

# Improving Students' Reading Comprehension in Descriptive Text Through Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) Strategy

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine whether and how the implementation of Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy was accompanied by an improvement in seventh-grade students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts, particularly in identifying the main idea and understanding vocabulary meaning. This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on Burns' (2010) cyclical model consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection, conducted in two cycles. The participants were 32 seventh-grade students of class 7E at SMP Negeri 19 Kota Pontianak in the academic year 2025/2026. Data were collected through field notes and reading comprehension tests consisting of 20 multiple-choice items, with 10 items measuring main idea and 10 items measuring vocabulary meaning. The improvement was observed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Qualitatively, students showed greater participation during the DRTA process. In Cycle 2, students were more involved in making predictions, reading the text, discussing ideas with group members, and confirming their predictions using information from the text. Students also showed better focus during reading activities and greater willingness to respond to the teacher's questions. These changes indicate that the DRTA process provided opportunities for students to participate actively in constructing and checking their understanding of descriptive texts. While quantitative data were analyzed by calculating the students' mean scores and the percentage of students attaining the minimum mastery criterion (KKM). The findings showed improvement in both students' classroom participation and reading comprehension outcomes. In Cycle 1, students' mean score was 72.26, with 18 of 31 students (58.06%) attaining the KKM of 75. After reflection on Cycle 1, several instructional adjustments were made in Cycle 2, including pre-assigned group formation, additional scaffolding during the predicting stage, closer monitoring, and the use of digital presentation. In Cycle 2, the mean score increased to 81.94, representing an increase of 9.68 points, while 24 of 31 students (77.42%) attained the KKM. The findings indicate that the implementation of DRTA, together with instructional adjustments based on reflection, was accompanied by improvement in students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts, particularly in identifying the main idea and understanding vocabulary meaning.

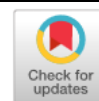
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## INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the essential skills in English language learning because it enables students to obtain, understand, and interpret information from written texts. Reading comprehension is not merely the ability to recognize written words but also involves understanding the meaning conveyed through words, sentences, and paragraphs. Comprehension involves general skills that enable readers to acquire knowledge and understand information through reading activities (Bormuth, 1969). Similarly, reading comprehension requires readers to connect the meanings of words, sentences, and paragraphs to construct an overall understanding of a text (Kurniadi et al., 2020). It is also considered a complex process in which readers actively construct meaning from written materials (Bruggink et al., 2022). Therefore, reading instruction for junior high school students needs to develop not only their ability to read texts but also their ability to understand and interpret the information contained in them.

One type of text encountered by seventh-grade students is descriptive text, which provides opportunities to understand detailed information about familiar people, places, and things. Topics such as rooms, homes, and objects in students' surroundings can provide meaningful contexts for developing reading comprehension. Descriptive text aims to provide readers with a clear picture of a person, subject, or setting through detailed information about its characteristics, qualities, appearance, or condition (Pratiwi et al., 2020). When learning descriptive texts, students are expected to identify the main idea, recognize specific information, and understand vocabulary in context. Vocabulary knowledge is particularly important because students need to understand individual words to interpret the overall meaning of a text. The importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension has been emphasized by Anjomshoa & Zamanian (2014), while Klingner et al. (2007) explain that students' understanding of texts is influenced by their vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, developing students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts requires instructional strategies that help them identify important information and understand word meanings within the context of the text.

The importance of these reading comprehension skills was also evident in the research setting. Based on preliminary observations and an interview with the English teacher at SMP Negeri 19 Kota Pontianak, seventh-grade students experienced difficulties in reading comprehension, particularly in identifying the main idea and understanding vocabulary meaning in descriptive texts. Although students were generally able to read a text until the end, they had difficulty identifying the main idea of each paragraph. They also tended to focus on individual words or sentences without fully understanding the relationships among sentences within a paragraph. In terms of vocabulary, students struggled to determine word meanings based on the context of the text. According to the English teacher, only 5 out of 32 students were able to identify the main idea and understand vocabulary meaning in context, while the remaining 27 students (84.4%) continued to experience difficulties in these areas. These findings indicate that the primary problem was not simply students' ability to recognize written words but their ability to construct meaning from descriptive texts as a whole.

Considering these classroom problems, the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy was selected as an instructional approach to improve students' reading comprehension. DRTA encourages students to become active readers by making predictions, reading to verify those predictions, and confirming or revising their understanding based on textual evidence. The strategy encourages students to make predictions based on visual information and their prior knowledge (Fatih, 2019). Furthermore, DRTA consists of three basic stages: predicting, reading, and confirming or proving predictions (Safitri et al., 2022). In the predicting stage, students activate their prior knowledge and anticipate the content of the text. In the reading stage, they examine the text to determine whether their predictions are supported by the information presented. In the confirming stage, students evaluate their predictions and justify their understanding using evidence from the text. Through these stages, students are encouraged to interact actively with the text rather than simply read it and answer comprehension questions.

The relevance of DRTA to reading comprehension can also be explained through schema theory. Reading comprehension involves an interaction between the text and the reader's background knowledge, which provides a framework for predicting, organizing, and interpreting new information (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). In DRTA, the predicting stage allows students to activate their existing knowledge before reading, while the reading and confirming stages help them evaluate their initial expectations against textual evidence. This process is relevant to the present study because students' difficulties in identifying the main idea indicate a need to understand the overall meaning of paragraphs rather than concentrate exclusively on individual words. By encouraging students to predict, examine textual information, and verify their understanding, DRTA may help them recognize important information and interpret vocabulary according to its context. Reading comprehension itself is an active process in which readers interact with texts to construct meaning

*Improving Students' Reading Comprehension in Descriptive Text Through Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) Strategy* (Kusumarasyati, 2023). Therefore, DRTA offers an instructional process that is consistent with the active and interpretive nature of reading comprehension.

Previous studies have reported improvements in reading comprehension following the implementation of DRTA. Improvements in students' reading comprehension through the use of DRTA in narrative texts were reported by (Ahmad et al., 2023; Anaktototy & Lesnussa, 2022; Nudho, 2013). The latter study also identified improvements in students' behavior and participation during the learning process. More closely related to the present study, Hutapea et al. (2025) investigated the implementation of DRTA in descriptive texts and reported improvements in the reading comprehension of tenth-grade students. These findings provide empirical support for the potential of DRTA to facilitate reading comprehension across different text types and educational levels. However, the effectiveness of an instructional strategy may depend on the characteristics of the students, the text being studied, and the specific comprehension difficulties encountered in the classroom. Consequently, further investigation is needed to understand how DRTA can be implemented to address the reading comprehension difficulties of younger learners, particularly seventh-grade students studying descriptive texts.

Despite the positive findings of previous studies, differences remain between the existing research and the present study. Several previous studies focused on other text types, including narrative texts, whereas Hutapea et al. (2025) examined descriptive texts among tenth-grade students. The present study specifically focuses on seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Kota Pontianak and addresses two identified aspects of reading comprehension: identifying the main idea and understanding vocabulary meaning in context. In addition, the difficulties identified during the preliminary observation require a practical instructional intervention that can be evaluated and refined systematically. Classroom Action Research (CAR) was therefore considered appropriate because it enables the researcher and the English teacher to identify classroom problems, implement an instructional strategy, observe the teaching and learning process, and reflect on the results to determine necessary improvements in subsequent cycles. Through this iterative process, the implementation of DRTA can be examined in relation to changes in students' reading comprehension and the challenges encountered during instruction.

Based on the classroom problems, theoretical considerations, and findings of previous studies, the present study investigates the implementation of the Directed Reading Thinking Activity strategy to improve the reading comprehension of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Kota Pontianak in descriptive texts. The study specifically focuses on students' ability to identify the main idea and understand vocabulary meaning in context. Using Classroom Action Research, the study aims to examine how the implementation of DRTA can improve these aspects of reading comprehension through systematic planning, action, observation, and reflection. Accordingly, the research question is: How does the implementation of the Directed Reading Thinking Activity strategy improve the reading comprehension of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Kota Pontianak in descriptive texts, particularly in identifying the main idea and understanding vocabulary meaning in context?

## METHOD

This research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR). The design was selected because the research addressed practical reading comprehension problems identified in an actual classroom and required instructional improvement through repeated cycles. The research followed the CAR model developed by Burns (2010), which consists of four interconnected stages: planning, action, observing, and reflecting. Through these stages, the researcher and the English teacher could identify students' difficulties, implement the planned instructional strategy, observe the learning process, and make necessary improvements in the subsequent cycle.

## **Instruments**

Two instruments were used to collect data. Field notes recorded all off the activities or situation that occurred during the implementation Directed Reading Thinking Activity strategy. The reading comprehension test consisted of 20 multiple-choice items. Ten items measured students' ability to identify the main idea, while ten items measured their understanding of vocabulary meaning in context. The test was administered at the end of each cycle.

## **Procedures Cycle 1**

### **Planning**

In the planning stage, the researcher identified the students' reading comprehension problems and prepared the lesson plan, learning materials, field notes, and reading comprehension test. The lesson plan incorporated DRTA through group activities focusing on predicting, reading, and confirming information from descriptive texts.

### **Action**

In the action stage, the English teacher acted as the practitioner and implemented the planned DRTA activities, while the researcher acted as an observer. Students were first introduced to the title and picture related to the descriptive text and were encouraged to make predictions about the content. They then read the text to check their predictions and identified information that supported or contradicted their predictions. During the confirming stage, students discussed their predictions and justified their ideas using information from the text. Students also identified unfamiliar vocabulary and discussed its meaning with the teacher. After the group activities, students individually completed the reading comprehension test.

### **Observing**

In the observing stage, the researcher recorded the classroom situation, students' participation, and the implementation of the DRTA activities using the field notes. The observation focused particularly on students' participation during predicting, reading, and confirming activities, as well as difficulties encountered during the learning process.

### **Reflecting**

In the reflecting stage, the researcher and the teacher reviewed field notes and students' test results. Several problems were identified in Cycle 1. Some students remained passive during the predicting stage, several students did not actively contribute their predictions during group discussion, and some students had difficulty providing textual evidence when confirming their predictions. Off-task behavior and classroom management problems were also observed. Quantitatively, the mean score was 72.26, with 18 out of 31 students (58.06%) attaining the KKM of 75. These results indicated that further instructional improvement was required.

## **Procedures Cycle 2**

### **Planning**

The planning stage of Cycle 2 was based on the reflection from Cycle 1. The researcher and teacher revised the instructional plan to address the problems identified in the first cycle. Group formation was pre-assigned by the teacher and displayed through PowerPoint to reduce noise and confusion during group formation. Additional scaffolding was also incorporated into the predicting stage to guide students from identifying the general topic toward identifying the main idea. In addition, the descriptive text was presented digitally because students showed greater attention to visual materials. The teacher also planned closer monitoring during group discussions.

**Action**

In the action stage, the teacher implemented the revised DRTA activities. Students made predictions based on the title and picture, read the text to verify their predictions, identified information supporting their ideas, and discussed their findings during the confirming stage. The teacher provided additional guiding questions during predicting and monitored group discussions more closely. Students also discussed unfamiliar vocabulary with the teacher to support their understanding of the text.

**Observing**

In the observing stage, the researcher recorded students' participation and the classroom situation using field notes. Particular attention was given to whether students became more active during prediction, whether they were able to identify textual evidence, and whether the classroom activities became more orderly after the instructional adjustments.

**Reflecting**

In the reflecting stage, the researcher and teacher evaluated the results of Cycle 2. The observation showed that students became more active during predicting, responded more frequently to the teacher's questions, participated more actively in group discussions, and were better able to identify sentences supporting their predictions. The quantitative result also improved. The mean score increased to 81.94, while 24 out of 31 students (77.42%) attained the KKM of 75. Since the percentage exceeded the predetermined mastery criterion of 75%, the research was concluded after Cycle 2.

**Data analysis**

The qualitative data obtained from field notes were analyzed descriptively by examining changes in students' participation, classroom behavior, and the implementation of DRTA across the two cycles., while quantitative data from the reading test were analyzed by calculating the students' mean score and the percentage of learning mastery using the formula proposed by [Aqib \(2016\)](#). Students who were absent during a test session were excluded from the calculation, since their absence was not related to their reading ability. Following [Trianto \(2018\)](#), a class was considered to have achieved learning mastery if at least 75% of the students obtained the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) of 75, the standard passing score for English at the research site.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings are presented according to the research objective, namely to examine whether and how the implementation of Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) was accompanied by improvement in students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts, particularly in identifying the main idea and understanding vocabulary meaning. The findings combine qualitative evidence from classroom observation and field notes with quantitative evidence from students' reading comprehension tests.

**Students' Reading Comprehension in Cycle 1**

The implementation of DRTA in Cycle 1 showed that students were beginning to engage in the predicting, reading, and confirming stages, but several difficulties remained during the learning process. During the predicting stage, some students were still passive and did not respond orally to the teacher's questions. During group discussion, several students did not actively contribute their predictions to their group members. In the confirming stage, some students had difficulty identifying textual evidence to support their predictions. Some students also demonstrated off-task behavior and required additional teacher guidance.

These classroom observations were reflected in the quantitative results. Of the 31 students who completed the Cycle 1 test, the mean score was 72.26. Eighteen students (58.06%) attained the KKM of 75, while 13 students (41.94%) remained below the KKM.

The Cycle 1 findings indicate that the students had not yet achieved the expected level of reading comprehension. Their difficulties were particularly related to identifying the main idea and understanding vocabulary meaning. This finding is consistent with the theoretical framework of the study. [Kurniadi et al. \(2020\)](#) explain that reading comprehension involves connecting the meaning of words, sentences, and paragraphs comprehensively. Therefore, students who focused mainly on isolated words or sentences could experience difficulty constructing the overall meaning of a paragraph. In addition, [Anjomshoa & Zamanian \(2014\)](#) emphasize the importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension because understanding word meanings supports students' ability to comprehend what they read.

The difficulties observed in Cycle 1 also suggest that students needed more guidance to use the DRTA stages effectively. The predicting stage is intended to activate students' prior knowledge and establish a purpose for reading, while the reading stage allows students to verify their predictions and the confirming stage requires them to justify their understanding using information from the text. [Fatih \(2019\)](#) explains that DRTA encourages students to make predictions using visual information and their prior knowledge, while [Safitri et al. \(2022\)](#) describe predicting, reading, and confirming as the main stages through which students actively interact with a text. In Cycle 1, however, some students were not yet sufficiently active during these stages. This indicates that the implementation of the strategy required further classroom support.

### **Reflection and Instructional Improvement in Cycle 2**

The reflection on Cycle 1 became the basis for improving the instructional process in Cycle 2. Three main adjustments were made. First, group formation was changed from sequential counting to pre-assigned groups displayed through PowerPoint because the previous procedure had caused noise and confusion. Second, additional scaffolding was incorporated into the predicting stage to guide students in identifying the general topic before determining the main idea. Third, the descriptive text was presented digitally, and the teacher monitored group discussions more closely.

These changes were not intended to replace DRTA but to support its implementation in response to the problems identified in Cycle 1. This is consistent with [Burns's \(2010\)](#) explanation of CAR as a cyclical process in which reflection on classroom problems becomes the basis for instructional improvement in the subsequent cycle. Thus, the transition from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 was not simply a repetition of the same instructional procedure, but a revised implementation based on evidence from the first cycle.

The additional scaffolding was particularly relevant to students' difficulty in identifying the main idea. In the predicting stage, students were guided to consider the title and picture and then identify the general topic before moving toward the main idea. This process was consistent with the theoretical explanation in the present study that DRTA can activate students' prior knowledge before they interact with the text. [Carrell & Eisterhold \(1983\)](#) explain that background knowledge provides a framework through which readers predict, organize, and interpret new information. Therefore, guiding students to activate relevant knowledge before reading provided support for their subsequent interpretation of the descriptive text.

### **Students' Reading Comprehension in Cycle 2**

The revised implementation produced improvements in both classroom participation and reading comprehension outcomes. Students paid closer attention to the title and picture, responded more actively to the teacher's prediction questions, and participated more actively in group discussions. During the confirming stage, students were also better able to identify specific sentences that supported their predictions. These observations indicate that students became more engaged in the reading process and were increasingly able to use textual information to check their understanding.

The quantitative findings also showed improvement. The mean score increased from

72.26 in Cycle 1 to 81.94 in Cycle 2, representing an increase of 9.68 points. The percentage of students attaining the KKM increased from 58.06% to 77.42%. In Cycle 2, 24 out of 31 students attained the KKM, exceeding the 75% mastery criterion established for the research. The improvement in students' reading comprehension is consistent with the theoretical basis of DRTA presented in this study. [Agao-Agao \(2023\)](#) explains that DRTA is a reading strategy intended to aid learners' understanding during reading, while [Agustiani \(2016\)](#) explains that DRTA guides students through cognitive procedures such as activating prior knowledge, predicting, visualizing, and making connections. In the present research, these processes were reflected in students' increasingly active participation in predicting, reading, and confirming information from the descriptive text.

The improvement in identifying the main idea can also be interpreted through the active nature of reading comprehension. [Bruggink et al. \(2022\)](#) describe reading comprehension as a complex process in which readers actively construct meaning from texts. Similarly, [Kurniadi et al. \(2020\)](#) explain that comprehension requires readers to connect meanings across words, sentences, and paragraphs. In Cycle 2, students were guided not only to read the text but also to predict its content, identify relevant information, and confirm their predictions using textual evidence. The observed improvement in students' ability to identify supporting sentences for their predictions suggests that the students were becoming more engaged in constructing meaning from the text rather than focusing only on individual words.

The improvement in vocabulary-related comprehension is also relevant to the theoretical framework. During the reading activities, students identified unfamiliar vocabulary and discussed the meanings with the teacher. This provided students with opportunities to understand vocabulary in relation to the surrounding text rather than relying only on isolated word meanings. [Anjomshoa & Zamanian \(2014\)](#) state that vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in reading comprehension, while [Klingner et al. \(2007\)](#) emphasize that vocabulary development is an important component of comprehension instruction. Therefore, the vocabulary support provided during DRTA activities may have helped students understand the descriptive texts more effectively.

The quantitative improvement is also in line with previous research discussed in the introduction. [Ahmad et al. \(2023\)](#), [Anaktototy & Lesnussa \(2022\)](#) and [Nudho \(2013\)](#) reported improvements in reading comprehension following the implementation of DRTA in different text types and educational contexts. [Hutapea et al. \(2025\)](#) specifically reported improvement in reading comprehension through DRTA in descriptive text among tenth-grade students. The present findings extend these previous findings to seventh-grade junior high school students and to the specific reading comprehension components of main idea and vocabulary meaning.

Nevertheless, the improvement between the two cycles should not be interpreted as evidence that DRTA alone caused the increase in students' scores. The Cycle 2 implementation involved several changes based on the reflection from Cycle 1, including pre-assigned group formation, additional scaffolding during predicting, closer monitoring, and the use of digital presentation. These supporting practices were implemented together with DRTA. Therefore, the finding is more appropriately interpreted as an improvement that occurred through the implementation of DRTA accompanied by instructional adjustments based on classroom reflection. This interpretation is consistent with [Burns's \(2010\)](#) cyclical conception of action research, in which changes made after reflection form part of the process of improving classroom practice.

## CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) through two classroom action research cycles was accompanied by improvements in students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts. Quantitatively, the mean score increased from 72.26 in Cycle 1 to 81.94 in Cycle 2, representing an improvement of 9.68 points. The percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) of 75 also increased from 58.06% to 77.42%. Qualitatively, students demonstrated greater participation in making predictions,

*Improving Students' Reading Comprehension in Descriptive Text Through Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) Strategy* reading texts, discussing ideas with group members, and confirming predictions using textual evidence. They also showed better concentration and greater willingness to respond to the teacher's questions. These improvements occurred alongside instructional adjustments made after Cycle 1, including additional scaffolding, structured group formation, closer monitoring, and digital presentations. Overall, the findings indicate that DRTA, when implemented with appropriate instructional adjustments based on students' classroom needs, can support improvements in reading comprehension of descriptive texts.

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