

Improving Students' Reading Comprehension through the Use of Pre-Reading Tasks at the Eight Grade of SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i3.2366>

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A B S T R A C T

Reading comprehension is a key component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as it supports vocabulary development, critical thinking, and academic achievement. Although theory highlights the importance of activating students' prior knowledge before reading, classroom instruction often begins directly with the text, creating a gap between pedagogical principles and actual practice. This mismatch may contribute to students' limited understanding and low engagement in reading activities. This study aimed to determine the effect of pre-reading tasks on the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga. A quasi-experimental design was employed, involving 49 students, with 25 students in the experimental group and 24 students in the control group. The experimental group was taught using specific pre-reading activities, including brainstorming, skimming, and vocabulary preview, while the control group received conventional instruction. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test instruments and analyzed statistically. The findings revealed that students exposed to pre-reading tasks achieved significantly better results than those in the control group. It can be concluded that pre-reading activities effectively enhance students' reading comprehension.

Keywords: *Pre-Reading Tasks, Reading Comprehension, Quasi-Experimental Study, EFL Learners, Junior High School*

Article History:

Received 10th April 2026

Accepted 05th May 2026

Published 10th May 2026



INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is widely recognized as a fundamental component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as it plays a crucial role in developing learners' linguistic competence and academic success (Alyousef, 2006; Grabe, 2009). Through reading, learners are exposed to various linguistic structures, vocabulary, and ideas that contribute to their cognitive development. In secondary education, reading is not only considered a language skill but also a key tool for acquiring knowledge across subjects (Koda, 2005; Snow, 2002). Therefore, the ability to comprehend texts effectively is essential for students' academic achievement.

From a theoretical perspective, reading is no longer viewed as a passive decoding process but as an active and interactive construction of meaning. This perspective is strongly supported by Schema Theory, which posits that comprehension occurs when readers relate new information from the text to their existing background knowledge or "schemas" (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Rumelhart, 1980). According to this theory, readers interpret texts by activating relevant mental frameworks that help them predict, organize, and understand incoming information. Without the activation of appropriate schemas, comprehension may be limited or even unsuccessful. Therefore, readers are required to integrate textual information with their prior knowledge in order to construct meaning effectively (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). This process involves not only linguistic competence but also cognitive and metacognitive

Improving Students' Reading Comprehension through the Use of Pre-Reading Tasks at the Eight Grade of SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga strategies that help learners monitor and regulate their comprehension (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990).

Despite these theoretical developments, classroom practices in many EFL contexts still rely on traditional methods. Teachers often begin reading lessons by asking students to read texts directly, followed by vocabulary explanation and comprehension questions (Harmer, 2007). Such practices may neglect the importance of preparing students cognitively before reading. As a result, students tend to focus on translating individual words rather than understanding the overall meaning, which leads to low engagement and limited comprehension (Alyousef, 2006; Nation, 2009).

The gap between theory and practice is also evident in the Indonesian educational context, where current curriculum frameworks emphasize student-centered learning and literacy development. However, the success of these frameworks depends largely on the instructional strategies applied by teachers. Without appropriate scaffolding, students may encounter difficulties in comprehending texts and achieving the expected learning outcomes.

One effective instructional strategy that aligns with interactive reading theory and Schema Theory is the use of pre-reading tasks (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 2003). Pre-reading activities include brainstorming, predicting content, discussing guiding questions, and previewing vocabulary. These activities aim to activate students' background knowledge and prepare them cognitively before engaging with the text (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). By activating prior knowledge, students are better able to connect new information with existing mental frameworks, which facilitates comprehension.

In addition, reading comprehension is influenced by students' ability to apply appropriate reading strategies. Pressley (2006) states that effective readers actively use strategies such as predicting, questioning, and summarizing. Similarly, Afflerbach et al., (2008) emphasize that reading strategies involve conscious efforts to improve comprehension. Therefore, integrating strategy-based instruction is essential, and pre-reading tasks can serve as an initial step in guiding students to apply these strategies effectively. Furthermore, pre-reading tasks help reduce students' anxiety and increase motivation (Goodman, 1976; Krashen, 1982). When students are familiar with the topic and key vocabulary, they tend to feel more confident and engaged in the reading process. In addition, pre-reading activities encourage students to become strategic readers who actively interact with texts.

Previous studies have shown that pre-reading strategies have a positive impact on reading comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Smith, 2004). However, the effectiveness of these strategies may vary depending on the context. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research in specific educational settings. Based on preliminary observations at SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga, students still experience difficulties in reading comprehension. They tend to rely on word-by-word translation and show limited ability to interpret texts. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of pre-reading tasks on students' reading comprehension achievement.

METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to examine the effect of pre-reading tasks on students' reading comprehension. The study involved two groups: an experimental group and a control group, both of which were administered a pre-test and a post-test. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga during the academic year 2025/2026. The sample consisted of 49 eighth-grade students from two intact classes. One class was assigned as the experimental group, while the other served as the control group. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling based on students' similar English proficiency levels.

The experimental group was taught using pre-reading tasks, while the control group received conventional instruction. The treatment was conducted over six meetings, with each meeting lasting approximately 80 minutes. In the experimental

group, the teaching procedure consisted of three main stages: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. During the pre-reading stage, students were engaged in activities designed to activate their background knowledge and prepare them for the text. These activities included brainstorming related to the topic, predicting the content based on titles or pictures, discussing guiding questions, and previewing key vocabulary. In the while-reading stage, students read the text and completed comprehension tasks such as identifying main ideas, supporting details, vocabulary in context, and making inferences. In the post-reading stage, students discussed their answers, summarized the text, and reflected on the reading content with the teacher's guidance.

In contrast, the control group was taught using a conventional method commonly applied in the school. The teacher began the lesson by introducing the topic briefly and asking students to read the text directly without any structured pre-reading activities. After reading, the teacher explained difficult vocabulary and asked students to answer comprehension questions individually. The lesson concluded with checking the answers and providing feedback. This approach primarily emphasized translation and question-answer activities, with limited activation of students' prior knowledge.

The instrument used in this study was a reading comprehension test in the form of multiple-choice questions, designed to measure students' ability to identify main ideas, supporting details, vocabulary in context, and inferences. The instrument was validated through expert judgment to ensure its content validity. The data collection technique involved administering a pre-test and a post-test to both groups. The data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test to determine whether there was a significant difference between the two groups.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the analysis showed that the implementation of pre-reading tasks as a teaching strategy in reading instruction contributed to the improvement of students' reading comprehension. The comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores demonstrated that the use of pre-reading tasks helped eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga better understand and interpret English texts.

Findings

This section presents the results of the data analysis from the pre-test and post-test administered to the experimental and control classes. The data are presented in tables and explained to show the effectiveness of pre-reading tasks in improving students' reading comprehension. The pre-test was conducted to determine the students' initial level of reading comprehension before the treatment was implemented. The results of the pre-test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-test Scores of Experimental and Control Classes

Class	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	25	56.60	7.95
Control	24	55.62	7.70

Based on Table 1, the mean score of the experimental class in the pre-test was 56.60, while the control class obtained a mean score of 55.62. These results indicate that both groups had relatively similar levels of reading comprehension before the treatment was implemented. After the treatment was conducted, a post-test was

administered to both groups to measure the students' reading comprehension after the learning process. The results of the post-test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Post-test Scores of Experimental and Control Classes

Class	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	25	78.40	8.30
Control	24	64.58	7.85

Table 2 shows that the mean score of the experimental class increased to 78.40, whereas the control class obtained a mean score of 64.58. This result indicates that the students in the experimental class achieved higher improvement compared to those in the control class after receiving instruction through pre-reading tasks.

To further examine the improvement in students' reading comprehension, the researcher compared the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test for both groups. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean Improvement of Both Classes

Class	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Improvement
Experimental	56.60	78.40	21.80
Control	55.62	64.58	8.96

Table 3 shows that the experimental class improved by 21.80 points, while the control class improved by 8.96 points. The greater improvement in the experimental class indicates that the implementation of pre-reading tasks contributed to enhancing students' reading comprehension. To determine whether the difference between the two groups was statistically significant, an independent sample t-test was conducted. The result of the statistical analysis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent Samples t-test of Post-test Scores

Variable	t-value	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Post-test	5.98	47	0.000

The independent sample t-test analysis showed that the significance value was 0.000, which is lower than the significance level of 0.05. This indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control classes. Therefore, the use of pre-reading tasks was effective in improving students' reading comprehension.

Discussion

In comparison with previous studies, the findings of this research strongly support existing evidence on the effectiveness of pre-reading tasks in enhancing reading comprehension. The significant improvement observed in the experimental group is consistent with the studies conducted by Duke & Pearson (2002) and Alyousef (2006), which reported that activating prior knowledge before reading facilitates deeper comprehension. Furthermore, the results align with Carrell & Eisterhold (1983), whose Schema Theory emphasizes the importance of background knowledge in interpreting textual information. The effectiveness of activities such as brainstorming, predicting, and vocabulary previewing in the present study reflects the practical application of this theoretical framework. In addition, the findings are in agreement with Harmer (2007), who argues that pre-reading activities prepare learners cognitively and emotionally for reading tasks.

While the findings are largely consistent with previous research, this study extends the existing literature by providing empirical evidence within the Indonesian junior high school context, specifically at SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga. Unlike some earlier studies conducted in different educational settings, this research demonstrates that the positive impact of pre-reading tasks is also evident among EFL learners with relatively limited English proficiency. No contradictions with prior research were identified; instead, the present study reinforces and contextualizes the established understanding of the role of pre-reading activities in reading instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the effect of pre-reading tasks on students' reading comprehension at the eighth grade of SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of pre-reading tasks significantly improved students' reading comprehension. The experimental group, which received structured pre-reading activities, achieved higher post-test scores compared to the control group that was taught using conventional methods. The statistical analysis also confirmed that the difference between the two groups was significant ($p < 0.05$). The findings of this study highlight the importance of activating students' prior knowledge before engaging in reading activities. Pre-reading tasks help students connect new information with their existing knowledge, thereby facilitating better understanding of the text. In addition, these activities enhance students' motivation, engagement, and confidence during the reading process. Furthermore, pre-reading tasks can be considered an effective form of instructional scaffolding that supports students in developing reading strategies. By guiding students to predict, discuss, and explore the topic before reading, teachers can help students become more active and independent readers. This not only improves immediate comprehension but also contributes to the long-term development of reading skills. In conclusion, pre-reading tasks are an effective and practical instructional strategy for improving students' reading comprehension in EFL classrooms. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers allocate approximately 10–15 minutes at the beginning of each reading lesson for schema-building activities such as brainstorming, predicting the content, and previewing key vocabulary. These structured pre-reading activities can help students become more prepared and engaged before reading the main text. Future researchers are also encouraged to explore the application of pre-reading strategies in different contexts and with different levels of learners to further validate and extend the findings of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the supervisors for their valuable guidance and support throughout this research. Appreciation is also extended to the English teacher of SMP Negeri 1 Mepanga and all participating students for their cooperation during the research process.

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