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Improving Students' Reading Comprehension of Recount Text Through Comic Strips of Eight Grade at Mts Maarif NU 7 Purbolinggo

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to significantly improve students' reading comprehension of recount texts through the strategic implementation of comic strip media. This investigation was primarily driven by the observed low level of reading comprehension regarding recount texts among eighth-grade students at MTs Ma'arif NU 7 Purbolinggo. To address this educational issue, the study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design conducted across two consecutive cycles, with each cycle systematically comprising four essential stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Purposive sampling was used to select the research participants. Data collection techniques included structured classroom observation, standardized reading comprehension tests, and qualitative document analysis. The empirical results clearly indicate that the integration of comic strip media positively and significantly enhanced students' reading comprehension performance. In the pre-cycle stage, the mean score was only 52.32, with a mastery rate of just 15.15% (5 students), while 84.85% (28 students) remained in the non-mastery category. Following the intervention in Cycle I, the mean score rose to 70.71, with 57.58% (19 students) reaching the high performance category and 42.42% remaining in lower categories. In Cycle II, the mean score reached an impressive 73.3 (total score of 2,419.8), with 60.61% (20 students) successfully achieving the high category and only 3.03% (1 student) remaining in the very low category. Consequently, it can be concluded that the use of comic strip media serves as a highly effective and engaging instructional tool to boost recount text reading comprehension among junior high school students.

Keywords: *Comic Strip, Reading Comprehension, Recount Text*

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential activity for acquiring various information and knowledge, most of which is presented in English. Good reading skills are fundamental for students to access academic materials, references, and digital resources available globally. Although reading is a core skill, it is a complex and challenging process. Therefore, fostering a strong reading culture among students—particularly in reading English texts—is necessary to enhance their knowledge transfer and academic capabilities (Putu Sudarmika, 2021). Reading comprehension refers to the ability to learn and understand English vocabulary, decode written text, identify main ideas, comprehend specific details, draw conclusions, and connect new information with prior knowledge. It is a flexible and selective process used by readers to construct meaning from written text. Beyond basic word recognition, reading comprehension involves discovering both explicitly stated and implied information embedded in the text, requiring active engagement and continuous practice starting from elementary education (Lasut & Klabat, 2025).

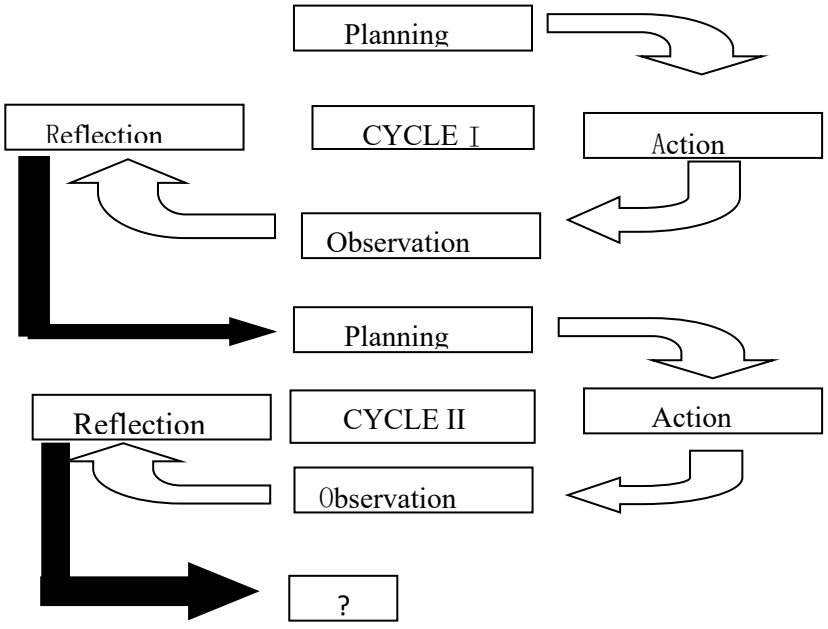
Furthermore, reading comprehension involves the reader's ability to articulate or recite the contents of argumentative, expository, or descriptive texts on specific topics (Agustina & Anum, 2021).

Ultimately, reading comprehension is a goal-oriented process aimed at understanding the full meaning of a text (Zahroh & Kirani, 2024). As highlighted by Farida in Alpian et al. (2022), the objectives of reading comprehension encompass enjoying reading, utilizing reading aloud, applying appropriate strategies, expanding subject knowledge, making connections between existing and new information, preparing written or oral reports, confirming or refuting predictions, and responding to comprehension questions. To achieve effective comprehension, readers must master three main levels: Literal comprehension: the ability to identify directly stated information; Inferential comprehension: the ability to draw conclusions from indirectly stated information; and evaluative comprehension: the ability to critically analyze text and distinguish facts from opinions.

Despite the importance of these skills, educators frequently face classroom challenges, notably differences in students' comprehension levels. Some students struggle to grasp the material taught during regular lessons, necessitating additional guidance outside class hours (Auliyannisa & Putri, 2025). To address these learning gaps, creating an engaging and creative classroom environment is essential. Emphasizing creative elements fosters positive attitudes toward English, turning learning into a fun, highly anticipated activity that motivates students to participate actively in finding and comprehending text information.

Among the various text types taught in English language education, recount text plays a significant role. A recount text retells events, activities, or experiences that occurred in the past in chronological sequence. According to Hyland, a recount text documents a series of events while allowing the narrator to express personal attitudes and feelings. Mauren further notes that recount texts can draw from personal experiences or historical events. Structurally, a recount text consists of three main parts: Orientation: The opening section that supplies essential background information, including the setting of time and place, as well as the participants and the context of the event; Sequence of Events: The core section that narrates events or activities in chronological order, interwoven with personal comments or evaluative remarks; and Re-orientation: An optional closing section that rounds off the sequence of events with concluding thoughts or summaries.

METHOD



Based on the problem formulation and objectives of Classroom Action Research (CAR), this research methodology was specifically chosen by the researcher, Umi Wahidatul Muttaqin, to enhance students' reading comprehension of recount text through the application of a visual approach using comic strips at MTs Ma'arif NU 7 Purbolinggo. In carrying out this study, the researcher plays a highly active, direct, and participatory role, starting from designing the flow of instructional actions, implementing teaching strategies within the classroom, observing student responses and learning dynamics, to conducting in-depth reflections in order to identify effective solutions for the real learning challenges faced by eighth-grade students. The primary rationale for selecting CAR is grounded in a fundamental commitment to delivering targeted, effective, and measurable instructional interventions aimed at continuously elevating the overall quality of the teaching and learning process. To enable the researcher to seamlessly monitor student progress and track the achievement of optimal learning objectives, this CAR is structured around a systematic and continuous cyclical mechanism comprising four interconnected phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

Conceptually, Classroom Action Research is a systematic form of inquiry conducted by educators directly within their own classroom environment. CAR is defined as an ongoing process of examining classroom learning problems through reflective self-assessment in an intentional effort to resolve those issues by implementing planned actions in real situation settings and systematically analyzing the influence and impact of each treatment administered. Referring to the core definitions and nature of CAR, several essential principles must be carefully considered during its execution. First, CAR is inherently a continuous and dynamic process, meaning that it represents a deliberate series of activities beginning with the recognition of a learning problem, followed by executing strategic interventions, and culminating in a critical reflection on the actions taken. Second, CAR specifically focuses on investigating and solving contextual learning issues that occur directly within the classroom. As highlighted by Syaifudin (2021), CAR thoroughly examines classroom learning problems to foster continuous self-evaluation among educators. Synthesizing these theoretical insights leads to the conclusion that classroom action research is exceptionally important for teachers and educational practitioners to undertake in order to maximize their personal potential, strengthen professional competence, and significantly boost student learning outcomes.

Furthermore, this research is categorized as classroom action research because the entire sequence of activities is designed and executed by the researcher inside the classroom through collaborative and participatory actions. The primary goal of this collaborative effort is to optimize teacher performance and instructional practices, which directly correlates with and leads to substantial improvements in student learning outcomes. At its core, CAR serves as a practical realization of teacher creativity, innovative ideas, and professional insight developed in response to what is observed and experienced daily within their teaching career. Through CAR, teachers can design richer, more interactive, and highly effective learning environments, such as implementing visual media like comic strips to help students visualize recount text narratives. Beyond individual professional development, the implementation of CAR yields broader positive benefits for overall school enhancement, as systemic educational progress occurs simultaneously through the growth of teacher competence and the academic advancement of students.

The reflective phase evaluating the actions taken in each cycle serves as the decisive milestone for determining subsequent steps in the research. The decision to either continue the research into the next cycle or conclude it at the end of a specific cycle depends entirely on the empirical results achieved during the final phase of that cycle. If the learning outcomes and reading comprehension indicators meet or exceed the predefined criteria of success established at the beginning of the study, the research intervention is deemed successful and is formally concluded. Conversely, if the intended learning targets have not yet been fully achieved, the research must proceed to the next cycle with refined and modified action plans based on the reflective findings of the preceding cycle.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted at MTs Ma'arif NU 7 Purbolinggo, involving thirty-three students of Class VIII C with the primary objective of improving their reading comprehension of recount text through the application of comic strips. The research procedures were carried out systematically through successive stages, starting from an initial diagnostic pre-test followed by two full-fledged cycles of implementation.

1. Pre-test (Initial Stage)

At this stage, the researcher administered a pre-test held on Monday, May 4, 2026. This test consisted of fifteen questions to measure students' reading comprehension of recount text, including main ideas, specific information, references, and vocabulary context. The researcher as an English teacher wanted to measure the extent to which eighth-grade students at MTs Ma'arif NU 7 Purbolinggo understood recount text before any treatment was given. Based on the preliminary test, scores were calculated to see the baseline of students' reading comprehension.

Based on the pre-test results, out of thirty-three students who took the test, the highest score was eighty-six point seven and the lowest was twenty-six point seven, resulting in a class average score of fifty-two point thirty-two. Specifically, five students were in the high category (fifteen point fifteen percent), ten students were in the low category (thirty point thirty percent), and eighteen students were in the very low category (fifty-four point fifty-five percent), while only five students met the passing grade.

This performance gap illustrated that the conventional learning approach taken had not succeeded in encouraging an even increase in reading comprehension performance, meaning a more effective strategy was needed at the next meeting to achieve better results.

2. Cycle I

The researcher conducted this study in two meetings, with a time allocation of two by thirty-five minutes for each meeting. Students improved their comprehension using comic strips as a medium. In this cycle, the researcher acted as a teacher in the classroom who observed the learning process directly by taking notes and completing observation sheets.

Planning:

The second meeting served as the treatment phase. The researcher implemented the action on Tuesday, May 5, 2026. Prior to the action, the researcher meticulously prepared the instructional instruments. This included designing a detailed lesson plan focusing on recount text, selecting appropriate recount stories adapted into engaging comic strips, developing student worksheets for reading tasks, preparing observation sheets to record classroom dynamics, and formulating Post-test 1 instruments. In this meeting, the researcher acted as the English teacher, while Mrs. Isnawati, S.Pd. served as the collaborator to monitor the teaching and learning process.

Action:

The researcher opened the session by praying, greeting the class, checking attendance, and asking about the students' well-being to build a positive rapport. Following this, the researcher delivered the core material on Recount Text. At the beginning of the teaching and learning process, the researcher assessed students' prior knowledge by asking them about recount texts. Some students had already forgotten, and only a few of them knew the definition of a recount text. To bridge this gap, the researcher introduced comic strips as a visual aid, explaining how the illustrations, character dialogues, and chronological panels correspond to the generic structure of a recount text, which includes orientation, sequence of events, and re-orientation. Students were then guided to read a short comic strip story and identify main ideas and specific information collaboratively.

Observation:

Observations were conducted collaboratively by the researcher and the classroom teacher, Ms. Isnawati, S.Pd., as the English teacher for Class VIII C. This observation was carried out intensively during the teaching process using observation sheets for both teacher and student activities. The observers noted that students showed increased curiosity and enthusiasm when viewing the comic strips compared to standard text-only lessons. However,

several students still struggled with vocabulary context and drawing inferences. At the end of the meeting, Post-test 1 was administered to evaluate student progress. Based on the evaluation of Post-test 1, out of thirty-three students who participated, the highest score reached ninety-three point three and the lowest was thirty-three point three, yielding a class average score of seventy point seventy-one. In terms of category distribution, nineteen students were in the high category (fifty-seven point fifty-eight percent), ten students were in the low category (thirty point thirty percent), three students were in the very low category (nine point nine percent), and one student reached the very high category (three point zero three percent).

Reflection: Based on the implementation of the action in Cycle 1, the researcher analyzed several evaluation points regarding student learning outcomes and classroom observation:

Strengths: Student learning achievement showed positive progress, where the majority of students reached the passing criteria with nineteen students (fifty-seven point fifty-eight percent) in the High category and one student (three point zero three percent) in the Very High category. Students demonstrated better enthusiasm and active participation during the implementation of the learning method compared to the pre-test stage.

Weaknesses:

Learning completeness was not yet fully even across the class, as ten students (thirty point thirty percent) were still in the Low category and three students (nine point nine percent) remained in the Very Low category. Students in these lower categories still struggled with reading comprehension of recount texts and needed more intensive guidance.

Conclusion and Next Action Plan:

Although overall student performance improved, the learning indicators for full classroom mastery had not been completely fulfilled in Cycle 1. Therefore, the researcher decided to continue the action to Cycle 2, conducted on Tuesday, May 12, 2026, by refining the instruction strategy, enhancing classroom management, and providing extra personalized attention to students who were still struggling.

3. Cycle II

In Cycle 2, the researcher continued to implement the action using comic strips as a medium to improve students' reading comprehension. The teaching strategy was revised based on the evaluation and reflection from Cycle 1.

Planning: The researcher prepared a revised lesson plan addressing the shortcomings identified in Cycle 1, new recount text materials integrated with more interactive comic strips, structured student worksheets, and updated observation sheets. The action for the second cycle was implemented on Tuesday, May 12, 2026. In this meeting, the researcher acted as the English teacher, while Mrs. Isnawati, S.Pd. served as the collaborator to assist in monitoring student engagement and behavior.

Action: The researcher opened the session by praying, greeting the class, checking attendance, and asking about students' well-being. Following this, the researcher reviewed the previous material and explained recount texts more deeply using comic strips, focusing specifically on how to extract main ideas and find specific vocabulary context from visual panels. To solve the problems found in Cycle 1, the researcher gave clearer instructions, managed the class more strictly, and provided intensive, direct guidance to the students who still had difficulties in comprehending the text during group work.

Observation:

Observations were conducted collaboratively by the researcher and the classroom teacher, Ms. Isnawati, S.Pd., as the English teacher for Class VIII C. During this phase, the observer noted that the students were significantly more active, enthusiastic, and focused. The classroom atmosphere was more conducive, and the students showed a much better understanding when reading the recount texts through comic strips. At the end of the session, Post-test 2 was administered. Based on the evaluation of Post-test 2, out of thirty-three students who took the test, the highest score was ninety-three point three and the lowest was fifty-three point three, elevating the class average score to seventy-three point three. The distribution of student performance showed that twenty students were in the high category (sixty point sixty-

one percent), six students were in the low category (eighteen point eighteen percent), one student was in the very low category (three point zero three percent), and six students reached the very high category (eighteen point eighteen percent).

Reflection:

Based on the research findings in Cycle 2, the implementation of the revised learning strategy demonstrated a notable improvement in students' achievement. A total of twenty-six out of thirty-three students, representing seventy-eight point seventy-nine percent, achieved the target mastery level, which comprised twenty students (sixty point sixty-one percent) in the High category and six students (eighteen point eighteen percent) in the Very High category. Since the percentage of classical completeness reached seventy-eight point seventy-nine percent, which successfully exceeded the minimum indicator of success of seventy-five percent, this Classroom Action Research was considered successful and officially concluded at Cycle 2 without the need for a further cycle. Meanwhile, for the remaining seven students (twenty-one point twenty-one percent) who were still categorized in the Low (six students) and Very Low (one student) categories, their persistent difficulties were caused by individual learning constraints. As a pedagogical responsibility, these students will be supported through personalized guidance and remedial instruction outside of the formal research cycles.

DISCUSSION

The progressive empirical findings gathered from the preliminary diagnostic assessment through the final cycle provide compelling evidence regarding the effectiveness of comic strips as a pedagogical medium for enhancing students' reading comprehension of recount texts. In the initial condition, the students encountered immense difficulties because conventional teaching methods often failed to bridge abstract textual information with their cognitive processing. Reading recount texts requires learners to decode past tense markers, follow chronological timelines, and understand structural components such as orientation, events, and re-orientation. Without engaging visual scaffolds, students struggled to maintain focus or construct meaningful interpretations of the text.

The introduction of comic strips during the first cycle served as a crucial turning point. Visual narratives provide dual-coding benefits, where images and text work synergistically to facilitate vocabulary acquisition and contextual understanding. Students were able to leverage visual cues to interpret character actions, settings, and plots, which directly translated into higher enthusiasm and improved cognitive performance. However, because reading comprehension is a complex multifaceted skill requiring higher-order cognitive processing—ranging from literal identification to inferential and evaluative understanding—some students still required supplementary scaffolding to overcome deep-seated learning gaps.

The subsequent success achieved in the second cycle underscores the vital importance of instructional adaptation and targeted intervention in classroom action research. By incorporating structured individual tasks and delivering intensive personal coaching to struggling learners, the cognitive barriers holding back low-achieving students were effectively dismantled. The harmonious integration of engaging illustrations and guided practice transformed a challenging literacy task into an enjoyable and accessible learning experience. Ultimately, the comprehensive outcomes validate that integrating comic strips successfully resolves students' reading comprehension challenges, fosters a positive reading culture, and optimizes overall instructional quality within the junior high school classroom environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the empirical results, systematic observation, qualitative reflections, and quantitative data analysis collected across the research cycles at MTs Ma'arif NU 7 Purbolinggo, this Classroom Action Research successfully investigated the implementation of a visual approach, specifically utilizing comic strips, to enhance eighth-grade students' reading comprehension of recount texts. The comprehensive synthesis of the research process leads to several fundamental conclusions regarding pedagogical efficacy, student achievement, classroom dynamics, and the value of action research.

The integration of comic strips as a visual learning media proved to be highly effective in facilitating students' understanding of recount texts. Prior to the intervention, students experienced significant cognitive hurdles in comprehending recount texts, primarily due to abstract textual structures, unfamiliar past-tense vocabulary, complex chronological sequences, and low reading motivation. The multi-modal nature of comic strips, combining sequential visual illustrations with concise textual dialogue and narrative captions, served as an effective instructional bridge. The visual cues enabled students to contextualize unfamiliar vocabulary, infer character actions, and track chronological event sequences with greater ease and accuracy. Consequently, the visual approach transformed reading from a passive decoding process into an interactive, visual-verbal meaning-making activity.

The quantitative findings from the reading comprehension assessments clearly demonstrate significant academic growth across the research cycles. In the baseline diagnostic assessment, a substantial portion of the students failed to achieve the minimum mastery criterion. However, following the strategic implementation of comic strips in the first cycle, student test scores exhibited a noticeable upward trajectory as learners became familiar with connecting visual narratives to written recount structures. In the subsequent cycle, following targeted instructional adjustments based on previous reflections, student performance improved substantially, with the vast majority of students exceeding the established success criteria. This quantitative progression confirms that the systematic application of visual media directly correlates with elevated reading comprehension outcomes.

Beyond quantitative score improvements, the qualitative data collected through structured observation sheets and field notes revealed a profound positive transformation in classroom atmosphere and student learning behaviors. Before the intervention, reading sessions were often characterized by student hesitation, reliance on word-for-word translation, and passive involvement. Following the implementation of comic strips, students demonstrated heightened enthusiasm, increased focus during reading tasks, active participation in collaborative group activities, and greater confidence when answering comprehension questions. The interactive visual format effectively lowered affective barriers such as learning anxiety and boredom, fostering a stimulating and supportive learning environment.

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