how to understand a text by verbally articulating their thought process while reading.

Teachers also reported several challenges, such as:

1. Limited Student Vocabulary: Many students struggled with comprehension due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge.
2. Low Motivation: Some students were not engaged in reading activities, requiring teachers to integrate gamification and interactive approaches.
3. Text Complexity: Teachers found it challenging to select texts that matched students' reading levels

The findings align with existing literature on effective reading instruction. Teachers' experiences highlight the importance of explicit strategy instruction, scaffolding, and student engagement in reading comprehension development. Future research should explore additional interventions to support teachers in

overcoming instructional challenges.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study explored the experiences of English teachers in teaching reading comprehension at UPT SMP Negeri 10 Medan. Through qualitative analysis, the research identified various strategies teachers employ, the challenges they encounter, and their reflections on instructional practices. The findings indicate that effective reading comprehension instruction relies on explicit strategy instruction, reciprocal teaching, and scaffolding techniques, all of which align with established theoretical frameworks in reading pedagogy.

One of the key takeaways from this study is the significance of Explicit Strategy Instruction, where teachers systematically guide students in applying reading strategies such as predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying. This approach enhances students' ability to actively engage with texts and develop comprehension skills. Additionally, Reciprocal Teaching fosters collaborative learning, allowing students to take an active role in their reading process, which not only improves their comprehension but also encourages critical thinking. Scaffolding Techniques, grounded in Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, were also found to be crucial in supporting students' gradual independence in reading.

Despite these effective strategies, teachers reported several challenges. A major obstacle was students' limited vocabulary, which hindered their ability to understand complex texts. Low motivation was another significant issue, as many students lacked interest in reading, requiring teachers to integrate innovative and interactive approaches. Furthermore, text complexity posed difficulties in matching reading materials to students' proficiency levels, making comprehension more challenging.

Reflecting on their experiences, teachers emphasized the need for continuous professional development to enhance their knowledge of advanced reading comprehension strategies and technology integration. They also highlighted the importance of using culturally relevant and engaging teaching materials to better connect with students' backgrounds and interests.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the importance of effective teaching strategies and teacher adaptability in addressing the challenges of reading comprehension instruction. Future research should explore the impact of technology-enhanced reading instruction and investigate additional interventions that can further support teachers in improving students' reading performance. By addressing these challenges, educators can create more effective and engaging reading comprehension lessons, ultimately fostering better literacy outcomes among students.

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