INVESTIGATING INDEPENDENT READING AND ITS EFFECTS ON READING COMPREHENSION IN STUDENTS

MEMBACA MANDIRI DAN PENGARUHNYA TERHADAP PEMAHAMAN MEMBACA PADA MAHASISWA

Satriani [1]

[1] *Institut Agama Islam (IAI) As'adiyah Sengkang*

* satrianiatta288@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aims to explore the impact of Independent Reading on students' English reading comprehension. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach with a focus on understanding the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of students towards Independent Reading. The participants of the study were second semester students at the Islamic Institute of As'adiyah Sengkang. The findings revealed rich insights into how Independent Reading influenced students' engagement with English texts, their strategies for comprehension, and their overall perceptions of reading. Through thematic analysis, it was evident that students in the Independent Reading group demonstrated increased motivation, confidence, and enjoyment in reading English texts, leading to improvements in comprehension skills. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the qualitative aspects of Independent Reading and its implications for enhancing students' English reading comprehension.

Keywords: Independent Reading, Reading Comprehension, Experiential Learning, Reading Engagement

ABSTRAK

Studi kualitatif ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dampak Membaca Mandiri terhadap pemahaman membaca bahasa Inggris mahamahasiswa. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan pendekatan kualitatif dengan fokus pada pemahaman, persepsi, dan sikap mahasiswa terhadap Membaca Mandiri. Peserta penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa semester kedua di Institut Islam As'adiyah Sengkang. Temuan menunjukkan wawasan yang kaya tentang bagaimana Membaca Mandiri memengaruhi keterlibatan mahasiswa dengan teks-teks bahasa Inggris, strategi mereka untuk pemahaman, dan persepsi mereka secara keseluruhan terhadap membaca. Melalui analisis tematik, terbukti bahwa mahasiswa dalam kelompok Membaca Mandiri menunjukkan peningkatan motivasi, kepercayaan diri, dan kesenangan dalam membaca teks bahasa Inggris, yang mengarah pada peningkatan keterampilan

pemahaman. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang aspek kualitatif dari Membaca Mandiri dan implikasinya untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca bahasa Inggris mahamahasiswa.
Kata-kata kunci: *Membaca Mandiri, Pemahaman Membaca, Pembelajaran Berbasis Pengalaman, Keterlibatan dalam Membaca*

A. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental process through which individuals acquire knowledge, interpret information, and derive meaning from text. It plays a crucial role in the mastery of language skills, facilitating communication, learning, and personal development. Cline et al. (2006) define reading as the process of decoding and comprehending written texts, encompassing the translation of symbols, understanding contextual elements, and applying cognitive strategies to extract meaning.

Proficiency in reading is essential for navigating various academic, professional, and everyday contexts. It enables individuals to access information, engage with diverse perspectives, and participate effectively in society. This is in line with Muhsyanur (2014) and Muhsyanur (2019) which emphasizes the importance of reading skills in various aspects of life, ranging from academic to professional and everyday life. Moreover, reading proficiency is closely linked to academic achievement, cognitive development, and lifelong learning (Khand, 2004). In today's information-driven world, where written communication is ubiquitous, the ability to comprehend written texts is indispensable for success in education and beyond.

Reading comprehension, the ultimate goal of reading, involves not only decoding words but also understanding the message conveyed by the author. It requires readers to engage with the text actively, make connections, infer meaning, and critically evaluate information. Effective reading comprehension involves a combination of cognitive processes, including attention, memory, reasoning, and metacognition (Cullinan, 2000). Furthermore, comprehension is influenced by various factors, such as the reader's background knowledge, vocabulary, and reading strategies.

In educational settings, the development of reading comprehension skills is a primary focus of language instruction. Teachers employ a variety of strategies and techniques to help students improve their reading abilities, including explicit instruction, guided practice, and independent reading. Independent reading, in particu-

lar, has gained attention as a valuable approach to fostering reading comprehension and promoting literacy development.

Independent reading, as defined by Cullinan (2000), refers to the reading that students choose to do voluntarily, without external requirements or assessments. It allows students to select reading materials based on their interests, preferences, and reading levels, empowering them to take ownership of their learning. In independent reading, students have the freedom to explore a wide range of texts, from literature to informational materials, at their own pace and convenience. This self-directed approach to reading encourages motivation, engagement, and autonomy, as students develop a love for reading and become lifelong learners.

Previous research has demonstrated the benefits of independent reading for academic achievement, vocabulary development, and reading fluency (Kelley & Clausen-Gracesome, 2010). By providing students with opportunities to read independently, educators can enhance their comprehension skills, expand their knowledge base, and cultivate a habit of lifelong reading. However, the implementation of independent reading requires careful planning, support, and monitoring to ensure its effectiveness and relevance to students' needs and interests.

In light of the importance of reading comprehension and the potential of independent reading to enhance it, this study aims to investigate the effects of independent reading on students' reading comprehension at the Islamic Institute of As'adiyah Sengkang. By examining the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of students towards independent reading, the researcher seeks to gain insights into its impact on comprehension skills and identify effective strategies for its implementation. Through this research, the aim is to contribute to the advancement of effective reading instruction and promote literacy development among students.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is defined as the ability to derive meaning from written text and interpret information appropriately (Bond, 2009:21). It is an active process that involves both recognition and comprehension skills, serving as a vital tool for updating knowledge and achieving academic success (Patel & Jain, 2008:113). Comprehension, on the other hand, is described as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning from written language through interactive engagement (Alyousef, Hesham Sulaeman, 2005). It encompasses

the reader, the text, and the activity of comprehension itself, emphasizing the importance of active involvement in understanding written material (Peha, 2003).

Reading comprehension, as Wainwright (2007:37) explains, is the process of linguistic symbol decoding and reconstruction to understand the intended meaning conveyed by the writer. It involves coordinating various complex processes, including word reading, vocabulary knowledge, and fluency (Janette Klingner, 2007:2). Reading comprehension is crucial for acquiring knowledge from text and analyzing its components, ultimately leading to successful reading outcomes.

Literature suggests that reading comprehension can be categorized into different levels, each with its purpose and complexity. Smith in Mansur (2002) identifies four levels: literal reading, interpretative reading, critical reading, and creative reading. Literal reading involves acquiring directly stated information from the text, while interpretative reading requires inferring implied meanings and ideas. Critical reading involves evaluating the accuracy and appropriateness of the text, while creative reading involves applying new knowledge to solve problems or generate new ideas (Burn et al., 1984:177-178).

Independent reading is recognized as an essential educational practice for vocabulary development, comprehension, and fluency enhancement (Paul, 2003). It refers to students' voluntary choice to read during their spare time, contributing to improvements in reading comprehension (Garner & Bochna, 2004). Fluency gains importance during independent reading as it correlates with enhanced comprehension due to reading speed and accuracy (McCrudden, Schraw, Hartley, & Kiewra, 2004). Student choice of reading materials is emphasized, with strategies for selecting books based on desired reading experiences and various sources (Arnstead, 2005).

After selecting a book, students benefit from reinforced comprehension strategies to understand the text independently (Garner & Bochna, 2004). Teachers recognize the importance of allocating time for independent reading to improve students' comprehension skills (Nippold et al., 2005). During independent reading, students increase comprehension levels through decoding skills, fluency building, activating prior knowledge, reading aloud, acquiring vocabulary, and structural analysis (Vaugh & Edmonds, 2006).

C. METHOD

This research utilized a quasi-experimental design, drawing on insights from previous studies (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Shadish et al., 2002), to assess the efficacy of Independent Reading in enhancing students' reading comprehension abilities. Following the guidelines outlined by Gay et al. (2019) for quasi-experimental research, two distinct groups were established: the experimental class (E) and the control class (C). In the experimental group, students engaged in Independent Reading sessions where they were empowered to select texts aligned with their interests and participated in pre-reading activities, a practice supported by the literature (Guthrie et al., 2013). Additionally, students in the experimental group underwent various comprehension-building exercises, as recommended by Hiebert and Reutzel (2010), aimed at enhancing their understanding of the texts.

Conversely, the control group received traditional reading instruction using narrative texts, consistent with conventional pedagogical approaches (Krashen, 2004). Both groups underwent pre-tests and post-tests to evaluate their reading comprehension levels, in line with standard research practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative observations, guided by established methodologies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), revealed distinct patterns of behavior and interaction during Independent Reading sessions. Students in the experimental group exhibited heightened engagement and enthusiasm, initiating discussions and demonstrating deeper comprehension strategies, echoing findings from similar studies (Duke & Pearson, 2002). In contrast, students in the control group displayed signs of disengagement and frustration, highlighting the limitations of conventional instructional methods in fostering meaningful learning experiences (Allington, 2011). These qualitative insights complemented quantitative data, providing a holistic understanding of the impact of Independent Reading on students' reading comprehension skills and underscoring the value of student-centered approaches in educational practice (Patton, 2015).

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The author should elaborate the research findings. The findings and discussion relate to the literature and its practical implication. In this section, the author explains the research findings as an indicator of the research success. Furthermore, the research accomplishment can be observed in the proposed hypotheses and the novelty of the research.

The research aimed to thoroughly investigate the effectiveness of Independent Reading as a pedagogical tool for improving English reading comprehension among second-semester students at the Islamic Institute of As'adiyah Sengkang. Through a comprehensive examination of Independent Reading implementation, student responses, and its impact on reading comprehension outcomes, the study utilized both quantitative and qualitative analyses to provide a nuanced understanding of this instructional approach.

The first research problem focused on evaluating the effectiveness of Independent Reading in enhancing students' reading comprehension skills. Using a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test measurements, the study compared the performance of an experimental group exposed to Independent Reading with a control group receiving conventional reading instruction. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed a significant improvement in reading comprehension outcomes among students in the experimental group. This improvement was evidenced by a notable shift in performance levels from lower to higher classifications, indicating the positive impact of Independent Reading on students' comprehension abilities.

Furthermore, the study delved into the underlying mechanisms contributing to the efficacy of Independent Reading as a pedagogical strategy. Qualitative observations during Independent Reading sessions provided valuable insights into students' engagement and interaction with the learning material. Despite encountering challenges such as group dynamics and lexical difficulties, students in the experimental group demonstrated heightened interest and enthusiasm for Independent Reading activities. Their active involvement in text selection, pre-reading exercises, and comprehension discussions underscored the learner-centered nature of Independent Reading and its capacity to foster deeper understanding and content retention.

Transitioning to the second research problem, the study examined the implementation of Independent Reading and student responses to this instructional approach. Initial assessments through pre-tests revealed a prevalent deficit in reading comprehension skills among students. However, as the implementation of Independent Reading progressed, students exhibited significant improvement in their reading abilities. Qualitative observations highlighted students' enthusiasm for activities such as text selection based on personal interests, group discussions, and sharing in-

sights, underscoring the effectiveness of Independent Reading in promoting active learning engagement.

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into the efficacy of Independent Reading as a pedagogical strategy for enhancing English reading comprehension among students. By combining quantitative analyses with qualitative observations, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced dynamics of Independent Reading and its impact on student learning outcomes. These findings contribute to the existing body of educational research, informing educators and policymakers about the benefits of adopting learner-centered approaches such as Independent Reading in literacy instruction. Ultimately, this study enriches academic discourse and holds significant implications for improving educational practices and fostering student success in reading comprehension.

E. CONCLUSION

In summary, qualitative findings echo the quantitative data, affirming the efficacy of Independent Reading in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of second-semeter students at the Islamic Institute of As'adiyah Sengkang. Observations revealed heightened student engagement, participation, and enjoyment during Independent Reading sessions, indicating a positive response to the instructional approach. Despite initial hurdles, students demonstrated increased motivation, critical thinking abilities, and a deeper grasp of the learning material, underscoring the transformative influence of Independent Reading on their learning experiences.

Overall, these qualitative insights reinforce the value of Independent Reading as a learner-centered pedagogical strategy. They highlight its ability to foster active learning engagement and facilitate a more profound understanding of English reading comprehension among students. By prioritizing student autonomy and involvement, Independent Reading emerges as a promising approach to cultivate essential literacy skills and promote a positive learning environment in secondary education.

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