



Building Comprehension: A Step-by-Step Approach for High School EFL Students in Indonesia

Zaldi Harfal^{a,1*}, Somayyeh Ariyanfar^{b,2}

^a Universitas Riau, Indonesia

^b University of Rochester, United States

¹ zaldi.harfal@lecturer.unri.ac.id*

*korespondensi penulis

Informasi artikel

Received: 23 Februari 2024;

Revised: 10 Maret 2024;

Accepted: 27 Maret 2024.

Keywords:

Literacy Education;

Comprehension Strategies;

Procedural Approach;

English Language Teaching;

Teacher Training

ABSTRACT

This study examines a structured instructional framework for teaching comprehension strategies to high school EFL students in Indonesia. It focuses on the challenges teachers face in fostering students' independent literacy skills by implementing Duke and Pearson's (2002) five-step model: explicit instruction, collaborative learning, guided practice, gradual release of responsibility, and independent application. The framework integrates comprehension strategies like Summarizing and Chunking with instructional strategies such as Think-Pair-Share and Modeling to ensure effective classroom implementation. A lesson plan for a professional development workshop is proposed to train EFL teachers in applying these strategies. The findings show that a systematic approach enhances students' cognitive and metacognitive skills, enabling them to comprehend texts independently. The study recommends adapting this framework for younger learners and low-proficiency adult students to ensure its applicability across diverse learning contexts. This approach helps address gaps in literacy instruction and prepares students for academic and real-world challenges.

Kata kunci:

Pendidikan Literasi;

Strategi Pemahaman;

Pendekatan Procedural;

Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris;

Pelatihan Guru.

ABSTRAK

Membangun Pemahaman: Pendekatan Langkah demi Langkah bagi Siswa EFL di Sekolah Menengah di Indonesia. Penelitian ini mengkaji kerangka kerja instruksional terstruktur untuk mengajarkan strategi pemahaman kepada siswa EFL tingkat sekolah menengah di Indonesia. Fokusnya adalah pada tantangan yang dihadapi guru dalam mendorong keterampilan literasi mandiri siswa, dengan menerapkan model lima langkah dari Duke dan Pearson (2002): instruksi eksplisit, pembelajaran kolaboratif, latihan terarah, transfer tanggung jawab secara bertahap, dan penerapan mandiri. Kerangka kerja ini mengintegrasikan strategi pemahaman seperti Meringkas dan Chunking dengan strategi instruksional seperti Think-Pair-Share dan Modeling untuk diterapkan dalam kelas secara efektif. Rencana pembelajaran untuk lokakarya pengembangan profesional diusulkan guna melatih guru EFL menerapkan strategi ini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan pendekatan sistematis dapat meningkatkan keterampilan kognitif dan metakognitif siswa dalam memahami teks secara mandiri. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan adaptasi kerangka kerja ini untuk pembelajar muda dan siswa dewasa berkemampuan rendah agar dapat diterapkan dalam berbagai konteks pembelajaran. Pendekatan ini membantu mengatasi kesenjangan dalam pengajaran literasi dan mempersiapkan siswa menghadapi tantangan akademik.

Copyright © 2024 (Zaldi Harfal & Somayyeh Ariyanfar). All Right Reserved

How to Cite : Harfal, Z., & Ariyanfar, S. (2024). Building Comprehension: A Step-by-Step Approach for High School EFL Students in Indonesia. *Pijar : Jurnal Penelitian Bidang Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran*, 4(2), 39–45. <https://doi.org/10.56393/pijar.v4i2.2689>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/). Allows readers to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of its articles and allow readers to use them for any other lawful purpose. The journal hold the copyright.

Introduction

As a foreign language teacher or teacher trainer, do your students have difficulties in understanding texts? Do you only tell them comprehension strategies or help them develop the strategies? Many times, instructors explain comprehension strategies to students and ask them to apply the strategies while reading texts. In this case, teachers ask students to skip steps on a staircase, which can lead to confusion. Teachers know comprehension strategies are important, but there seems to be little or no discussion around the instructional steps of how to incorporate these strategies within the lesson.

In Indonesia, literacy promotion has primarily focused on encouraging students to read through initiatives such as the "Literacy Culture" movement. While commendable, these efforts often fail to address the core issue: helping students develop the cognitive and metacognitive skills necessary for independent text comprehension. Reading involves interactive processes where readers apply their knowledge to build and construct meaning (Day, 2020). Research, such as that by Duke and Pearson (2002), has emphasized the importance of balanced comprehension instruction that includes explicit teaching, modeling, and guided practice. However, these strategies are rarely implemented systematically in Indonesian high school classrooms, leaving students underprepared for academic and real-world reading demands.

In many reading classes, the focus shifts from teaching reading skills to using texts as tools for introducing vocabulary or grammar (McDonough et al., 2013). This highlights the need for instructional approaches that prioritize comprehension skills. This study aims to describe current literacy practices, highlight the importance of comprehension strategies, and propose a structured instructional framework based on Duke and Pearson's (2002) model. By focusing on adolescent and adult learners, the study seeks to empower teachers with procedural knowledge to improve literacy outcomes effectively.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to design a structured instructional framework for teaching comprehension strategies in high school EFL classrooms in Indonesia, focusing on the summarization strategy. Guided by Duke and Pearson's (2002) five-step model—explicit instruction, modeling, collaborative practice, guided practice with gradual release of responsibility, and independent application—the framework integrates comprehension strategies such as Summarizing, Chunking, and Skimming with instructional strategies like Think-Pair-Share, Modeling, and Grouping. The combinations scaffold students' learning by providing a clear, step-by-step process for applying comprehension strategies in varied reading contexts while encouraging metacognitive reflection on their effectiveness. Grabe and Yamashita (2022) suggest that teachers should choose and modify reading materials based on students' proficiency levels, reading demands, and interests. A sample lesson plan was developed to illustrate the framework's classroom application, incorporating teacher-led activities, collaborative group work, and independent practice. Feedback from literacy education experts and EFL teachers was sought to refine the framework and ensure its feasibility. Additionally, a professional development workshop was proposed to train teachers in implementing the framework, equipping them with the skills to integrate research-based literacy practices effectively. This method addresses gaps in current literacy instruction by combining theoretical insights with practical applications, ensuring adaptability to diverse classroom contexts.

Results and Discussion

Many teachers promote literacy by asking or inviting students to read more daily. However, literacy encompasses more than just reading and writing skills. Alberta Education (2022) defines literacy as "the ability, confidence, and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct, and

communicate meaning in all aspects of daily living.” For older learners, literacy includes using strategies to understand unfamiliar texts and evaluate strategies when they fail to derive meaning (Duke and Pearson, 2002). Students' ability to apply comprehension strategies is classified as cognitive skills, while their capacity to evaluate and revise strategies is metacognitive skills. With metacognitive skills, students are able to consider the best strategies to understand texts independently across different contexts, specifically readings at a higher level (Garner, 1987). Zhang (2018) discusses Flavell's model of metacognition, which identifies metacognitive knowledge and experiences as essential components of effective reading. This study reinforces the importance of these components in fostering independent reading skills.

As suggested by Tovani (2004), literacy strategy is an intentional plan that is flexible and can be adapted to meet the needs of a literate situation. Many schools in Indonesia have set up a reading corner, put a few books for students to read and promote what they call the ‘Literacy Culture’ movement. These literacy massive actions are good social practice (Perry, 2012). However, students need to build their comprehension strategies strongly along with their literacy development. Duke and Pearson (2002) suggested “balanced comprehension instruction.” Teachers should not only assign students to read, write and discuss texts, but teachers should provide explicit instruction in specific comprehension strategies. Anderson (2009) highlights three key strategies for developing metacognitive awareness in reading: making lists of relevant vocabulary to prepare for new reading, collaborating with classmates to enhance reading skills, and taking opportunities to practice existing knowledge.

Habók and Magyar (2019) emphasize the need for explicit strategy training to raise students' awareness of metacognitive practices. This study underscores their suggestion by proposing structured instructional frameworks to guide such training. Rajaei et al. (2020) found that both collaborative and non-collaborative teaching approaches are effective in improving reading comprehension. However, collaborative instruction is preferred when classroom conditions are favorable, a recommendation that aligns with the findings of this study. Research suggests that strategies like summarizing while reading can help monitor comprehension and improve understanding (Colombo, 2011). By implementing summarization strategies effectively, teachers can enable students to engage actively with texts and improve their cognitive and metacognitive skills.

English is a foreign language in Indonesia and at our English Language Education Program, the student teachers should have the strategic instructional skills to teach the strategic knowledge to their EFL students. To do this, the teaching procedure can refer to the model of strategy instruction by Duke & Pearson (2002). EFL teachers are expected to consider using the procedure when teaching comprehension strategies to older high-level English learners. However, when they teach reading to young children or adult low-level EFL learners, teachers need to consider the other two factors, automatic word recognition and language comprehension (Nam, 2006).

This study focuses on older learners' literacy practices because of the page limitation. Another reason is that these prospective teachers are going to teach junior and senior high school students because in the current curriculum English is not set as a core subject at elementary school anymore. These student teachers are projected to work at junior and senior high schools. The teachers should make sure these older learners use the strategies independently in making meanings of texts, particularly in learning English as a foreign language. In addition, they can also promote the comprehension strategies when reading Indonesian texts or learning other school subjects. Teachers should help the school students to possess metacognitive skills, that is, the ability to think about their thinking. Finally, the students can consider what strategies work and what do not work in comprehending whatever texts they would like to read.

To address these needs, this study proposes a sample lesson plan that can be used in the EFL teacher training program. Teacher educators must understand two types of strategies, comprehension

strategies and instructional strategies. Teachers' jobs are to help students develop their comprehension strategies, such as Summarize, Read Aloud/ Think Aloud, Double-entry Journal, Accessing Prior Knowledge, Annotation, Skimming and Scanning, Chunking, Visualizing, Questioning, etc. Teacher educators' jobs are doubled, however, that is to help (student) teachers develop their comprehension strategies and instructional strategies. The instructional strategies include Think-Pair Share, Grouping Strategies, Pre-Teach Vocabulary, Modeling Thinking, Modeling a Strategy, Modeling How to Ask Questions, Found Poem, Double-Entry Journal, etc.

Teachers should do the right procedure to help learners develop their comprehension strategies until they can use it independently. The instructional procedure can integrate one or more instructional strategies, such as combination of Think-Pair Share, Questioning, and Modeling but should contain at least the 5 elements in a model of comprehension instruction by Duke and Pearson (2002): (1) explicitly describe the strategy when you would use it, (2) teacher or student model the strategy in action, (3) Collaboratively use the strategy in action, (4) Guided practice with using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility, (5) Independently use the strategy. An example of step-by-step procedure to develop a comprehension strategy, 'Predicting', has been explained by Duke and Pearson (2002) in their paper. This study provides another sample instructional procedure that integrates the suggested 5 steps for teaching another comprehension strategy, combining 'Summarize' and 'Think Aloud' strategies at a time, which can be implemented or adapted at one session at a teacher professional development (TPD) workshop, teacher training course, or other similar settings. The suggested TPD workshop session plan activities with teacher and student actions aligned to the comprehension instruction model can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. TPD Workshop Session Plan (*with suggested teacher's verbal instructions*)

Activity	Teacher does/says...	Students do...	Comprehension Instruction Model
Greeting	Teacher welcomes and greets students. <i>"Good morning, everyone! Last time we discussed two comprehension strategies, Think Aloud and Predicting. Now, can you predict what we will discuss today?"</i>	Students respond to the greeting and attempt to predict today's lesson.	
Lesson Objective	Teacher explains the lesson objective: <i>"Yes, definitely, we will practice another strategy today, that is, Summarize. Our session objective is that students demonstrate the summarizing strategy independently"</i>	Students listen and note the objective of the lesson.	
Benefits of Reading	Teacher invites students to explain the benefits of reading in their life and the importance of summarizing and other strategies to comprehend reading texts. <i>"Can you tell me the benefits of reading?"</i> <i>"What types of texts do you love to read?"</i> <i>"What strategy do you use to comprehend difficult texts?"</i> <i>"What is the importance of using correct strategy in reading?"</i>	Students share their thoughts about reading benefits, favorite texts, and strategies.	
Find the Strategy	Teacher asks students to discuss in pairs or small groups to find the meaning of summarizing strategy, when to use it, and how to use it in reading activity.	Students work in pairs or groups, use a dictionary or search	(1) Explicitly describe the strategy

Activity	Teacher does/says...	Students do...	Comprehension Instruction Model
	<i>"Now, I want you to work in pairs or small groups. Discuss and find the meaning of the summarizing strategy. Think about when you should use this strategy and how you can use it while reading. You can use a dictionary or search engine to help you. After that, be ready to share your findings with the class."</i>	engine, and share findings.	
Explicit Instruction	Teacher explicitly describes the comprehension strategy and how it should be used. <i>"Summary is You should summarize a lot when you read. You can read a section, then stop and summarize it."</i>	Students listen and understand how to summarize texts.	(1) Explicitly describe the strategy
Student Modeling	Teacher invites two students to come forward and model the strategy. <i>"I need two volunteers to come forward and model the summarizing strategy. You will read a short section and then summarize it in your own words. The rest of the class will observe, compare both examples, and help decide which one demonstrates the strategy best. Who would like to volunteer?"</i>	Two students model the strategy while others observe and decide the best example.	(2) Teacher or student model the strategy
Teacher Modeling	Teacher gives feedback and models the correct use of the strategy. <i>"I am going to summarize while reading this passage. I will start with the introductory section. I will use the headings and subheadings to help me extract important points and make connections between them."</i>	Students observe the teacher's modeling and take notes.	(2) Teacher or student model the strategy
Collaborative Practice	Teacher invites all students to use the strategy collaboratively. <i>"I have done the summarizing strategy while reading the introductory section and use the chapter title, headings, subheadings and pictures to do it. For the next section, I want you to summarize the information with me. You and I should read and write a summary."</i>	Students work collaboratively with the teacher to summarize the text.	(3) Collaboratively use the strategy
Guided Practice	Teacher guides students to practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility. <i>"It's your time to read silently. When you read later, remember what you have been practicing – writing a summary while reading. You can summarize every subsection in the chapter. Ask yourself whether the strategy is helpful, or whether you need to use another one."</i>	Students practice summarizing independently, reflecting on its effectiveness.	(4) Guided practice with gradual release
Reflection Questions	Teacher invites students to make conclusion <i>"What comprehension strategy have you learned and practiced today?"</i> <i>"Does it help you to understand the meaning of texts?"</i> <i>"When do you use this strategy?"</i> <i>"How do you use this strategy?"</i>	Students reflect on the strategy, discuss its usefulness, and share thoughts.	

Activity	Teacher does/says...	Students do...	Comprehension Instruction Model
	<p><i>“Should you use only one strategy or more strategies while reading?”</i></p>		
Conclusion and Follow-Up	<p>Teacher concludes the lesson and assign follow-up activities for students</p> <p><i>“There are several strategies that we can use in comprehending reading texts. Sometimes one strategy is enough, sometimes you need to combine two or more. Sometimes they work, sometimes they don’t. You should not only think about the meaning of texts, but also the strategy that you use in understanding the texts”</i></p> <p><i>“Alright everyone, now you can practice the strategies that we have developed in your reading activities, including Summarizing. Reflect on the strategies, do they help you or not in reading other texts? How do you cope with the obstacles? Let me know in our next session.”</i></p>	<p>Students reflect on strategies, complete follow-up activities, and prepare for the next session.</p>	<p>(5) Independently use the strategy</p>

Note: Comprehension Instruction Model is based on Duke and Pearson (2002)

Not only orchestrating multiple comprehension strategies, but the procedure also coordinates a combination of instructional strategies like Groupings and Modeling. Therefore, there are some other considerations in delivering the strategy instruction, teachers should: (1) help students orchestrate multiple strategies rather than using only one at a time, (2) choose reading texts that are suitable with the strategy, (3) provide motivational factors like real-world contexts and engaging discussion through reading the texts, (4) provide a wide range of text genres across multiple disciplines, (5) practice the actual reading as much as possible, (6) monitor students’ progresses, and (7) develop writing skill as an output of literacy practices.

Conclusion

This study provides a step-by-step procedure for literacy strategy instruction, offering teachers and teacher educators clear guidance for classroom implementation. While Indonesia's literacy movement has successfully encouraged reading, it has yet to enable students to apply comprehension strategies independently. Training teachers in research-based instructional stages is critical to bridging this gap. Future research should explore instructional models tailored to younger and low-level adult learners, considering their unique needs for automatic word recognition and language comprehension. By adopting such strategies, educators can equip students with essential skills to navigate academic and real-world reading challenges effectively.

References

- Alberta Education. (2022). *Defining literacy and strategies for classroom use*. Retrieved from <https://education.alberta.ca>
- Anderson, N. J. (2009). *Active skills for reading: Book 2*. Heinle Cengage Learning.
- Chamot, A. U. (2005). The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA): An update. In P. A. Richard-Amato & M. A. Snow (Eds.), *Academic success for English language learners: Strategies for K-12 mainstream teachers* (pp. 87–111). Pearson Education.
- Colombo, M. W. (2011). *Supporting student comprehension in content area reading*. Wiley & Sons.
- Day, R. R. (2020). *Teaching reading*. TESOL Press.

- Duke, N. K., & Pearson, P. D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 205–242). International Reading Association.
- Garner, R. (1987). *Metacognition and reading comprehension*. Ablex Publishing.
- Grabe, W., & Yamashita, J. (2022). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Habók, A., & Magyar, A. (2019). The effects of explicit strategy training on EFL students' reading comprehension and metacognitive awareness. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 95, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.03.004>
- McDonough, J., Shaw, C., & Masuhara, H. (2013). *Materials and methods in ELT: A teacher's guide* (3rd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Michigan Department of Education. (2017). *Introduction to standard for the preparation of teachers of lower elementary (PK-3) education*. Michigan Department of Education.
- Nam, J. (2006). Review of language comprehension research and implications for instruction. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(3), 430–445. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.98.3.430>
- Perry, K. H. (2012). What is literacy? — A critical overview of sociocultural perspectives. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 8(1), 50–71.
- Rajaei, M., Ghonsooly, B., & Ghanizadeh, A. (2020). Collaborative versus non-collaborative approaches to teaching reading strategies: Impacts on reading comprehension and reading attitudes. *Reading Psychology*, 41(1), 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2020.1684189>
- Tovani, C. (2004). *Do I really have to teach reading? Content comprehension, grades 6-12*. Stenhouse Publishers.
- Zhang, L. J. (2018). *Metacognitive and cognitive strategy use in reading comprehension: A structural equation modelling approach*. Springer.