

Analysis of Learning Needs in Reading Descriptive Texts for VII Grade Junior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is an essential skill that students must possess to support the development of language skills, critical thinking, and academic success. However, the ability to comprehend descriptive texts among junior high school students remains relatively low because reading instruction tends to focus on literal comprehension and does not yet fully incorporate critical thinking activities. This study aims to analyze the needs of students and teachers in improving the comprehension of descriptive texts in seventh-grade junior high school. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, involving Indonesian language teachers and seventh-grade students at several junior high schools as research subjects. Data collection techniques were conducted through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data were analyzed descriptively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the teaching of descriptive texts is still dominated by conventional, teacher-centered methods, resulting in students being less active in the learning process. Students generally understand explicit information but still struggle to grasp implied meanings, draw conclusions, and connect text content to real-life contexts. Additionally, the use of diverse learning media and reading strategies remains limited, making instruction less engaging and less contextual. Teachers require more innovative teaching strategies, professional development, and learning media that support active student engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill that every student must possess as a foundation for language development and the learning process in general. Reading ability involves more than merely recognizing letters, words, or sentences; it also entails complex cognitive processes in understanding, interpreting, and constructing the overall meaning of a text. According to Michael Pressley and Peter Afflerbach, reading comprehension is an active process that involves thinking strategies to derive meaning from a text. Thus, reading ability plays a vital role in supporting students' intellectual development, critical thinking skills, and academic success.

In Indonesian language instruction at the Junior High School (SMP) level, the ability to comprehend texts is one of the core competencies students must master. One type of text studied is the descriptive text. A descriptive text aims to depict an object, place, atmosphere, or event in detail so that readers can visualize the described object as if they were seeing, hearing, or experiencing it directly. Therefore, understanding descriptive texts requires students not only to identify explicit information but also to grasp the details, meaning, and relationships between text components comprehensively.

Learning to read descriptive texts plays a crucial role in developing students' ability to comprehend information in a detailed, systematic, and contextual manner. In the process of reading descriptive texts, students are expected to identify the main ideas, understand the text's structure, recognize the use of descriptive language, and draw conclusions based on the information presented. These skills are essential for supporting students' literacy, particularly in meeting the demands of 21st-century learning, which emphasizes critical, analytical, and reflective thinking.

According to David Rumelhart and James McClelland, the reading process is not merely about recognizing words in a text but is an active process of constructing meaning through the relationship between the information in the text and the reader's prior knowledge. This indicates that reading comprehension involves complex cognitive activities because students must be able to connect the content of the text with their own experiences, knowledge, and life contexts. Thus, reading instruction should not only focus on the ability to find answers within the text but also help students understand and interpret the text's content deeply.

Reading ability is one of the key skills that supports students' academic success across various subjects. Students with strong reading skills tend to find it easier to understand learning materials, analyze information, and develop critical and systematic thinking. Research by Sultan et al. (2020) states that reading ability enables students to understand, analyze, and evaluate information from various learning sources. Therefore, mastering reading skills, particularly in understanding descriptive texts, is a crucial aspect that must be developed in junior high school students.

However, in actual classroom practice, students' reading comprehension skills remain relatively low. Many students struggle to deeply understand the content of descriptive texts. Some students are only able to identify explicit

information but are not yet able to grasp implied meanings, draw conclusions, or connect the text's content to real-life contexts. This situation indicates that students' inferential and evaluative reading skills have not yet developed optimally.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding descriptive texts actually requires higher-order thinking skills, such as the ability to identify key information, understand relationships between ideas, interpret meaning, and evaluating the content of the text. Research by Puspita et al. (2023) explains that understanding descriptive texts demands deeper analytical and interpretive skills compared to merely grasping surface-level information. However, in reality, many junior high school students still struggle to understand descriptive texts because the reading instruction currently in place does not fully support the development of students' critical thinking skills.

Students' low reading comprehension is influenced by various factors, both on the part of students and teachers. One factor frequently identified is the use of teaching methods that lack variety and remain oriented toward conventional learning. During the learning process, teachers tend to rely on lectures, text reading, and assigning tasks to answer questions without actively involving students in the process of understanding the text. This type of instruction causes students to become passive and leaves them with few opportunities to develop critical thinking skills in reading.

Based on initial observations at the school, instruction in reading descriptive texts still focuses primarily on the ability to understand literal information, such as identifying main ideas and answering factual questions. Learning activities that guide students to interpret, analyze, and evaluate the text's content remain very limited. As a result, students tend to skim read without deeply understanding the text's content. Some students also struggle with understanding new vocabulary, drawing conclusions, and paraphrasing the text in their own words.

Additionally, students' low reading interest is a factor affecting their reading comprehension skills. Many students view reading as a boring activity, especially when the texts used are too long and irrelevant to their lives. The limited use of learning resources, which is still confined to textbooks, makes reading instruction less engaging and less contextual. In fact, the use of varied learning media and texts that are relevant to students' lives can help increase their motivation and engagement in reading.

Research by Safitri et al. (2024) indicates that teaching methods that do not actively engage students result in students struggling to deeply comprehend the content of what they read. Students merely skim the text without being able to identify key information, understand text structure, or draw conclusions based on the reading. These findings suggest that the reading instruction process still requires innovation to enable students to be more active and engaged in understanding texts.

In addition to student factors, teachers' limitations in developing reading instruction strategies also contribute to students' low reading proficiency. Research by Sultan et al. (2020) reveals that many students with low reading proficiency struggle to comprehend textbooks that are too difficult in terms of readability. This issue is further exacerbated when students have low reading interest and instruction does not utilize reading strategies tailored to their needs.

Research by Wahyudi, Ristanti, and Suwandi (2022) emphasizes that Indonesian language teachers need to integrate reading instruction with the DRTA strategy by fostering critical thinking, analyzing information, and making in-depth interpretations of texts. However, the implementation of learning using these strategies in reading instruction remains suboptimal in many schools due to limitations in the strategies, media, and training available to teachers.

Additionally, research by Juhanaini et al. (2025) indicates that reading learning strategies such as DRTA are effective in enhancing student engagement and reading comprehension. These strategies help students actively connect prior knowledge with new information, making the reading process more meaningful. These findings suggest that the use of appropriate learning strategies can be a solution to improve the quality of reading instruction for descriptive texts in junior high schools.

Teachers also require support in the form of ongoing training to improve the quality of reading instruction. Nugraha and Setiawan (2020) state that teachers who receive regular training tend to be able to implement more innovative learning strategies that align with students' needs. Without continuous professional development, teachers are likely to rely on outdated teaching methods that are less effective in improving students' reading skills.

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that reading instruction for descriptive texts in junior high school still faces various challenges, including issues related to learning strategies, student engagement, instructional media, and teachers' competencies in developing effective reading instruction. Therefore, an analysis of student and teacher needs is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the current state of reading instruction for descriptive texts in seventh-grade junior high school classrooms.

This study aims to analyze the needs of students and teachers in improving reading comprehension of descriptive texts in seventh-grade junior high school. Through this needs analysis, it is hoped that accurate and in-depth information can be obtained as a basis for developing more effective, innovative, and contextual reading learning strategies in line with real-world needs in the field. Additionally, this study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Indonesian language education, particularly in improving students' comprehension of descriptive texts in junior high school.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the needs of students and teachers in improving comprehension of descriptive texts in seventh-grade junior high school. This approach was used to gain an in-depth

understanding of the learning process for reading descriptive texts, the challenges faced, and the learning needs of students and teachers.

The study was conducted in several junior high schools, with the research subjects being Indonesian language teachers and seventh-grade students. The research focused on the learning of descriptive texts, particularly regarding the ability to comprehend text content, the use of learning strategies, student engagement in the learning process, and the use of learning media and resources.

Data collection techniques included interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with teachers and students to gather information regarding their experiences, challenges, and needs in learning to read descriptive texts. Observations were conducted directly during classroom learning activities to observe teacher-student interactions and the learning methods used. Documentation was used to supplement data in the form of learning tools, teaching materials, and student assignments related to learning to read descriptive texts.

The research data was analyzed using qualitative descriptive methods through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The analysis was conducted by identifying the needs and challenges faced by students and teachers in learning to read descriptive texts. Through this analysis, this study is expected to provide an overview of effective, contextual learning strategies that align with the needs of reading instruction in junior high school.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results indicate that the teaching of descriptive text reading in 7th-grade junior high school classes still faces various obstacles that affect students' reading comprehension skills. Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, it was found that the reading instruction process taking place in the classroom has not yet fully developed students' critical thinking skills and deep understanding of the text. Reading instruction remains more focused on the ability to understand literal information rather than inferential and evaluative skills.

In the learning process, teachers have used descriptive texts in accordance with the curriculum materials. Teachers have also provided explanations regarding text structure, linguistic features, and the content of the readings studied by students. However, the learning activities conducted are still dominated by reading texts, answering questions based on the content of the reading, identifying the main idea, and finding information directly written in the text. These activities indicate that reading instruction places greater emphasis on the ability to understand explicit information rather than the ability to interpret

Observation results show that most students are able to find basic information in descriptive texts, such as the objects being described, the characteristics of the objects, and factual information contained in the reading material. However, students still face difficulties when asked to explain implied meanings, connect the text's content to daily experiences, or draw conclusions

based on the overall content of the reading material. This situation indicates that students' reading skills are still relatively low.

Additionally, students also struggle to understand descriptive texts that contain fairly complex vocabulary and relatively lengthy passages. Some students skim the text without fully grasping its content. When teachers pose questions requiring reasoning or interpretation, students tend to provide brief and superficial answers. This indicates that the reading process students engage in remains superficial and does not yet optimally involve critical thinking activities.

Based on interviews with students, it was found that most students view learning to read descriptive texts as a monotonous and boring activity. Students reported that learning is more often conducted by reading texts from textbooks and then answering the provided questions. This approach results in students having little interest in exploring the text's content more deeply. Some students also expressed a preference for learning activities that incorporate images, videos, group discussions, educational games, or other interactive learning media.

From the teachers' perspective, the interviews revealed that they face several challenges in implementing descriptive text reading instruction. Teachers noted that students' varying reading abilities pose a challenge in determining appropriate instructional strategies. Some students possess a fairly good ability to comprehend texts, while others still struggle to understand even simple texts. These ability differences lead teachers to more frequently use general teaching methods believed to reach all students, even though these methods are not fully effective in enhancing deep reading skills.

Teachers also acknowledged that reading instruction still tends to rely on conventional methods such as lectures, assignments, and simple question-and-answer sessions. The use of reading instruction strategies that actively engage students remains limited. This is due to time constraints, the volume of material that must be covered, and the limited training teachers have received regarding critical thinking-based reading instruction strategies.

Based on classroom observations, teachers appear to dominate the learning process. Teachers explain the content, after which students are asked to read and answer questions found in the textbook. Learning interactions are one-sided, causing students to remain passive during lessons. In some situations, only certain students actively ask questions or express opinions, while the majority wait for instructions from the teacher.

These conditions indicate that the teaching of descriptive texts remains teacher-centered (teacher-centered learning). In fact, effective reading instruction should provide students with opportunities to actively construct understanding through discussion, interpretation, and reflective thinking activities. Instruction that is overly teacher-centered results in students being under-trained in developing analytical and evaluative skills regarding the content of the text.

In addition to instructional strategies, limitations in media and learning resources also contribute to students' low reading comprehension. Based on documentation and observations, reading instruction primarily relies on

textbooks as the main learning resource. Teachers have not optimally utilized digital media, authentic texts, contextual images, or other reading materials. Consequently, instruction becomes less varied and fails to effectively capture students' attention.

The selection of reading texts also affects students' motivation to read. Some of the texts used in instruction are considered too distant from students' life experiences, making it difficult for them to understand the context of the reading material. In reading instruction, the use of texts relevant to daily life is crucial because it helps students establish connections between the information in the text and their own experiences. When students are able to connect the text content with their real-life experiences, the reading comprehension process becomes easier and more meaningful.

The findings of this study align with the views of David Rumelhart and James McClelland, who state that reading is an active process of constructing meaning through the relationship between information in the text and the reader's prior knowledge. In this study, students were not yet fully able to connect the text's content with their prior knowledge because instruction still emphasized finding answers based on the text rather than the process of interpreting meaning.

These findings also support the views of Michael Pressley and Peter Afflerbach that reading comprehension is a complex process involving thinking skills, interpretation, and reading comprehension strategies. In the instructional practices observed in this study, the reading strategies used by teachers did not yet fully encourage students to think critically and active thinking while reading.

Furthermore, the results indicate that teachers require more innovative teaching strategies to enhance student engagement in reading descriptive texts. Teachers need an instructional approach that helps students understand texts more deeply, actively, and contextually. One strategy deemed appropriate is a prediction- and reflection-based reading strategy such as Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA). This strategy can help students connect prior knowledge with new information, making the reading process more active and meaningful.

Teachers also require support in the form of training and professional development related to reading instruction based on critical thinking skills. Based on interview results, some teachers still face difficulties in formulating questions that can encourage students to think critically and analyze the content of the text. Therefore, enhancing teachers' competencies is a crucial component of efforts to improve the quality of reading instruction in schools.

From the students' perspective, the primary need identified is for reading instruction that is more engaging, interactive, and contextual. Students require more varied learning materials as well as reading activities that do not solely focus on answering written questions. Reading instruction that involves group discussions, the use of digital media, educational games, or texts relevant to students' lives is considered capable of increasing student motivation and engagement in reading.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the research findings indicate that the needs of students and teachers in improving comprehension of descriptive texts are not limited to instructional materials but also encompass learning strategies, instructional media, teacher competencies, and students' active engagement in the reading process. Reading instruction that remains focused on literal comprehension prevents students' critical thinking skills from developing optimally. Therefore, more interactive, contextual, and student-centered instructional innovations are needed to effectively and sustainably improve the reading comprehension skills of seventh-grade junior high school students.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Overall, the findings demonstrate that improving seventh-grade students' comprehension of descriptive texts requires a comprehensive instructional approach that extends beyond the provision of learning materials to include effective pedagogical strategies, interactive learning media, teacher professional competence, and active student participation. The persistence of teacher-centered instruction and an emphasis on literal comprehension continue to constrain the development of higher-order reading skills, particularly critical analysis and interpretive understanding. Future research should therefore investigate the effectiveness of technology-enhanced, student-centered, and inquiry-based reading interventions through longitudinal and experimental designs across diverse educational contexts. Such studies are expected to identify sustainable instructional models that not only improve descriptive text comprehension but also foster critical literacy, learner autonomy, and broader reading achievement.

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