INVESTIGATING TEACHING-LEARNING STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING EFL LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION: A LESSON LEARNED FROM JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: October 2024 Revised: November 2024 Published: January 2025 **Keywords** Teaching strategies; Think aloud; Question answer relationships; Reading comprehension; Reading strategies; Teaching reading;	This study investigates the implementation of teaching strategies to improve reading comprehension among eighth-grade students in Indonesian junior high schools, where English is treated as a foreign language. Limited exposure and practice outside the classroom contribute to underwhelming reading proficiency. The research adopts a qualitative case study approach involving two English teachers and eighth-grade students. Data collection methods include observations, interviews, and documentation, while analysis is conducted using Miles and Hubberman's interactive model. Findings reveal that teachers employ two primary strategies for teaching descriptive text comprehension: Think Aloud and Question Answer Relationships (QARs). The Think Aloud strategy involves guiding students to set reading purposes and make predictions during the pre-reading stage. During reading, students identify key information, resolve unfamiliar vocabulary, and make connections across texts. Post-reading activities include summarizing, evaluating comprehension through performance, and formative assessments. QARs strategy focuses on building background knowledge before reading. Teachers introduce four types of questions – Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own – to guide text interpretation during reading. Reflection and comprehension tests, such as worksheets, are conducted post-reading to assess learning outcomes. The study highlights the effectiveness of interactive and structured approaches in fostering deeper engagement and improving students' reading comprehension abilities. These strategies offer practical insights for educators seeking to enhance reading proficiency through targeted interventions.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential skill that plays a critical role in the acquisition of foreign languages, serving as a gateway for learners to access globally connected information. Mastering reading in English opens doors to vast knowledge and provides substantial benefits across various domains of life. As Kustanti (2016) highlights, the continuous need for information can be easily fulfilled through reading, reinforcing its importance in daily life. Reading not only facilitates the acquisition

of knowledge but also promotes intellectual growth and cultural awareness. Harmer (2007) in Nurdianingsih (2021) underscores that reading is pivotal to language acquisition, with increased exposure to text correlating directly with improved language proficiency. This sentiment is echoed by Lumbantobing, Pardede, and Herman (2020), who argue that the more students engage with reading, the more refined their skills become. Furthermore, Par (2020) and Zhu et al. (2020) assert that reading significantly contributes to vocabulary expansion by exposing students to diverse words and phrases in different contexts.

Reading is not merely a passive activity but one that enhances critical thinking by encouraging the evaluation of information and the analysis of arguments. Sirait, Hutauruk, and Herman (2020) emphasize that reading shapes cognitive development, enabling learners to make informed decisions. Duke, Ward, and Pearson (2021) add that reading fosters analytical skills, allowing students to dissect complex ideas and synthesize new concepts. Sharon (2002) in Kurniawan et al. (2021) illustrates the critical role reading plays in the classroom, suggesting that 70%-90% of teaching activities rely on reading materials such as textbooks and reference articles. Consequently, developing proficient reading skills is not optional but imperative for academic success, necessitating that students comprehend and engage deeply with texts.

Despite its importance, the reading proficiency of Indonesian students remains underwhelming. English, perceived as a foreign language rather than a second language, is often confined to classroom settings, limiting students' exposure and practice (Sari et al., 2019). Unlike Indonesian, English sentence structures present unique challenges that further impede comprehension. As a result, students resort to translating English texts using dictionaries or online tools, focusing on word-for-word translations rather than contextual understanding. Apsari and Yana's (2015) study on high school students confirms that reading comprehension skills are generally low, with many learners struggling to grasp main ideas or follow text structures. Ulfa et al. (2023) reinforce this, noting difficulties in vocabulary acquisition, grammar, and understanding paragraph coherence. This lack of proficiency inhibits students' ability to accurately interpret information and respond correctly to comprehension questions.

Achieving reading proficiency necessitates the development of comprehensive reading comprehension skills. Brown (2001) posits that reading comprehension is predicated on the integration of language comprehension and decoding skills (Zang et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022; Sinamo, Herman, & Marpaung, 2023). Effective reading requires more than surface-level decoding; it involves connecting ideas, contextualizing information, and integrating new knowledge with existing frameworks. Bogaerds-Hazenberg, Evers-Vermeul, and van den Bergh (2021) emphasize that students must develop the ability to analyze texts holistically, situating new information within broader conceptual structures. This level of comprehension demands targeted instructional strategies that address the multifaceted nature of reading.

A well-designed teaching strategy is fundamental to fostering reading comprehension. Harmer (2007) describes teaching strategies as deliberate actions taken by educators to achieve learning objectives (Liu, 2021). Effective strategies align with students' learning styles and promote engagement through interactive methods. Ansari et al. (2023) suggest that incorporating games, multimedia, and collaborative activities enhances student participation and facilitates active learning. Brown (2004) in Muslaini (2017) contends that teaching strategies simplify complex concepts by structuring content in accessible ways, ensuring that students grasp core ideas and apply them to new contexts. Successful teaching strategies transform the classroom into a dynamic environment that nurtures inquiry and discovery.

To address reading comprehension challenges, teachers must apply targeted strategies that resonate with students' cognitive and emotional needs. Adler (2001) in Ulfa et al. (2023) characterizes reading strategies as structured plans that guide students toward deeper textual engagement (Damanik & Herman, 2021). These strategies enhance comprehension by fostering critical thinking and encouraging students to actively interact with texts. McNamara (2007) in Setiawati and Budiasih (2022) asserts that reading strategies reflect cognitive and behavioral processes essential for comprehension (Dignath & Veenman, 2021; Cents-Boonstra et al., 2021; Yapp, de Graaff, & van den Bergh, 2023; Purba et al., 2023). Effective strategies must be adaptable to different learning environments and tailored to students' unique needs.

Liang and Dole (2006) in Mene and Syawal (2021) identify several key strategies for enhancing reading comprehension, including predicting, making connections, questioning, visualizing, and inferring. Prediction encourages students to anticipate content, establishing a framework for understanding. Connecting texts to personal experiences and real-world events enhances relevance and engagement. Questioning fosters curiosity and prompts students to seek deeper meanings, while visualization helps them construct mental images that reinforce understanding. Inferring allows students to extrapolate ideas, forming conclusions that extend beyond explicit content. By integrating these strategies, teachers empower students to become autonomous readers capable of interpreting complex materials.

This research highlights the critical issue of underdeveloped reading comprehension among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar. Preliminary interviews with English teachers revealed that limited vocabulary and unfamiliarity with text structures contribute to student disengagement. Observations conducted during preliminary research further indicated that students exhibit passive learning behaviors, relying heavily on external aids to decode texts. Although teachers implemented discussion-based strategies to stimulate engagement, comprehension gaps persisted. These findings underscore the necessity for diversified instructional strategies that accommodate students' learning needs.

Previous studies have demonstrated the efficacy of various teaching strategies in enhancing reading comprehension. Safrianti's (2020) research at SMA Negeri 1 Ampek Angkek identified Think-Pair-Share, Reciprocal Teaching, Question-Answer Relationships (QARs), and small group discussions as effective methods. Saputri et al. (2021) reported similar findings at SMA N 10 Kota Bengkulu, with scaffolding and QARs emerging as primary strategies. Syukri and Karmini's (2022) investigation at an Islamic high school in Kendari revealed that memory-based techniques and collaborative discussions fostered significant improvements in comprehension. These studies collectively affirm the transformative potential of interactive teaching strategies.

This current research builds upon prior studies by focusing specifically on descriptive texts for eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar. The unique setting and targeted material provide a nuanced perspective, offering insights into how context-specific strategies influence reading comprehension. By examining teaching strategies within a localized framework, this research contributes to the broader discourse on literacy education, presenting scalable solutions for improving reading outcomes in diverse educational environments.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design

The researcher employs a qualitative research since it has been determined to be the most suited approach for answering the research questions of this research (Creswell, 2013). In this research, the specific phenomena under investigation is an implementation of teaching strategies have been applied successfully by English teachers in developing students' reading comprehension

skill in a junior high school. In applying qualitative research, the researcher adapts a case study method. Yin (2002) described that a case study is a design with a strategy by the main question of an investigation about how or why, then the researcher just has little opportunity to control the events to be investigated, and when the focus of the research lies on contemporary phenomena (present) in the context of real life (Vindrola-Padros, & Johnson, 2020). This research focuses intensively on a particular object namely the implementation of teaching strategies which has been applied successfully by English teachers in developing students' reading comprehension skill on descriptive text material that can be viewed as a case.

Data Source and Research Data

Data sources are divided into two types, namely primary and secondary. Primary data sources are obtained from the two English teachers in eighth grade from SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar who practice the teaching strategy of reading comprehension on descriptive text material namely Mrs. HDS and Mrs. MS. Besides, several eight grade students of the school are involved in this research. While secondary data is obtained from supporting documents such as lesson plans, student grades list, photos of learning materials, photos of classroom activities, theory books and several journals relevant to issue of this research.

The data in this research are in the form of field notes, pictures, and documents. Field notes are the results of observations in the eighth-grade class of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar which reflect the implementation of the types of teaching strategies for reading comprehension applied by English teachers and the interview results with both of English teachers and several eighth-grade students who are in English course related to the research questions. Pictures are photos that capture all the activities that teachers do when the implementation of teaching strategies for reading comprehension in the classroom as well as descriptive English text material taught to eighth grade students from SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar. Documents used in this research are daily lesson plans prepared by teachers especially on descriptive text material, list of student names, and list of students score in descriptive text material.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this research are field notes, interview script, and guide of documentation. Field notes are tools used in the observation stage of data collection to record the occurrence of an event. Meanwhile, interview script is designed by a semi-structured interview that consist of adopted questions related to kinds of teaching strategy and its implementation based on Vacca (1999) theory. Then, guide of documentation refers to several documents to be captured due to confirm the evidence of the information that has been collected by the researcher such as lesson plan, list of students' names, teaching material, the result of the students' reading comprehension on descriptive text, and classroom activity photos. All of the instruments can be seen on the appendix of this research.

Technique of Collecting Data

In this research, the researcher applies three techniques in collecting data namely observation, interview, and documentation to get the comprehensive information related to implementation of teaching strategies in reading comprehension by the English teachers on descriptive texts.

Observation

Observation is the earliest type of data collection technique carried out by a researcher. Creswell & Poth (2018) mentioned that observation is one of the most important data collection methods in qualitative research. Observation is conducted by directly observing in the field and

note taking even recording to obtain data related to the focus of the research. Creswell (2013) stated that observation refers to the practice of openly and directly collecting data by observing people and places at the research site.

Observation requires field notes to understand the content of the observation. Field notes are tools used in the observation stage of data collection to record the occurrence of an event. Observation is a comprehensive summary of the problem to be researched. It includes descriptive and reflective notes. In the descriptive notes, the researcher describes to implementation of teaching strategies in reading comprehension by the English teachers on descriptive texts, including chronological notes on what she sees and hears, all events, and the physical characteristics of the classroom. In the reflective notes, the researcher provides the checklist on the most significant aspects on the checking list document.

Interview

An interview is an in-depth and systematic question and answer process with informants so that the expected information can be obtained completely. Patton (2014) explained that an interview is a conversational activity between two people who have the aim of digging up information as support in the process of achieving certain goals. In this case, the researcher asks the participants related to the issue of this research based on the interview guide which formulated in sub questions to get comprehensive information clearly.

The researcher selects a semi-structured interview for this case study because the questions can be prepared in advance. This format is an easy method to keep the conversation on topic (Patton, 2014). It allows the interviewer to be well prepared and have a deep understanding of the research problem. Therefore, this instrument will be proposed and piloted in advance so that the questions in this interview can be applied according to the research issue namely the types and the implementation of teaching strategies in reading comprehension by the English teachers on descriptive text for eight grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar.

Documentation

Documentation is conducted by researcher to support research data from observations and interviews. Sugiyono (2015) defined that documentation is a data collection technique that is done by recording or photographing archives, letters, and other documents as support. In this research, researcher conducts documentation by photographing various forms of activities that reflect the of teaching strategies in reading comprehension by the English teachers on descriptive text for eight grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar. Documentation is a source of written or visual data that can aid knowledge of what happens in the classroom (Johansson, 2003). In addition, the researcher also collects document data such as lesson plan, list of students' names, teaching material, the result of the students' reading comprehension on descriptive text, classroom activity photo reflecting to implementation of teaching strategies in reading comprehension by the English teachers on descriptive text for eight grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar. These documents are used to increase and support the information more valid and trusted.

Technique for Analysing Data

The researcher conducts Miles and Hubberman data analysis technique comprising data collection, reduction, display, and verification. Data collection is an integral part of the activities in conducting data analysis. The researcher collects data by applying observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation on issues related to the implementation of teaching strategies in reading comprehension by the English teachers on descriptive text for eight grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar. Data reduction is a process carried out by researchers by sorting out

some data and focusing attention through narrowing down the problem and transferring rough data that emerges from various notes in the field. This data reduction is taken from observation, interview, and documentation data related to the teaching strategies implemented in reading comprehension by the English teachers on descriptive text for eight grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar. If the data is not related to the focus of the research problem, then the researcher deletes the data so that there is no accumulation of data that is not used. Data display is a way of presenting a set of information systematically so that it provides the possibility of drawing conclusions. Research data will be easier to understand if the arrangement is well organized. Furthermore, the researcher provides codes (coding) for the data she needs. The results of data from observations, interviews, and documentation related to the teaching strategies implemented in reading comprehension by the English teachers on descriptive text for eight grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar are organized so that they are easy to be read and studied. The activity carried out by the researcher in the drawing conclusion stage is to determine the final conclusion, because the initial conclusions formulated are still temporary. Drawing conclusions is a step of reviewing the truth of the data obtained during data presentation. This conclusion is accompanied by valid evidence from the research data so that the conclusion can be considered as new findings and can answer the problem that is the focus of the research, namely to the teaching strategies implemented in reading comprehension by the English teachers on descriptive text.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Research Findings
The Kinds of Strategies Applied by the English Teachers in Teaching Reading Comprehension on Descriptive Text for the Eighth Grade Students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar

The researcher identifies that English teachers of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar apply two strategies in teaching reading comprehension on descriptive text, namely think aloud and question answer relationships (QARs) for eight grade students.

Think Aloud

Think aloud strategy made by the English teacher is focused to help the eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar to connect new information with the knowledge that owned by them. It can practice them to predict what the next happen into the text based on the information has been obtained. It means that think aloud is one of best strategy which students are attracted to the teacher's thinking. The instructions from the English teacher encourage the eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar to think critically, build their ability in connecting idea of texts and solve the problem in complex vocabulary. It also figures out how she is open minded and will accept each students' opinion regarding to the text idea. This act is expected to be followed by the students. They can imitate how the way that the teacher shows in thinking to the text.

After that, the eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar are required to draw conclusion of the information of the text through visualization then they can describe it as well as why they think of that in order to produce the better understanding of it. Finally, students can monitor how extent they can understand the text and able to identify the complicated things that make them confused. Here, she just becomes the facilitator who giving feedback towards students' difficulties. Thus, think aloud strategy can make the eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 4

Pematangsiantar being active readers in reading comprehension process so that they can build their own understanding or insight comprehensively towards overall texts given by the English teacher.

Question Answer Relationships (QARs)

Question Answer Relationships (QARs) strategy illustrates about how the English teacher instructs the eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar to classify the questions. It means that they are required to differentiate question that the answer can be found in the text and the question that the answer needs their own thinking. Then she instructs to find the answer. In this case, students are required to find the answer systematically from the text or using their own perspective after classifying questions. Finally, the students are expected to connect the information that they find with the question asked by the teacher or come from the text. Overall, this manifestation of this strategy helps the eighth grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar to understand the relationship of question and answer that they find into the text. It means that students do not only search answer passively but they can connect actively the questions with the information which is relevant into the text. By applying the strategy, they can be more active and critical reader who capable in developing their idea to analyze information and draw conclusion accurately towards the descriptive text provided by their English teacher.

From the explanation above, the researcher illustrates that there are two strategies applied by the both of English teachers in teaching reading comprehension on descriptive text on the table below:

Table 1
Kinds of reading comprehension strategy used by the English teachers

NO	STRATEGY	TEACHER I	TEACHER II
1	Scaffolding	-	-
2	Think Aloud	√	-
3	Reciprocal Teaching	-	-
4	SQ3R	-	-
5	Question and Answer Relationships (QARs)	-	√

Based on the table above, it can be seen that from five strategies of reading comprehension, the teacher I just applies think aloud, while the teacher II applies question and answer relationships. Moreover, the researcher gives the view of the result on the picture below:

The Implementation of the Strategies by the English Teachers in Teaching Reading Comprehension on Descriptive Text for the Eighth Grade Students of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar

The researcher provides a detailed description of how think aloud and question answer relationships (QARs) strategies are implemented by English teachers to enhance reading comprehension of descriptive texts. This exploration focuses on the practices employed by Mrs. NH, an English teacher at SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar, in her eighth-grade classroom.

The Implementation of Think Aloud

In the pre-reading stage, Mrs. NH initiates the lesson by guiding students to determine the purpose of the reading activity. She encourages students to make predictions about the material as part of the apperception process. These activities are designed to engage students in the reading

process from the outset, stimulating their curiosity and prompting them to consider the content of the text. By setting clear reading goals and fostering initial predictions, the teacher aims to build interest and activate students' prior knowledge, laying the groundwork for deeper comprehension.

During the whilst-reading phase, students participate in several interactive activities that facilitate active engagement with the text. One of the key activities involves identifying relevant information within the text. The teacher instructs students to sift through the material, selecting important details that align with the reading objectives while disregarding extraneous information. This selective reading process enhances students' ability to focus on essential content, promoting a more strategic approach to reading comprehension.

Another integral aspect of this phase involves identifying difficult or unfamiliar words. Mrs. NH encourages students to use contextual clues, dictionaries, or peer assistance to decode challenging vocabulary. This practice not only improves word recognition but also fosters a habit of independent learning and critical analysis. As students encounter new terms, they develop the skills necessary to decipher meaning and expand their vocabulary, crucial for long-term language acquisition.

Re-reading is another vital component of the whilst-reading stage. Mrs. NH prompts students to revisit sections of the text that pertain to key topics or questions. By engaging in repeated readings, students reinforce their understanding and are better equipped to answer questions related to both explicit and implicit content. This activity also sharpens students' ability to connect textual information to their prior knowledge, thereby deepening their comprehension and encouraging reflective thinking.

A final activity in this stage involves making connections between texts. Mrs. NH guides students to draw parallels between the current reading material and other related texts. For instance, after reading about Prambanan Temple, students are encouraged to compare it to other historical sites like Borobudur Temple. This intertextual approach broadens students' perspectives, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. By linking ideas across texts, students cultivate analytical skills that are essential for interpreting complex information and drawing meaningful conclusions.

In the post-reading stage, the focus shifts to reflection and comprehension evaluation. Mrs. NH emphasizes think aloud activities that prompt students to articulate their thoughts, emotions, and insights regarding the text. This reflective process allows students to consolidate their understanding, express interpretations, and engage in deeper discussions. Summarizing the text is a central component of this stage, reinforcing key concepts and ensuring that students retain the core message of the reading material. To assess comprehension, Mrs. NH administers class exercises through LKPD (Learner Activity Sheets) tailored to descriptive texts. These exercises provide structured opportunities for students to demonstrate their grasp of the material and receive feedback. By incorporating post-reading evaluations, the teacher gains insights into students' progress and areas that require further reinforcement.

The Implementation of Question Answer Relationships (QARs) Strategy

The implementation of the Question Answer Relationships (QARs) strategy by Mrs. MPS in teaching reading comprehension on descriptive texts for eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar demonstrates a structured and engaging approach. This method aims to build students' comprehension by guiding them through different types of questions that encourage interaction with the text at various cognitive levels.

During the pre-reading phase, Mrs. MPS begins by creating a connection between the students and the topic of the descriptive text. She initiates the lesson by greeting the class and

engaging students in a discussion about the upcoming reading material. Visual aids such as pictures are used to stimulate curiosity and prompt students to share their experiences related to the topic. This phase focuses on activating and building background knowledge, ensuring that students feel prepared and motivated to engage with the text. By asking open-ended questions, Mrs. MPS encourages students to think critically about the topic before reading, setting the stage for a deeper understanding of the material.

In the whilst-reading phase, Mrs. MPS introduces the four types of QARs questions: Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own. She begins with the Right There questions, which require students to find answers directly from the text. Questions focus on factual information such as the scientific name, height, and physical characteristics of a giraffe. Students respond well to these questions, demonstrating their ability to extract clear and explicit information from the reading material. This step reinforces their confidence in locating key details within the text.

The Think and Search questions are then introduced, requiring students to gather information spread across different parts of the text. Unlike the previous stage, students must connect various pieces of information to construct comprehensive answers. This process pushes students to read more thoroughly, promoting greater attention to detail. Despite the increased complexity, students successfully answer the questions, reflecting an improved ability to synthesize information from multiple areas of the text.

Following this, Mrs. MPS introduces the Author and Me questions, which blend textual information with students' personal reflections and opinions. This type of question challenges students to interpret the text while incorporating their own perspectives, fostering critical thinking and deeper engagement. Students respond enthusiastically, demonstrating an ability to analyze the content and relate it to their own ideas. Their willingness to explore beyond the text highlights the effectiveness of this approach in encouraging creative and independent thought.

The final type, On My Own questions, allows students to rely entirely on their imagination and prior knowledge. These questions are not directly linked to the text, giving students the freedom to express subjective and varied responses. For instance, Mrs. MPS prompts students to describe the characteristics and behaviors of giraffes based on their understanding and creativity. The classroom atmosphere becomes lively, with active discussions and enthusiastic participation. This activity not only stimulates imagination but also fosters confidence as students feel empowered to contribute unique insights.

In the post-reading phase, Mrs. MPS focuses on reflection and comprehension assessment. She begins by inviting students to provide feedback on the lesson, encouraging them to summarize their understanding of the material. This reflective exercise reinforces the knowledge gained during the session and allows the teacher to gauge the depth of students' comprehension. To further evaluate learning outcomes, Mrs. MPS administers a test in the form of a worksheet (LKPD) containing 20 multiple-choice questions related to the descriptive text. This final assessment ensures that students consolidate their learning, providing a structured opportunity to demonstrate their grasp of the content.

The application of QARs strategies by Mrs. MPS creates an interactive and engaging learning environment that effectively enhances students' reading comprehension skills. By incorporating diverse types of questions at different stages of the reading process, students are encouraged to interact with the text in meaningful ways, fostering both analytical and imaginative thinking. This structured yet flexible approach promotes deeper understanding and prepares students to approach reading comprehension with greater confidence and skill.

Discussion

The current research highlights the application of think aloud and question answer relationships (QARs) strategies by English teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar in teaching reading comprehension of descriptive texts. These strategies, employed for eighth-grade students, align with the theory proposed by Vacca and Vacca (1999) in Oktavia et al. (2023), which emphasizes comprehensive understanding through structured reading strategies. McNamara (2007) in Setiawati and Budiasih (2022) posits that reading comprehension strategies reflect cognitive and behavioral actions essential for enhancing comprehension in specific contexts. The findings suggest that Vacca's theory is highly applicable to the instructional challenges faced by the teachers in this study, offering relevant solutions to improve student outcomes.

The research findings resonate with previous studies, such as Ghozali and Adi (2023), who reported similar strategies employed by high school teachers in Batu. Their study found that QARs and think aloud methods effectively engaged students, encouraging exploration of materials and fostering active learning. QARs facilitated the construction of knowledge, while think aloud supported students in articulating their thoughts during reading. Conversely, the current research contrasts with Saori (2022), which observed the use of scaffolding, mind mapping, audiovisual methods, and grammar translation strategies among second-grade high school teachers in Gunungsari. This divergence suggests that while QARs and think aloud are effective, the selection of strategies may vary based on student needs and contextual factors.

The think aloud strategy, as implemented by the teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar, involves a structured sequence of activities designed to facilitate comprehension. In the pre-reading stage, the teacher guides students in identifying the purpose of reading and making predictions about the material. This stage prepares students by activating prior knowledge and fostering curiosity about the text. During the reading process, students engage in identifying key information, recognizing difficult words, and making connections across different parts of the text. These activities encourage students to interact deeply with the content, reinforcing comprehension through repeated exposure and analysis.

The whilst-reading phase is characterized by continuous engagement, where students filter relevant information and seek clarifications on challenging vocabulary. This aligns with Vacca and Vacca's (1999) assertion that teachers should model their thought processes, encouraging students to reflect on their reading in real-time. The think aloud method culminates in post-reading activities, where students summarize the text and undergo formative assessments to evaluate their understanding. This approach mirrors Mehrpour et al. (2012), who advocate for the integration of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities as a comprehensive framework for reading instruction.

Similarly, the implementation of QARs involves distinct phases that systematically enhance students' comprehension abilities. The pre-reading phase focuses on building background knowledge, a critical step in preparing students to engage with the text. During the reading process, the teacher introduces the four types of QARs questions: Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own. Each question type targets different cognitive skills, guiding students to retrieve information directly from the text, synthesize ideas, and integrate personal insights.

Through the application of QARs, students actively participate in discussions and text analysis. The teacher models the questioning process, encouraging students to generate their own questions and reflect on the relationships between text and personal knowledge. This interactive approach aligns with the findings of Mirrah and Zaim (2021), who emphasize the importance of text identification and analysis in reading comprehension. The process not only strengthens

students' ability to locate explicit information but also nurtures higher-order thinking skills through inferential and evaluative questioning.

The findings also reflect the practical application of QARs observed in studies by Saputri et al. (2021) and Safrianti (2020). These studies demonstrate that QARs provide a structured mechanism for assessing students' comprehension levels, allowing teachers to gauge understanding through targeted questioning. The alignment between the current research and previous studies reinforces the validity of QARs as an effective reading comprehension strategy, adaptable to diverse educational settings.

Despite the effectiveness of think aloud and QARs, the research identifies persistent challenges faced by teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar. A primary issue is students' limited vocabulary and overall language proficiency, which hinder comprehension. These obstacles echo the findings of Chen and Chen (2015), who argue that vocabulary deficits, syntactic complexities, and schema deficiencies are common barriers for EFL learners. Without adequate vocabulary, students struggle to interpret texts accurately, resulting in fragmented understanding and reduced engagement.

To address these challenges, the research suggests that teachers adopt a patient and supportive approach, gradually expanding students' vocabulary and reinforcing reading skills. Providing continuous exposure to new words and contextualizing them within reading activities can facilitate gradual improvement. As students develop stronger linguistic foundations, their ability to comprehend texts holistically is expected to improve, aligning with the broader goals of reading comprehension instruction.

In conclusion, the research underscores the effectiveness of think aloud and QARs strategies in enhancing reading comprehension among eighth-grade students. These strategies, grounded in established theoretical frameworks, offer practical solutions to common reading difficulties. While challenges related to vocabulary and language acquisition persist, the structured application of these strategies provides a pathway for sustained improvement. By fostering interactive and reflective reading practices, teachers can cultivate a more engaged and proficient cohort of readers, contributing to the broader objectives of language education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the previous chapter, the researcher concludes the results as following: The English teachers of SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar have applied two strategies in teaching reading comprehension on descriptive text for eight grade students, namely think aloud and question answer relationships (QARs). Think aloud strategy is implemented by determining the purpose of reading activity and instructing predictions about the material at pre reading stage; identifying relevant information in the text, identifying difficult words in the text, re-reading the text in question related to the content of the text and matters related to the topic, and making connections between texts at whilst reading stage; summarizing text and evaluating students' comprehension ability through reading performance and formative test at post reading stage. Meanwhile, question answer relationships (QARs) is applied by building the students' background of knowledge at pre reading stage; introducing and applying the types of question in QARs namely Right There, Think and Search, Author and Me, and On My Own at whilst reading phase; reflecting the learning result and testing students' comprehension ability applied in class through worksheet at post reading stage.

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