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

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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 a fundamental skill in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it enables learners to access information, broaden their knowledge, and strengthen critical thinking abilities. Nevertheless, many students continue to face challenges in understanding English texts due to limited vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, and ineffective reading strategies. In Intermediate Reading classes, these difficulties often lead to low participation and trouble identifying the main ideas. As a result, well-designed instructional strategies are essential to close the gap between learners' language skills and their reading comprehension.

One commonly acknowledged method for supporting reading comprehension is the use of pre-reading activities. These activities aim to prepare students before encountering a text by activating prior knowledge, anticipating the content, and introducing essential vocabulary. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) state that pre-reading acts as a link between what learners already know and the new information within the text, thereby improving understanding. Similarly, Nunan (2003) highlights that activating background knowledge before reading enhances

students' confidence and engagement, making the reading experience more effective and meaningful.

In EFL environments such as Indonesia, pre-reading activities are especially important in helping students understand English texts that may differ greatly from their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Lecturers can apply a range of strategies, including brainstorming, vocabulary previews, key-idea discussions, and prediction tasks. These activities not only help build contextual knowledge but also spark students' curiosity and motivation. Research by Alyousef (2006) and Grabe & Stoller (2013) further demonstrates that pre-reading significantly enhances students' comprehension and retention.

However, although the value of pre-reading is well recognized, its classroom implementation is often inconsistent or not carried out systematically. Some lecturers prioritize vocabulary instruction, while others focus more on prediction or discussion. This inconsistency prompts a key pedagogical question: which types of pre-reading activities are the most effective in improving students' understanding and engagement?

Taking these issues into account, this study seeks to examine (1) the types of pre-reading activities used by lecturers in Intermediate Reading courses, (2) the ways these activities are implemented, and (3) their effects on students' reading comprehension and engagement. The results are expected to offer valuable insights for English lecturers in designing more effective reading instruction strategies that support both comprehension and interest in reading among EFL learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a multifaceted and dynamic process in which readers must decode written language, interpret its meaning, and connect it to what they already know (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Anderson (2003) describes comprehension as an active meaning-making process that involves interaction between the reader, the text, and contextual information. This suggests that successful comprehension relies not only on language proficiency but also on background knowledge, motivation, and learner engagement.

Recent research (Rahimi & Zhang, 2021) indicates that comprehension in EFL settings is frequently hindered by limited vocabulary, unfamiliar text organization, and insufficient preparation before reading. As a result, strategies that help activate learners' prior knowledge prior to reading are essential for enhancing comprehension performance.

The Concept and Role of Pre-Reading Activities

Pre-reading activities are instructional methods aimed at preparing learners before they engage with a text by activating their prior knowledge and establishing contextual readiness (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). According to Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1980), comprehension is enhanced when learners are able to link new ideas to their existing cognitive structures.

Typical pre-reading techniques include brainstorming, reviewing key vocabulary, making predictions, discussing related topics, and analyzing visual aids (Nunan, 2003). These activities not only support comprehension but also boost student engagement by making the reading material more meaningful and personally relevant (Hudson, 2007).

A recent study by Lin and Chien (2022) demonstrated that pre-reading strategies significantly enhanced reading fluency and engagement among EFL university students. Their findings suggest that pre-reading serves as a form of "mental scaffolding," helping learners prepare both linguistically and cognitively to understand a text more effectively.

Implementation of Pre-Reading Activities in the Classroom

In practice, lecturers apply pre-reading activities through engaging techniques such as discussion questions, vocabulary-based games, and the use of multimedia. This is consistent with Yuliana (2020), who reported that visual and discussion-oriented pre-reading tasks enhanced student participation and understanding.

In this study, most lecturers used interactive strategies like game-supported vocabulary previews and warm-up discussions related to the topic, which helped students feel more comfortable and motivated. These findings align with Hapsari and Setiawan (2021), who showed that pre-reading activities in Indonesian higher education settings improved learners' autonomy and concentration.

Additionally, implementing pre-reading as a collaborative task—such as group prediction activities or peer discussions—has been shown to enhance both comprehension and communicative skills (Liu & Wang, 2022).

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

Previous studies consistently show that pre-reading activities improve both reading comprehension and learner motivation (Carrell, 1988; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Specifically, activating learners' prior knowledge before reading has been found to lower anxiety levels and increase engagement (Hudson, 2007).

The results of this study align with these findings. Students indicated that pre-reading activities made it easier for them to understand the text, remember key information, and remain motivated during reading tasks. Fitriani and Nurhayati (2022) similarly reported that pre-

reading supports vocabulary retention and enhances learners' ability to infer meaning from context.

Furthermore, a meta-analysis by Li and Hafiz (2023) revealed that pre-reading activities produce substantial improvements in comprehension outcomes—showing an average effect size of 0.58—as well as increased engagement, especially when combined with technology-enhanced tools such as digital flashcards and multimedia-based prediction activities.

Pre-Reading in the Indonesian EFL Context

In Indonesian university contexts, reading comprehension is frequently perceived as a difficult skill, largely due to students' limited vocabulary and minimal exposure to English-language materials (Suharyono, 2018). Consequently, pre-reading activities play an essential role in addressing these linguistic challenges.

Recent work by Hidayati and Rachmawati (2023) highlights that combining pre-reading with collaborative learning enhances critical thinking and boosts students' confidence in reading. Similarly, the results of this study show that learners value interactive pre-reading techniques—such as games, discussions, and contextual vocabulary tasks—because they help reduce boredom and lessen cognitive strain.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative design to examine how pre-reading activities were implemented and how they influenced students in Intermediate Reading classes. A qualitative method was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of learners' perceptions, experiences, and opinions regarding the role of pre-reading in enhancing comprehension and engagement. As noted by Creswell (2014), qualitative inquiry enables researchers to describe and interpret participants' experiences within authentic classroom contexts.

The study involved 55 students enrolled in the Intermediate Reading course in the English Department. These participants were chosen through purposive sampling because they had direct experience with the use of pre-reading activities during their lessons. Although the students came from different academic backgrounds, they possessed comparable levels of English reading proficiency.

Data were primarily collected using a questionnaire containing open-ended questions. The questionnaire was designed to gather information about the difficulties students faced in learning Intermediate Reading, the strategies they used to manage these challenges, their understanding of pre-reading, how pre-reading supported their learning, and their opinions on effective strategies for comprehending English texts. Additional data were obtained from

classroom observations and lecturers' instructional documents, including lesson plans and teaching materials, to strengthen and validate the questionnaire findings.

Data collection took place over the course of one semester. Questionnaires were distributed both online and in person after several pre-reading sessions had been completed. Students were encouraged to respond freely and honestly based on their experiences. The collected responses were then compiled, coded, and organized into thematic categories. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedures, which include familiarization with the data, coding, generating themes, and interpreting the findings. The results were presented narratively and visually, supported by diagrams showing the frequency and distribution of responses.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

All respondents (100%) were English majors, indicating that each participant had prior exposure to formal instruction in English reading skills and strategies. In terms of English proficiency, most students rated themselves at the Intermediate level (43.6%), followed by Elementary (34.5%) and Beginner (14.5%). Only a small proportion identified as Upper Intermediate (5.4%) or Advanced (1.8%). This distribution suggests that the majority are still developing their reading abilities and can benefit from supportive strategies such as pre-reading to improve comprehension.

When asked about the difficulty of the Intermediate Reading course, most students (60%) described it as "moderate," while 25.5% considered it difficult, and only 14.5% viewed it as easy. These results indicate that learners generally experience a moderate level of challenge, highlighting the need for effective reading strategies—particularly pre-reading—to help strengthen comprehension and maintain motivation.

A large majority of participants (92.7%) reported that they are familiar with the concept of pre-reading introduced in the Intermediate Reading course. Moreover, 89.1% agreed that pre-reading activities assist them in understanding the text more effectively, with only 10.9% expressing disagreement. These findings provide strong support for the usefulness of pre-reading, reinforcing prior research that shows activating background knowledge and making predictions before reading can significantly enhance comprehension and engagement (Grabe & Stoller, 2011).

Analysis of the open-ended responses revealed several key themes regarding the benefits of pre-reading activities. The first theme is enhanced comprehension and concentration. Many students stated that pre-reading enables them to grasp the content more

easily and identify the main ideas. They also noted that activities such as skimming and scanning help them focus on essential information and contextual clues before reading the full text.

The second theme is vocabulary development. Students frequently mentioned that pre-reading introduces new or unfamiliar vocabulary, allowing them to encounter these words in context before engaging with the main passage. This early exposure made them feel more confident while reading.

The third theme concerns prediction and contextual preparation. Several respondents indicated that pre-reading supports content prediction, activates prior knowledge, and facilitates overall understanding. The final theme is improved engagement and reading efficiency. Some students described pre-reading as a warm-up activity that makes reading more enjoyable and helps them work through texts more effectively. These responses suggest that pre-reading not only supports comprehension but also promotes a more positive attitude toward reading tasks.

A small portion of students (approximately 10%) reported that pre-reading did not significantly help them. This may reflect limited understanding of how to use pre-reading strategies or insufficient guidance during instruction, indicating the need for clearer explanations and more structured practice. Overall, the findings confirm that pre-reading plays a vital role in assisting EFL learners' reading comprehension. Most respondents acknowledged that pre-reading helps them anticipate content and vocabulary, build contextual understanding, and read with greater ease and confidence.

The results also show that students at intermediate and lower proficiency levels benefit the most because pre-reading provides essential scaffolding before they encounter more complex texts. This supports Schema Theory (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983), which posits that activating prior knowledge helps learners interpret new information. Additionally, pre-reading boosts engagement by increasing curiosity and mentally preparing students to process the main text.

Nonetheless, a small number of learners did not perceive clear advantages, possibly due to unfamiliarity with the strategies or inconsistent classroom use. Therefore, instructors should model a variety of pre-reading techniques—such as previewing titles, predicting content, discussing key vocabulary, and brainstorming related topics—to ensure students understand how to apply them effectively.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that English majors widely recognize pre-reading as an effective strategy for improving comprehension and engagement. It enables

learners to activate schemata, anticipate content, expand vocabulary, and read with clearer direction. Future instructional practices should continue to incorporate purposeful and structured pre-reading stages, particularly within Intermediate Reading courses.

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

From the students' answers, several forms of pre-reading activities were found to be frequently implemented in the Intermediate Reading class. These activities include:

- Previewing vocabulary — Lecturers frequently explain unfamiliar vocabulary before students begin reading, enabling them to identify essential terms and minimize difficulties related to word meaning.

- Prediction and guessing — Students are guided to anticipate the text's content or main ideas by examining elements such as the title, images, or selected keywords.

- Skimming and scanning exercises — These tasks function as warm-up activities, allowing learners to quickly find key information and develop a general understanding of the passage.

- Brainstorming and discussion — Lecturers may start the lesson with brief discussions or guiding questions to activate students' background knowledge and link it to the upcoming topic.

- Short warm-up readings — Some lecturers offer short, related passages prior to the main reading, giving students initial exposure to the theme and easing them into the more complex text.

These findings show that lecturers in the Intermediate Reading course employ a range of pre-reading strategies aimed at stimulating prior knowledge, strengthening vocabulary, and preparing students both mentally and emotionally before they engage with the main text.

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

Based on the collected data, it can be concluded that pre-reading activities are applied as an initial phase before students begin reading the main text. Lecturers usually start by giving a brief introduction to the context or highlighting important vocabulary. After that, students are encouraged to make predictions or discuss what they anticipate from the text. The implementation also includes interactive methods such as posing guiding questions, inviting students to share their prior knowledge or experiences, completing vocabulary-matching or synonym tasks, and providing short preview paragraphs to help identify the main idea.

These activities are designed to support active participation and spark students' interest. Many students described pre-reading as a warm-up before tackling a longer passage, showing that lecturers use these techniques to gradually guide students into understanding the text.

Nevertheless, the data also indicate that a small portion of students (around 10%) did not feel significant benefits, which may suggest variations in how lecturers apply the strategies or that some students have not yet mastered how to use pre-reading effectively. Therefore, it is important for lecturers to present the pre-reading stage clearly, offer explicit guidance, and practice it consistently in class.

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

The findings clearly indicate that pre-reading activities have a positive effect on students' comprehension, engagement, and reading confidence. Quantitative data show that 89.1% of students agreed that pre-reading helps them understand texts more effectively, while qualitative feedback highlights several specific benefits:

- Enhanced comprehension: Students reported that pre-reading assisted them in identifying the main ideas and understanding the text, reflecting improved overall comprehension.
- Vocabulary development: Encountering new words before reading helped students recognize and retain vocabulary more easily during the main reading task.
- Improved focus and efficiency: Students noted that pre-reading allowed them to concentrate on key information and read more effectively.
- Greater engagement and motivation: Students described pre-reading as making reading more enjoyable, indicating that it fosters a positive and motivating learning environment.

Moreover, pre-reading activities support schema activation by enabling learners to link new information with prior knowledge, which further enhances understanding. These results align with previous research (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Grabe & Stoller, 2011) emphasizing pre-reading as an essential preparatory stage in reading instruction.

In summary, pre-reading activities play a significant role in improving comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and learner engagement, particularly for intermediate-level EFL students.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that pre-reading activities are essential for enhancing both comprehension and engagement among students in the Intermediate Reading classroom.

The research involved 55 students from the English Department, who actively participated in reflecting on the use and effects of pre-reading strategies in their learning process.

Firstly, the study found that lecturers employ a range of pre-reading strategies, including vocabulary previews, prediction exercises, skimming and scanning tasks, brainstorming sessions, and short preparatory passages. These techniques aim to activate students' prior knowledge, increase vocabulary awareness, and provide contextual understanding before engaging with the main text.

Secondly, the implementation of pre-reading in the classroom serves as a preparatory phase. Lecturers typically introduce key terms, pose predictive or guiding questions, and facilitate discussions to connect students' existing knowledge with new content. This approach effectively supports students' cognitive readiness, enabling them to approach reading tasks with greater confidence and comprehension.

Thirdly, the impact of pre-reading was found to be highly positive. A majority of students (89.1%) agreed that pre-reading helps them understand texts more easily. Qualitative feedback also revealed that students felt more focused, confident, and motivated during reading activities. In addition, pre-reading activities support vocabulary acquisition and make reading sessions more engaging and purposeful.

In conclusion, pre-reading is more than an introductory activity; it is a critical instructional strategy that improves comprehension, vocabulary development, and student engagement. When effectively integrated, pre-reading contributes to richer and more interactive learning experiences in English reading classes.

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