



READING COMPREHENSION FOR SENIOR-GRADE STUDENTS: A FOCUS ON THEMATIC LEARNING

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ABSTRAK

The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not the Thematic Learning Approach can significantly improve students' reading comprehension. In this study, a pre-experimental design with one group pretest-posttest was used. This study's population was the third year of MA. Nurul As'adiyah Callaccu, for the academic year 2019/2020, which comprises three classes. The study's overall sample size was 21 students. It was collected using the purposive sampling technique. The reading test and observation checklist were employed as study instruments. The adoption of the Thematic Learning Approach had a substantial influence on students' reading comprehension, according to the findings of this study. It was demonstrated by a t-test value of less than 0.05. The value was $(0.00) < (0.05)$ with a degree of freedom (df) of 20. Based on the study's findings and discussion, the researcher concluded that there was an improvement in the use of theme learning approaches in teaching reading comprehension in the third year of the MA. Nurul As'adiyah Callaccu.

Keywords : Reading Comprehension, Thematic Learning

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a crucial ability to develop when learning English. Reading, according to Goodman & Goodman (2013); Sun et al. (2020), is a receptive linguistic activity. There is a process through which readers attempt to extract more information from what the author encodes in the text in order to generate meaning from the text they read. Then it is clear that there is an interaction between a reader and a text during the reading process (Satriani et al., 2022).

Reading, as one of four language skills, has its own distinct feature. Reading includes some actions that assist the reader in comprehending the written terms (Ahmadi, 2017; Roe et al., 2018). Reading can open up a new world for students; it allows them to obtain new knowledge and appreciate various types of books, magazines, and newspapers. This is consistent with Hudson et al. (2021) assertion that reading is critical for increasing knowledge. Even in this modern age of multimedia and high-tech, people still rely on their reading abilities to get information or increase their knowledge (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2015; Jordan et al., 2018; Satriani et al., 2022).

The ability to read will provide many benefits to pupils throughout their lives, but mastering English reading is not easy (Livingstone, 2012). According to the researcher's observations in the third year of MA Nurul As'adiyah Callacu, students had certain difficulties with reading activities. Those occurred as a result of many circumstances. The

students' lack of language proficiency was the first factor. It would be difficult for the kids to comprehend the reading content if they lacked sufficient vocabulary. Second, kids were less enthusiastic about reading. It can be determined by their attitude toward the text they read, such as a lack of curiosity to read and a lack of attention to investigate more depth information from the text. Finally, the final issue concerned reading topics.

Teachers frequently urge children to read the entire page aloud, and the topic is sometimes unrelated to the students' age, such as old history, science, commerce, and so on. The approaches or procedures for teaching reading are another issues in the reading activity (Goldman et al., 2016). In other words, teachers were unable to pique kids' enthusiasm for reading. As a result, students were hesitant to read and did not fully comprehend the content.

Thematic learning is one of the approaches used by teachers to improve students' reading comprehension (Liu & Wang, 2010; Nurlaela et al., 2018; Puspita et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2021; Hamid et al., 2022). This study's introduction to the Thematic Learning Approach is predicted to boost students' participation and activity in reading comprehension. Before implementing the thematic learning strategy in teaching reading, the researcher observed students' interests in the third year of MA Nurul As'adiyah Callacu. The researcher identified three major themes: social media, family, and school. As a result, the family theme became a popular student interest subject with a large selection. After learning about the students' interests, the researcher will create a topic based on the theme, with the idea that it will be relevant to the students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. The concept of reading

There are numerous definitions of reading offered by specialists from various perspectives. Reading is sometimes regarded as a passive skill (Marzban, 2011; Noble et al., 2019). It involves the processing of the generated ideas by others that are transmitted through language. It also involves the written language and the highly complex cognitive processing operations. Moreover, reading is a receptive linguistic activity (Goodman & Goodman, 2013; Sun et al., 2020). There is a process through which readers attempt to extract more information from what the author encodes in the text in order to generate meaning from the text they read. Then it is clear that there is an interaction between a reader and a text during the reading process.

According to Kieffer & Christodoulou (2020); Feruzi (2021), reading is an "interactive" process between a reader and a text that leads to automaticity or fluency. The reader interacts dynamically with the text in order to elicit the meaning, and many types of knowledge are utilized in this process: linguistic or systemic information, as well as schematic knowledge.

Furthermore, according to Proctor et al. (2020); Bell et al. (2022), while reading can be clearly defined as the ability to gain comprehension of written information, the

intricacy inherent in the reading ability negates this basic definition. He believes that when people begin to read, they carry a set of skills and abilities with them. Bell identifies a number of abilities that are inherent in the reading ability and should be considered definitional (Bell et al., 2022).

There are two prevalent models of the reading process, according to Boyd (2018); Hersch & Andrews (2012). There are two approaches: bottom-up and top-down. The bottom-up technique begins with the readers learning the letters or symbols, followed by sound recognition, word interpretation, and then deciphering the meaning of the words. The top-down approach, on the other hand, necessitates readers' participation in the process of receiving incoming information from the text (Boyd, 2018). The top-down technique allows readers to comprehend the content by guessing, forecasting, or making the most of their prior knowledge (Hersch & Andrews, 2012).

A model of the reading process is also proposed by Dechant (2013); Perfetti & Roth (2017). It's referred to as interactive reading or interactive processing. It's a reading comprehension model that uses both bottom-up and top-down approaches. According to this reading paradigm, readers gain a strong grasp of the text by correctly identifying words, meanings, or phrases, and by connecting the text to the readers' own experiences or prior knowledge.

It can be deduced from the previous description that there are three sorts of reading processes. Bottom-up processing, top-down processing, and interactive processing are the three types of processing. Word recognition is dealt with by bottom-up processing. Top-down processing is concerned with the reader's prior knowledge. The last, interactive processing stage combines the top-down and bottom-up approaches. Here, interactive processing blends word recognition with the readers' prior knowledge.

2. The concept of thematic learning approach

A thematic learning method, according to Liu & Wang (2010), represents a "rupture" in the way curricula have been developed because they are heavily dependent on scientific and technological material and organized in a strict and systematic manner. A thematic approach is a good criterion for helping in the selection of content in a dynamic domain with a lot of content (Nurlaela et al., 2018). Moreover, a thematic learning method to contextualize instruction could be beneficial. It has the potential to create cooperative and interactive learning possibilities in the classroom since it integrates a concrete learning-by-doing attitude (Puspita et al., 2020). The benefits of employing a thematic approach to curriculum design, according to Kim et al. (2021), are that it motivates teachers to start with students' strengths and use their relevant past knowledge. Students are engaged and able to study issues from a range of views and viewpoints thanks to well-chosen themes (Hamid et al., 2022).

Themes enable the use of a variety of resources of diverse levels of complexity, allowing all students to engage. Aside from that, themes give context for real-world

reading and writing activities, scientific studies, and inquiries across a wide range of topic areas. A theme curriculum also allows students to engage in individual learning, problem-solving, divergent thinking, risk-taking, and decision-making.

According to Rashidi & Safari (2011); De Hei et al. (2016) thematic learning approach, learning activities should be designed around generative themes that are part of the students' cultural context. These generative topics boost students' interest and allow them to broaden their understanding of the subject, incorporating social and political issues that can help them become well-rounded citizens with critical thinking skills.

Based on the foregoing, it can be stated that the Thematic Learning Approach is a teaching style in which the emphasis is placed on selecting a specific subject for teaching one or more concepts. It is centered on combining multiple sources of knowledge and using them to demonstrate the subject.

RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher used a pre-experimental design using a one-group pre-test and post-test design in her investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The participants were given a pre-test, treatments, and a post-test. A pre-test was used to determine the students' prior level of reading comprehension, and a post-test was used to determine whether the students' reading comprehension had improved. The pre-test was done before the treatment, and the post-test was done thereafter to see how effective it was. The following is a description of the study's design:

$$O_1 \text{ X } O_2$$

Where:

O_1 : Pretest
 X : Experiment
 O_2 : Posttest

In this study, a reading exam was employed to assess the students' reading ability utilizing a theme learning strategy. The reading test consists of 15 essay-style questions. The test encompassed three levels of comprehension: basic, intermediate, and advanced. They're literal, inferential, and analytical all at the same time.

The major evidence that explained the efficacy of theme learning strategy in boosting students' reading comprehension was supported by an observation checklist. From the first treatment through the third treatment, the observation was used to determine whether or not thematic learning increased student engagement during the therapy. When students ask questions, answer questions, finish their work, participate in discussions, take notes, take the test separately, and summarize the lesson, they are demonstrating classroom engagement (Handayani, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage score distributions for the students' reading comprehension pre-test and post-tests:

Table 1. Score Students' Reading Comprehension

Classification		Pre-Test		Post-Test	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Very good	86-100	-	-	6	28.6%
Good	71-85	2	9.5%	15	71.4%
Fair	56-70	18	85.7%	-	-
Low	≤ - 50	1	4.8%	-	-
Total		21	100%	21	100%

The Table 1 above shows that the majority of students received a fair mark on the pre-test. One student (4.8 percent) received a low score, while 18 students (85.7 percent) received a decent mark. The post-treatment outcome of students' scores demonstrates a significant improvement in students' scores in the post-test. 6 students (9.5 percent) received a very excellent grade, 15 students (71.4 percent) received a good grade, and no student received a fair or low grade. It can be concluded that the post-test rate percentage was higher than the pre-test rate percentage. Table 2 shows the mean score and standard deviation for the pre-test and post-test:

Table 2. Mean Score And Standard Deviation

Treatment	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	60.42	6.584
Post-test	80.47	5.810

Table 2 displays the pre-test and post-test statistical overview of the students' mean score and standard deviation. The pre-test mean score was 60.42, which was characterized as "fair," and the post-test mean score was 80.47, which was categorized as "good." It signifies that the students' post-test mean score was greater than the students' pre-test mean score. The pre-test standard deviation was 6.584, and the post-test standard deviation was 5.810. The next, the following table illustrates the outcome of significant differences between pre-test and post-test in order to determine whether the mean score is different from the two variables (pre-test and post-test):

Table 3. Level of Significant

Variables	Probability Value	Level of Significance α
Pre-test and Post Test	0.00	0.05

The value of sig (2-tailed) was smaller than the value of $\alpha = 0.05$ ($0.00 < 0.05$) as a result of the statistical computation above. It was discovered that the results of the students' pre-test and post-test differed significantly. According to the preceding description, the

null hypothesis (H0) was rejected, whereas the alternative hypothesis (H1) was accepted. It also indicates that when students were taught utilizing the Thematic Learning Approach, their reading comprehension, including literal, inferential, and analytical understanding, improved. Using the thematic approach method, the researcher determined that there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test of the students' reading comprehension. As supporting data, the researcher used an observation checklist to gauge the students' engagement during the treatment. The following is the outcome of the observation checklist in Table 4.

Table 4. Outcome of the Observation Checklist

Students' Participation	Treatment I		Treatment II		Treatment III	
	N	P(%)	N	P(%)	N	P(%)
Asking questions	3	14.2%	7	33.3%	10	47.6%
Answering questions	2	9.5%	5	23.8%	8	38.0%
Giving opinion	3	14.2%	8	38.0%	8	38.0%
Doing the task	15	71.4%	17	80.9%	19	90.4%
Active in discussion	10	47.6%	15	71.4%	18	85.7%
Taking notes	7	33.3%	10	47.6%	15	71.4%
Giving comments on other students' opinion	3	14.2%	6	28.5%	10	47.6%

The improvement in student participation during therapy is shown in Table 4.4. Only three students (14.2 percent) participated in the asking question category, two students (9.5 percent) in the answering question category, three students (14.2 percent) in the giving opinion category, 15 students (71.4 percent) in the doing the task category, ten students (47.6 percent) in the active in discussion category, and seven students (33.3 percent) in the taking notes category in the first treatment.

The students' participation improved in the second treatment compared to the first. Seven students (33.3 percent) participated in the asking question category, five students (23.8 percent) in the answering question category, eight students (38.0 percent) in the giving opinion category, seventeen students (80.9 percent) in the doing the task category, fifteen students (71.4 percent) in the active in discussion category, ten students (47.6 percent) in the taking notes category, and six students (28.5 percent) in the taking notes category.

The students' engagement improved in the third treatment compared to the second. There were 10 students (47.6 percent) who participated in the asking question category, 8 students (38.0 percent) in the answering question category, 8 students (38.0 percent) in the giving opinion category, 19 students (90.4 percent) in the doing the task category, 18 students (85.7 percent) in the active in discussion category, 15 students (71.4 percent) in the taking notes category, and 10 students (47.6 percent) in the doing the task category.

Table 5. Percentage of students in treatments I, II, and III

Aspect	T. I	T. II	T. III
Percentage of students' participation	29.2%	46.2%	59.81%

Based on the observation, a table depicted the percentage of students that participated in treatments I, II, and III. According to Table 5, the percentage of students who participated in the first and second treatments were 29.2 percent and 46.2 percent, respectively, and were classified as "low" criteria. The students' engagement percentage improved in the third treatment compared to the first and second treatments. It was 59.81 percent, which was considered "excellent" by the criterion. The results of this study are relevant and support several previous studies by Kieras (2017); Nurlaela et al. (2018); Puspita et al. (2020); Kim et al. (2021), that thematic learning is effective and able to improve students' reading ability.

CONCLUSION

The researcher suggests the following conclusions based on the study's findings and discussion in the previous:

1. A thematic learning strategy was found to be successful in improving students' reading comprehension, particularly at three levels: literal, inferential, and analytical. This was demonstrated by the T-test computation, which revealed that the probability value (0.00) was less than the level of significance (0.05).
2. Using a thematic learning strategy to encourage student participation in classroom activities was successful. This was demonstrated by the percentage of students who participated in the third therapy, which showed that 59.81 percent of students participated in the third treatment, which was characterized as "good" criteria.

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