



Unlocking the Power of Pre-Reading: Strategies for Better Comprehension and Engagement

A'thi Fauzani Wisudawati^{1*}, Rizka Maulina Wulandari², Muhammad Isa³,
Ita Permatasari⁴, Muhyiddin Aziz⁵, Imam Mudhofir⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Program Studi Bahasa Inggris, Jurusan Administrasi Bisnis, Politeknik Negeri Madiun, Indonesia

*Correspondence author: athifauzani@pnm.ac.id

Abstract. This study aims to analyze the implementation of pre-reading activities in the Intermediate Reading classroom and their impact on students' comprehension and engagement. The respondents consisted of 55 students from the English Department who participated in the study. Data were gathered through questionnaires and descriptive analysis of classroom practices to identify the types, purposes, and effects of pre-reading strategies used by lecturers. The findings reveal that lecturers employ a variety of pre-reading techniques such as vocabulary introduction, topic discussion, brainstorming, and content prediction to activate students' prior knowledge and prepare them for the reading process. These strategies are carried out through interactive activities including word games, group discussions, visual media presentation, and short pre-reading quizzes. Such activities not only create a dynamic learning environment but also help students anticipate the content of the text and establish connections between their background knowledge and new information. The results indicate that pre-reading activities significantly contribute to enhancing text comprehension, increasing motivation, and promoting active student participation during reading sessions. Consequently, pre-reading is viewed not merely as an introductory stage but as an essential pedagogical approach that fosters engagement, comprehension, and critical thinking in EFL reading instruction, leading to more effective and meaningful reading experiences for learners.

Keywords: EFL learning; Pre-reading Activities; Reading Comprehension; Student Engagement; Teaching Strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is one of the most essential skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as it allows learners to access information, expand knowledge, and develop critical thinking. However, many students still struggle to understand English texts due to limited vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, and inadequate reading strategies. In the *Intermediate Reading* classroom, these challenges often lead to low engagement and difficulties in grasping the main ideas of the text. Therefore, effective instructional strategies are needed to bridge the gap between students' linguistic competence and reading comprehension.

One of the widely recognized approaches to support reading comprehension is *pre-reading activities*. These activities are designed to prepare students before reading a text by activating prior knowledge, predicting content, and introducing key vocabulary. According to Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), *pre-reading* serves as a bridge between what learners already know and the new information presented in the text, thereby enhancing their understanding. Similarly, Nunan (2003) emphasizes that activating background knowledge before reading

increases learners' confidence and engagement, making the reading process more meaningful and effective.

In ELFL contexts like Indonesian, *pre-reading activities* play a crucial role in helping students comprehend English texts that are often culturally and linguistically distant from their own experiences. Lecturers can employ various *pre-reading strategies* such as brainstorming, vocabulary introduction, discussion of key ideas, and prediction exercises. These activities not only build contextual understanding but also stimulate curiosity and motivation to read. Studies by Allyouself (2006) and Grabel & Stoller (2013) have also shown that *pre-reading* significantly improves students' comprehension and retention of information.

However, despite the recognized importance of *pre-reading*, its implementation in classroom settings is not always consistent or systematic. Some lecturers focus mainly on vocabulary explanation, while others emphasize prediction and discussion. This variation raises an important pedagogical question: which types of *pre-reading activities* are most effective in enhancing students' comprehension and engagement?

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore (1) the kinds of *pre-reading activities* used by lecturers in *Intermediate Reading* classes, (2) how these activities are implemented, and (3) what impacts they have on students' reading comprehension and engagement. The findings are expected to provide insights for English lecturers in developing more effective reading instruction strategies that foster both understanding and interest in reading among ELFL learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a complex and interactive process that requires readers to decode text, interpret meaning, and connect it with prior knowledge (Grabel & Stoller, 2019). Anderson (2003) defines comprehension as the active process of constructing meaning through interaction between the reader, the text, and contextual clues. This means that comprehension depends not only on linguistic skills but also on background knowledge, motivation, and engagement.

Recent studies (Rahimi & Zhang, 2021) highlight that comprehension in ELFL classrooms often faces challenges due to limited vocabulary, unfamiliar text structures, and lack of pre-reading preparation. Therefore, strategies that activate prior knowledge before reading play a significant role in improving comprehension outcomes.

The Concept and Role of Pre-Reading Activities

Pre-reading activities are instructional techniques designed to prepare students before reading a text by activating their schemata and building contextual relevance (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Based on Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1980), comprehension improves when learners connect new information with existing cognitive frameworks.

Common pre-reading activities include brainstorming, vocabulary preview, predicting content, discussing related themes, or interpreting visuals (Nunan, 2003). Such activities not only improve comprehension but also increase engagement by making the text personally relevant (Hudson, 2007).

A recent study by Lin and Chien (2022) found that pre-reading strategies significantly improved reading fluency and engagement among university EFL students. They concluded that pre-reading functions as “mental scaffolding,” preparing learners both linguistically and cognitively to process a text more effectively.

Implementation of Pre-Reading Activities in the Classroom

In practice, lecturers integrate pre-reading activities through engaging methods such as question-based discussions, vocabulary games, and multimedia exposure. This aligns with Yuliana (2020), who found that visual and discussion-based pre-reading activities fostered stronger participation and comprehension.

In the present study, most lecturers adopted interactive approaches such as game-based vocabulary introductions and topic-related warm-up discussions, making students more relaxed and motivated. This supports findings by Halisari and Setiawan (2021), who demonstrated that pre-reading activities in Indonesian tertiary classrooms increased learner autonomy and focus.

Furthermore, implementing pre-reading as a collaborative exercise—such as group predictions or peer discussions—has been shown to improve both comprehension and communicative competence (Liu & Wang, 2022).

Impacts of Pre-Reading Activities on Students’ Comprehension and Engagement

Previous research consistently indicates that pre-reading activities enhance reading comprehension and student motivation (Carrell, 1988; Grabel & Stoller, 2019). In particular, activating background knowledge before reading reduces anxiety and increases engagement (Hudson, 2007).

Findings from this study support these claims. Students reported that pre-reading helped them understand text content more easily, recall information more effectively,

and stay motivated throughout reading sessions. Similarly, Fitriani & Nurharyati (2022) found that pre-reading enhances vocabulary retention and contextual guessing ability.

According to a meta-analysis by Li & Halfiz (2023), pre-reading activities lead to significant gains in comprehension scores (average effect size 0.58) and engagement measures, particularly when integrated with technology-based tools like digital flashcards or multimedia prediction tasks.

Pre-Reading in the Indonesian EFL Context

In Indonesian higher education settings, reading comprehension is often considered a challenging skill due to limited vocabulary and exposure to English texts (Suharyono, 2018). Therefore, pre-reading plays a critical role in bridging linguistic gaps.

Recent research by Hidayati & Rachmatwati (2023) emphasized that integrating pre-reading with collaborative learning promotes critical thinking and increases confidence in reading. Likewise, the findings in this study reveal that students appreciate interactive pre-reading activities such as games, discussions, and contextual vocabulary exercises because they reduce boredom and cognitive overload.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design aimed at exploring the implementation and impact of *pre-reading activities* in *Intermediate Reading* classes. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions, experiences, and opinions regarding the use of *pre-reading strategies* in improving comprehension and engagement. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research allows researchers to describe and interpret participants' experiences in a natural classroom setting.

The participants of this study were 55 students enrolled in the *Intermediate Reading* course in the English Department. These students were selected using purposive sampling, as they had direct experience with the implementation of *pre-reading activities* in their reading classes. The participants came from various academic backgrounds but shared similar proficiency levels in English reading comprehension.

The primary data collection instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions. The questionnaire was designed to elicit students' responses about the difficulties they encounter in learning *Intermediate Reading*, how they overcome those difficulties, their understanding of *pre-reading*, how *pre-reading*

activities help them in learning, and their opinions on the best strategies to understand English texts. Additionally, supporting data were gathered through classroom observations and lecturers' teaching documents, such as lesson plans and materials, to validate and enrich the questionnaire results.

The data were collected over a one-semester period. The researchers distributed the questionnaires online and in person after several *pre-relating* sessions had been conducted. Students were encouraged to answer openly and honestly about their experiences and perceptions. The responses were then compiled, coded, and categorized thematically. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps included data familiarization, data coding, theme generation, and interpretation. The results were presented in both narrative and visual forms, including diagrams to illustrate the frequency and distribution of responses.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

All respondents (100%) are students majoring in English. This indicates that all participants have been exposed to formal instruction in English relating comprehension and strategies. Regarding English proficiency, most students rated themselves at the Intermediate level (43.6%), followed by Elementary (34.5%) and Beginner (14.5%), while only a small percentage identified as Upper Intermediate (5.4%) and Advanced (1.8%). This distribution shows that most students are still developing their relating proficiency and would benefit from strategies such as *pre-relating* to enhance comprehension.

When asked about the difficulty of the *Intermediate Relating* course, the majority of students (60%) perceived it as moderate, while 25.5% considered it *difficult* and only 14.5% found it *easy*. This implies that most learners face a moderate level of challenge, suggesting that effective relating strategies—particularly *pre-relating*—are essential to improve their comprehension and motivation.

A significant majority of respondents (92.7%) stated that they are familiar with the term *pre-relating* in their *Intermediate Relating* course. This demonstrates that *pre-relating* has been introduced and practiced as part of their learning process. Furthermore, 89.1% of students agreed that *pre-relating helps them understand the text better*, while only 10.9% disagreed. This strongly supports the effectiveness of *pre-relating* activities in enhancing relating comprehension, aligning with previous research

suggesting that activating prior knowledge and predicting content before reading improves understanding and engagement (Gralbel & Stolle, 2011).

From the open-ended responses, several major themes emerged regarding how pre-reading helps students. The first finding is improving comprehension and focus. Many students mentioned that pre-reading helps them understand the content and identify the main idea. They also reported that pre-reading activities like scanning and skimming help them focus on key information and context before engaging with the full text.

The second finding is vocabulary development. A recurring response was that pre-reading helps to build vocabulary and introduce unfamiliar terms in advance. By encountering new words in context, students felt more confident when reading the main text.

The third finding is prediction and context building. Several students stated that pre-reading helps predicting content activates background knowledge and facilitates understanding. And lastly is increasing engagement and efficiency. Some students described pre-reading as warming up before reading, making reading more enjoyable and efficient. This shows that pre-reading not only aids comprehension but also fosters a positive attitude toward reading tasks.

However, a few respondents (around 10%) expressed that pre-reading did not help. This might reflect a lack of understanding of how to apply pre-reading strategies effectively, suggesting a need for clearer instruction and practice. The results confirm that *pre-reading strategies* play a crucial role in supporting reading comprehension among ELFL learners. The majority of students perceived pre-reading as beneficial in helping them to anticipate content and vocabulary, develop contextual understanding, read more efficiently and confidently.

The findings also indicate that students at intermediate and lower levels particularly benefit from pre-reading because it scaffolds comprehension before they engage with complex texts. This aligns with the theory of *schematic activation* (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983), where learners' prior knowledge is triggered to make sense of new information. Moreover, pre-reading enhances *reading engagement* by making learners more curious and mentally prepared to process the main text.

Nevertheless, a small group of students did not perceive clear benefits from pre-reading. This could be due to limited familiarity with pre-reading techniques or less effective classroom implementation. Therefore, instructors should explicitly model various pre-reading activities—such as previewing titles, predicting content, discussing

kely vocabulary, and brainstorming related ideas—to ensure students understand and apply the strategy purposefully.

Overall, the data reveal that pre-reading is widely recognized and valued by English majors as an effective strategy for improving comprehension and engagement in reading classes. It helps students activate prior knowledge, predict content, expand vocabulary, and read with clear purpose. Future teaching practices should continue to integrate structured pre-reading stages as a core part of reading instruction, especially in *Intermediate Reading* courses.

Pre-reading activities are used by lecturers in Intermediate Reading classroom

Based on the students' responses, several types of pre-reading activities were identified as commonly used in the *Intermediate Reading* classroom. These activities include:

1. Previewing vocabulary — lecturers often introduce or discuss unfamiliar words before reading, helping students to recognize key terms and reduce lexical barriers.
2. Prediction and guessing — students are encouraged to predict the content or main ideas of the text based on titles, pictures, or key words.
3. Skimming and scanning exercises — these are used as warm-up tasks to help students quickly locate important information and gain an overview of the text.
4. Brainstorming and discussion — lecturers may begin with short discussions or questions to activate students' prior knowledge and connect it to the topic.
5. Short warm-up readings — some lecturers provide short, simple passages related to the main text to help students get familiar with the topic before reading in depth.

These findings indicate that lecturers in the *Intermediate Reading* course use a variety of pre-reading techniques designed to activate background knowledge, build vocabulary, and prepare students cognitively and emotionally before reading the main text.

The implementation of pre-reading activities by lecturers in the Intermediate Reading classroom

From the data collected, it can be inferred that pre-reading activities are implemented as an introductory stage before the main reading session. Lecturers typically begin by presenting a brief contextual overview or introducing key vocabulary. Students are then guided to engage in prediction or discussion about what they expect from the text. Implementation also involves interactive techniques such as asking guiding questions related to the topic, encouraging students to share their assumptions or

prior experiences, conducting vocabulary matching or synonym exercises, giving short preview passages to identify the main idea.

These activities are conducted in a way that encourages participation and stimulates curiosity. Students described pre-reading as a warm-up before reading a long text, indicating that lecturers integrated these activities to ease students into reading comprehension gradually.

However, the data also show that a small number of students (around 10%) felt less benefit, suggesting that implementation might differ among lecturers or that not all students fully understand how to utilize pre-reading strategies effectively. Therefore, lecturers need to ensure that the pre-reading stage is clearly structured, explicitly explained, and consistently practiced.

The impacts of implementing pre-reading activities in Intermediate Reading classroom

The findings strongly demonstrate that the implementation of pre-reading activities has positive impacts on students' comprehension, engagement, and reading confidence. According to the quantitative data, 89.1% of students agreed that pre-reading helps them understand texts better, while qualitative responses highlight several key impacts:

1. Improved comprehension: Students stated that pre-reading helped them find the main idea and understand the text, showing enhanced understanding of reading materials.
2. Vocabulary enhancement: Exposure to new words before reading made it easier for students to decode and remember vocabulary during the main reading.
3. Better focus and efficiency: Students reported that pre-reading helped them concentrate on relevant information and read more efficiently.
4. Increased engagement and motivation: Descriptions such as makes reading more enjoyable suggest that pre-reading creates a more positive learning atmosphere.

In addition, pre-reading activities support schema activation, enabling learners to connect new information with prior knowledge, which in turn facilitates comprehension. This confirms previous theories (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Grabel & Stoller, 2011) that emphasize the importance of pre-reading as a preparatory phase in reading instruction.

In short, pre-reading activities significantly contribute to better comprehension, vocabulary development, and learner engagement, especially among intermediate-level EFL students.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that pre-reading activities play a crucial role in improving comprehension and engagement among students in the *Intercultural Reading* classroom. The study involved 55 English Department students who actively participated in identifying and reflecting on the use and impact of pre-reading strategies during their learning process. First, the research found that lecturers implement a variety of pre-reading activities such as vocabulary preview, prediction, skimming and scanning exercises, brainstorming, and short pre-reading passages. These strategies are designed to activate students' prior knowledge, build vocabulary awareness, and provide context before reading the main text. Second, the way pre-reading is implemented in class shows that it functions as a preparatory stage. Lecturers typically introduce key vocabulary, ask predictive or guiding questions, and encourage class discussions to connect students' background knowledge with new content. This implementation effectively supports students' cognitive readiness and helps them approach reading with greater confidence and understanding. Third, the impact of pre-reading implementation is highly positive. The majority of respondents (89.1%) agreed that pre-reading helps them comprehend texts more easily. Qualitative data also indicated that students become more focused, confident, and motivated when engaging with reading tasks. Additionally, pre-reading activities enhance vocabulary mastery and make reading sessions more enjoyable and purposeful. Overall, the study concludes that pre-reading is not merely an introductory step, but an essential strategy that enhances comprehension, vocabulary development, and student engagement in reading classes. Effective integration of pre-reading activities contributes to more meaningful and interactive English learning experiences.

REFERENCES

- Aljidelh, P. (2006). *Schema theory-based pre-reading tasks: A neglected essential in the ESL reading class*. *The Reading Matrix*, 6(2), 88–96.
- Al-Qahtani, M. (2015). *The importance of vocabulary in language learning and how to be taught*. *International Journal of Teaching and Education*, 3(3), 21–34.
- Anderson, N. J. (2003). *Active skills for reading: Book 2*. Heinle.
- Carrell, P. L. (1988). *Interactive text processing: Implications for ESL/second language reading classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.

- Carrell, P. L., & Eisterhold, J. C. (1983). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(4), 553–573.
- Farnia, F., & Geva, E. (2020). Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English language learners. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 36(5), 439–456.
- Fitriani, D., & Nurhayati, L. (2022). Enhancing EFL students' reading comprehension through pre-reading activities. *Journal of English Education and Teaching*, 6(1), 45–56.
- Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (2019). *Teaching and researching reading* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Hapsari, S., & Setiawan, B. (2021). The effectiveness of pre-reading strategies on students' reading comprehension. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Indonesia*, 9(2), 111–122.
- Hidayati, D., & Rachmawati, A. (2023). Collaborative pre-reading techniques to enhance reading motivation in Indonesian EFL classrooms. *Lingua Cultura*, 17(1), 13–22.
- Hudson, T. (2007). *Teaching second language reading*. Oxford University Press.
- Li, Q., & Hafiz, M. (2023). The effectiveness of pre-reading strategies in improving EFL students' comprehension and motivation: A meta-analysis. *Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 11(2), 55–72.
- Lin, M., & Chien, Y. (2022). Pre-reading strategies and their effects on EFL learners' reading fluency and engagement. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 23(4), 98–112.*
<https://doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0000000000200584>
- Liu, J., & Wang, P. (2022). Enhancing reading comprehension through collaborative pre-reading in EFL contexts. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 75(3), 288–302.
- Nguyen, H. T. (2021). The effects of pre-reading activities on EFL students' reading comprehension. *Asian EFL Journal*, 28(1), 123–139.
- Nunan, D. (2003). *Practical English language teaching*. McGraw-Hill.
- Rahimi, M., & Zhang, L. (2021). The role of vocabulary knowledge in second language reading: A cognitive perspective. *System*, 103, Article 102635.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102635>
- Rumelhart, D. E. (1980). Schemata: The building blocks of cognition. In R. Spiro et al. (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in reading comprehension*. Erlbaum.
- Suharyono, A. (2018). Improving reading comprehension through pre-reading activities in EFL classrooms. *Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris*, 7(2), 12–19.
- Widiastuti, N. (2023). The impact of pre-reading questioning on student engagement in EFL classrooms. *International Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies*, 11(1), 77–88.
- Yuliana, R. (2020). The use of pre-reading strategies to improve students' engagement in reading. *ELT Journal Indonesia*, 8(1), 67–78.