

Exploring The Teacher's Strategies In Teaching Reading Comprehension In Senior High School

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill in English language learning, especially under the newly implemented Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. This study aims to explore the strategies used by an English teacher in teaching reading comprehension to first-grade students at SMAN 6 Palangka Raya. A qualitative descriptive method with a phenomenological approach was employed, and data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the teacher implemented two main strategies: Digital and Multimodal Reading Strategy and the Question Answer Relationship (QARs). The first strategy, Digital and Multimodal Reading Strategy, integrates online texts with images, videos, and hyperlinks to enhance students' engagement and comprehension. The second, QARs, helps students differentiate types of questions and improves their critical thinking skills. These strategies reflect the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered, flexible, and interest-driven learning. The study concludes that adopting adaptive and innovative strategies can significantly improve students' motivation and reading comprehension in line with curriculum goals.

Keywords: *Reading Comprehension, Teaching Strategies, Digital and Multimodal Reading Strategy, QARs, Merdeka Curriculum.*

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is a crucial skill in learning English as a foreign language, especially in senior high school, as it serves as a means to obtain information and knowledge from written texts based on the reader's needs. It is one of the four essential language skills that students are expected to master during their high school education. According to Nunan, Terrell, and Brown (2003), reading is a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning. This means that reading involves not only decoding words but also actively engaging with the content, drawing upon prior experiences and knowledge to interpret and understand the text more deeply.

Reading significantly contributes to enhancing students' word knowledge, spelling skills, and writing capabilities (Yulistiani et al., 2020). Through consistent reading practice, learners can expand their vocabulary, which also has a beneficial impact on their writing skills. Reading comprehension is not merely the recognition of words rather, it entails a complex integration of cognitive skills and prior knowledge that enables readers to construct meaning from written texts (Kheang, Chin, and Em, 2024).

Reading is important because it is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in education, personal development, and lifelong learning (Smith et al., 2021). It serves as the foundation for academic success by enabling students to construct meaning from texts across all subjects. Reading comprehension is particularly important as it lays the groundwork for effective communication in both speaking and writing (Nuriati, Jos. E.Ohoiwutun, 2015). Reading is a more controlled process compared to listening, because readers can adjust their speed, reread, and process the text to achieve deeper comprehension (Rost, 2015). Speaking is

an active skill requiring immediate interaction, while reading serves as a foundational tool that enriches vocabulary and understanding of language structure, ultimately enhancing speaking abilities (Sadiku, 2015). Reading focuses on text comprehension which involves interpreting the meaning, themes and nuances of various written materials, while writing skills develop through practice and exposure to a variety of writing styles that encourage the application of learning from the reading experience (Fadli et al., 2024). However, in the Indonesian context, many senior high school students continue to face difficulties in reading English texts. Factors such as limited vocabulary, low proficiency levels, and lack of motivation significantly hinder their ability to engage with reading materials (Ganie and Rangkuti, 2019). These challenges hinder their ability to engage with and comprehend texts effectively.

Based on classroom observations conducted by the researcher at SMAN 6 Palangka Raya in July 2024, during the MBKM teaching assistant program in an English class for first grade, it was found that the school has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Previously, the researcher had asked the English teacher about the students' interest in learning English. The teacher noted that student interest in learning English was notably low. During the four-month teaching experience in first grade, it was discovered that pupils' passion for learning English was comparatively low. This observation was further supported by direct discussions with students, in which many of them expressed a lack of enthusiasm toward learning English. They perceived the subject as difficult due to their limited ability to read English texts, understand their meanings, and correctly pronounce or write English words. The teaching materials delivered in class were focused on reading comprehension, specifically involving the ability to read and identify the context, main ideas, and detailed information within descriptive text and recount texts. Additionally, the researcher asked students about their learning experiences and how their teachers taught English in the classroom. Many students stated that they felt more motivated when the teacher applied engaging and varied teaching techniques, particularly when these were combined with games or interactive activities. In light of the issues above, the researcher observes that students continue to show little enthusiasm in studying English, but it can be improved if aligned with the teacher's efforts in the classroom. Therefore, students' interest in learning in class is strongly influenced by the teaching strategies implemented by the teacher.

Teaching strategies are ways or methods used by teachers to deliver subject matter to students effectively and efficiently (Ergawati et al., 2023). Teachers can assist in reaching the established learning objectives by employing effective teaching techniques. Teachers in Bengkulu's Senior High Schools use strategies such as asking questions, encouraging the use of dictionaries, and answering questions (Yulia, Syafrizal, 2020). These strategies are quite effective in helping students understand reading texts. The strategies are adapted based on the material, indicators, and learning objectives outlined in the syllabus and curriculum. At SMAN 8 Padang, the strategies for teaching reading comprehension include discovery learning, the scientific approach, and interactive activities, with teachers also connecting the material to real-life contexts to help students overcome reading difficulties and enhance their motivation, creativity, and self-confidence (Yunisa, 2014). Many English teachers in senior high schools apply various strategies to help students improve their reading comprehension. Furthermore, these strategies not only aim to improve comprehension but also to foster a deeper engagement with the text, encouraging students to become more independent and critical thinkers in their learning process.

Several studies have been conducted to improve reading comprehension, but only a few have specifically examined effective instructional methods that educators employ while instructing students in reading comprehension. The study titled *"The Matters in Teaching*

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Reading Comprehension to EFL Students" indicates that collaboration between teachers and students plays a crucial role in enhancing reading comprehension. However, the strategies implemented by teachers do not always align with expert recommendations, highlighting the need for a more supportive learning environment to improve students reading competence (Natsir & Anisati, 2016). Another study, titled *"Teaching Reading Comprehension by Using Some Methods in Senior High Schools"*, emphasizes the importance of adapting teaching methods to students' needs and the necessity for continuous evaluation by teachers to enhance the learning process. This study found that teachers commonly use methods such as scaffolding and mind mapping, with the grammar-translation method proving to be the most effective in improving students' comprehension (Saori, 2022).

The study titled *"The Teachers Awareness and Utilization of Innovative Strategies for Teaching and Learning in Awka South"* reveals that although teachers are generally aware of innovative teaching strategies, their implementation in the classroom remains low. Therefore, educational institutions need to develop training programs to enhance teachers' skills in effectively applying innovative strategies. This study emphasizes how crucial of better training and support for teachers, aligning with current educational trends that emphasize innovative teaching methods (Christian-Ike et al., 2024). Based on previous research, it can be concluded that teachers' strategies in teaching play a crucial role in improving students reading comprehension skills. Language teachers should have a comprehensive understanding of the various methodologies, strategies, and learning activities suitable for teaching reading comprehension effectively (Auta, Ibrahim, and, Ayeace, 2023). This is crucial as students experience difficulties in applying reading techniques and understanding grammar, which are crucial for understanding English texts (Azwar et al., 2024).

Although various studies have explored methods for teaching reading comprehension most of them do not focus on the practical implementation of strategies within the Merdeka Curriculum. Moreover, there is limited research that examines how these strategies are applied in real classroom settings, particularly in the context of SMAN 6 Palangka Raya. To address this gap, the present study aims to explore the specific strategies used by an English teacher in teaching reading comprehension to first-grade students under the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings are expected to provide insights that can help educators enhance reading instruction and support curriculum implementation more effectively.

The researcher conducted a study titled *"Exploring the Teacher's Strategies in Teaching Reading Comprehension at SMAN 6 Palangka Raya"* with the aim of exploring the strategies used and how reading comprehension teaching strategies are applied in the first-grade class in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum, specifically at SMAN 6 Palangka Raya. It is expected that the results of this study will provide valuable insights to improve reading instruction, as well as assist teachers in selecting effective strategies to support students' understanding of English texts and ultimately enhance the overall quality of language learning. Despite various studies on reading comprehension, little attention has been paid to how teachers implement strategies that align specifically with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered and contextual learning. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining the strategies used by an English teacher at SMAN 6 Palangka Raya. The findings are expected to inform best practices in teaching reading comprehension under the new curriculum and support teachers in enhancing students' reading motivation and understanding.

METHOD

In this study, the researcher will apply a qualitative descriptive method with a phenomenological approach. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research begins with assumptions and theories that help in understanding a social or human issue based on the perspectives of individuals or groups. To examine the problem, researcher will use qualitative methods by collecting data directly in a natural setting that aligns with the research context. The phenomenological approach in qualitative research is used to investigate and comprehend

the experiences of individuals or groups directly engaged with a specific topic. This approach is particularly suitable as it allows for in-depth research on teachers' strategies for teaching reading comprehension. Through in-depth interviews, descriptive qualitative research with a phenomenological approach provides insights into the experiences, strategies, and challenges that teachers face in their teaching.

Participants

The primary participant in this study was one English teacher at SMAN 6 Palangka Raya who teaches first-grade students and implements the Merdeka Curriculum. The teacher was selected based on the following criteria: (1) actively teaching reading comprehension to Grade X students, (2) implementing instructional strategies that align with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, and (3) having experience in adapting reading instruction to the needs and characteristics of students. Although the primary focus of this study is on the instructional strategies employed by the teacher, observations were conducted within a learning context that involved first-grade students. Thus, the students served as the setting in which the strategies were applied, although they were not directly involved as subjects in the data collection process.

Instruments

In this study, the researcher used three main instruments to collect data: observation, interview, and documentation. The observation instrument was used to record and directly observe the teaching strategies employed by the English teacher in teaching reading comprehension to first-grade students. The observation checklist included indicators across the pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading stages, along with a notes column to capture classroom dynamics and interactions. The interview instrument consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore the teacher's strategies in reading instruction, the rationale behind those strategies, and how they align with the Merdeka Curriculum, while also providing flexibility to further investigate the teacher's experiences and perceptions. Lastly, documentation involved using a camera or other recording devices to capture classroom activities and interviews, as well as collecting documents such as lesson plans (RPP), teaching materials, and teacher notes, all of which supported and strengthened the data from observation and interview to ensure the credibility of the research findings.

Procedures

In collecting the data, the first step taken by the researcher was to conduct classroom observations during English learning activities, specifically in reading comprehension, in the first grade. The researcher used an observation checklist that focused on learning activities across three main stages: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. During the observation process, the researcher also recorded classroom dynamics and teacher-student interactions to gain a deeper understanding of how the teacher implemented various teaching strategies.

After conducting the observations, the researcher proceeded with a semi-structured interview with the English teacher to gather more in-depth information. The interview employed a set of open-ended questions designed to explore the teacher's strategies in teaching reading comprehension, including how these strategies were applied in the classroom, the selection of reading materials, and any adjustments made to align with the Merdeka Curriculum. This interview format was flexible, allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions based on the teacher's responses. The interview was recorded with the teacher's permission to ensure the accuracy of the collected data.

In addition to observation and interview, documentation was also used as a supporting instrument to strengthen the research findings. The researcher used a camera or other recording devices to document the classroom teaching and learning process as well as the interview session. Moreover, the researcher collected relevant documents such as lesson plans (RPP), teaching materials, and the teacher's instructional notes. The combination of these three instruments aimed to ensure that the data obtained were credible, comprehensive, and accountable.

Data analysis

The researcher used the data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the first stage, data reduction, the researcher simplified and focused the data by selecting the most relevant information from the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. Irrelevant information was eliminated, while important data related to the teacher's strategies in teaching reading comprehension were retained to make the analysis more structured and manageable. The second stage, data display, involved organizing the reduced data into a clear and understandable format, such as tables, diagrams, or descriptive narratives. This allowed the researcher to present the teaching strategies more effectively for analysis and interpretation. Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the researcher summarized the findings and verified their accuracy to ensure that the results aligned with the focus and objectives of the study. This final step aimed to produce conclusions that are valid, objective, and reliable based on the data collected.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research conducted in first-grade students, it was found that the teacher employed two main strategies in teaching reading comprehension: the Digital and Multimodal Reading Strategy and the Question Answer Relationship (QARs) Strategy. Based on the observation checklist, it was evident that the teacher conducted the lesson through a complete sequence of stages. It began with the opening (pre-reading) stage, where the teacher greeted the students, motivated them, and activated their prior knowledge related to the reading topic. During the main activity (while-reading) stage, the teacher explained reading strategies, asked guiding questions, used various reading texts such as dialogues and descriptive texts, and facilitated students in identifying main ideas and important details. The teacher also encouraged students to make inferences and participate in discussions about the reading material. In the closing (post-reading) stage, the teacher summarized the material, provided reading comprehension exercises, and gave feedback based on the students' performance. According to the interview results, two main strategies were identified: Digital and Multimodal Reading and Question Answer Relationship (QARs). Both strategies were implemented in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which promotes student-centered, flexible, and interest-driven learning.

The findings of this study highlight the teacher's use of specific strategies in teaching reading comprehension that are not only practical but also theoretically grounded. This section discusses how these strategies align with relevant pedagogical theories and the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Implementation of Digital and Multimodal Reading Strategy

Tabel 1. Implementation of Digital and Multimodal Reading Strategy Based on Curriculum Principles

No	Principle & Curriculum Focus	Reading Strategy	Explanation	Examples	Steps to Implement Strategy
1	Student-Centered Learning Flexible Reading Strategies	Digital and Multimodal Reading	Supports students with diverse media preferences by integrating various digital formats into reading activities.	Texts with images, videos interactive, articles.	-Begin the lesson by introducing the topic and objectives. -The teacher explains the topic and learning goals to give direction and focus to students.
2	Curriculum Flexibility Adaptation of Reading Strategies	Digital Text Integration	Allows teachers to use a range	Digital news, YouTube videos, hyperlinked articles.	-Provide a digital multimodal text. -The teacher gives students an online

No	Principle & Curriculum Focus	Reading Strategy	Explanation	Examples	Steps to Implement Strategy
			of online resources (articles, videos, images) to adjust to the class's interests and context.		article (<i>Ragnar Oratmangoen</i>) with text, images, and hyperlinks.
3	Projects and Real-World Context Reading Authentic Texts	Authentic Digital Text Reading	Encourages students to interact with real world texts available online, enhancing relevance and motivation.	Athlete profiles, travel blogs, news reports.	-Distribute a comprehension worksheet. -Students complete a worksheet that includes questions about main ideas, detailed information, and key vocabulary.
4	Character Development and HOTS Critical Reading Strategies	Multimodal Critical Reading	Helps students build critical thinking by analyzing how various media (text, audio, video) convey and reinforce meaning.	Comparing video and text messages. Drawing conclusions from visuals.	-Enrich the activity with audio/video. -The teacher plays relevant media such as a YouTube video (<i>Anthony Ginting</i>) to support understanding. -Connect information from multiple media sources. -Students link insights from text, visuals, and audio. -Teacher asks guiding questions like: "What extra info did you get from the video?" and "How did sound and visuals help your understanding?"
5	Curriculum Flexibility Independent Learning Encouragement	Independent Digital Exploration	Encourages self-directed reading using hyperlinks and online resources.	Exploring related articles. Following up hyperlinks.	-Practice reading additional digital information. -Students access a hyperlink to another article (<i>Neymar</i>) and write a short summary of their findings.
6	Character Development and Reflection Learning Awareness	Reflective Reading Habits	Promotes metacognitive skills as students reflect on the media that helped them learn effectively.	Students identify helpful media and consider using digital resources outside of class.	-Conduct a reflection activity. -The teacher closes the session with reflective questions: "Which media helped you understand

No	Principle & Curriculum Focus	Reading Strategy	Explanation	Examples	Steps to Implement Strategy
					the text most?", "Can you use similar tools at home for learning?"

The teacher regularly uses digital and multimodal reading strategies when teaching reading comprehension. This approach involved presenting texts in digital format enhanced with images, hyperlinks, videos, and audio. The teacher explained:

"The teacher mentioned using online articles with multimodal elements, including text, images, and hyperlinks. For instance, students were assigned to read a digital article about Ragnar Oratmangoen and complete a related worksheet. The teacher also supplemented the lesson with video or audio materials to enhance student understanding".

This reflects Serafini (2012) concept of multimodal literacy, where students must navigate and interpret multiple modes of information textual, visual, and auditory to construct meaning. The teacher also facilitated reflection by asking students which media helped them understand the content better. This is consistent with 21st-century reading literacy goals that emphasize students' ability to process information from various media sources. The teacher also connected the strategy to students' interests and real-life contexts. By selecting relevant and authentic materials and simplifying them as needed, the teacher ensured that the texts were suitable for first grade proficiency levels. This aligns with differentiated instruction principles and the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on relevance and personalization. The Digital and Multimodal Reading Strategy is applied to make reading activities more engaging and accessible for students. At the beginning of the lesson, the topic and learning objectives are introduced to provide students with a clear direction and focus. In the context of descriptive text instruction, online articles that combine text, images, and hyperlinks to related sources are utilized. For instance, a digital article about Ragnar Oratmangoen is provided, followed by a worksheet containing questions that target main ideas, supporting details, and key vocabulary.

To enhance the learning experience, multimedia elements such as relevant audio or video content are incorporated. For example, a narrative YouTube video about Anthony Ginting. Students are then encouraged to connect the information obtained from the text, visuals, and audio. Guiding questions such as *"What additional information did you get from other media?"* and *"How did the sound and visuals help clarify the meaning of the text?"* are used to prompt students to reflect on how multimodal elements contribute to their understanding.

The strategy also involves encouraging independent digital exploration. Students are assigned hyperlinks to additional articles, such as one about Neymar, and are instructed to read the content and write a brief summary of the information gathered. This activity promotes self-directed learning and strengthens students' ability to navigate and synthesize digital texts effectively. At the end of the lesson, a reflection session is conducted through questions like, *"Which media helped you the most in understanding today's text?"* and *"Can you use this kind of media at home for reading practice?"*. This reflective activity allows students to assess their own learning preferences and provides insights into the types of media that are most effective in supporting their reading comprehension.

Implementation of Question Answer Relationship (QARs) Strategy

Tabel 2. Implementation of QARs Strategy Based on Curriculum Principles

No	Principle & Curriculum Focus	Reading Strategy	Explanation	Examples	Steps to Implement Strategy (QARs)
1	Student Centered Learning Flexible	Flexibility in Reading Strategies	Teachers can apply strategies based on students' pace and style.	Slow readers: predicting content. Fast readers: critical reading.	-Introduce the QARs strategy and its purpose. -The teacher explains that QARs helps students understand

No	Principle & Curriculum Focus	Reading Strategy	Explanation	Examples	Steps to Implement Strategy (QARs)
	Reading Strategies				different question types and where to find the answers.
2	Curriculum Flexibility Adaptation of Reading Strategies	Adaptation of Reading Strategies	Teachers are free to choose techniques suitable for class context and student characteristics.	Interactive reading QARs	-Explain the four types of QARs questions: - <i>Right There</i> : Answer is directly in one sentence in the text. - <i>Think and Search</i> : Answer found across parts of the text. - <i>Author and You</i> : Combine text with own opinion. - <i>On Your Own</i> : Answer from personal experience or ideas.
3	Projects and Real-World Context Reading Authentic Texts	Reading Authentic Texts	Emphasizes use of authentic texts (articles) to help students relate reading to real life.	Reading news articles, analyzing reports, interpreting advertisements, understanding formal letters.	-Provide a descriptive text to analyze. -Students read a descriptive text (<i>Cristiano Ronaldo</i>) individually or in pairs.
4	Character Development and HOTS Critical Reading Strategies	Critical Reading Strategies	Promotes Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) such as evaluating, analyzing, and comparing content.	Evaluating author's argument, comparing perspectives in two texts, inferring meaning beyond the text.	-Complete a QARs-based worksheet: -Students answer questions based on the four categories: - <i>Right There</i> : Where did Ronaldo start his career? - <i>Think and Search</i> : How did Ronaldo's early life influence his career? - <i>Author and You</i> : Is his discipline important for success? - <i>On Your Own</i> : What sport would you like to try and why? -Conduct group discussion and share reasoning, especially for deeper question types. -End with reflection by asking: "Which type was most difficult?" or "Did this help in exams?"

The teacher also employed the QARs strategy to guide students in identifying types of questions and locating answers appropriately. The strategy included four types of questions: *Right There*, *Think and Search*, *Author and You*, and *On Your Own*. As the teacher described:

"I introduce what QARs is and then give a descriptive text, such as about Cristiano Ronaldo, along with questions based on the four categories. This helps students realize that not all answers are in the text."

This approach aligns with Damanik and Herman (2021), who found that QARs enhances students' critical thinking by encouraging them to distinguish between literal and inferential questions. Furthermore, the teacher encouraged discussion and reflection, which supports metacognitive development. Students reported that the strategy helped them during exams, as they became more efficient at identifying question types and answer locations. The Question Answer Relationship (QARs) strategy is implemented to guide students in understanding the relationship between different types of questions and the locations where answers can be found. This strategy has been found effective in enhancing students' critical thinking and improving their ability to comprehend reading materials more deeply. The implementation begins with an introduction to the concept and purpose of QARs. Students are then introduced to the four types of questions within the QARs framework:

Right There – the answer is located directly in the text, often in one sentence.

Think and Search – the answer is gathered from several parts of the text.

Author and You – the answer requires both information from the text and the student's own understanding or interpretation.

On Your Own – the answer relies entirely on the student's personal experience or opinion.

Following this explanation, students are provided with a descriptive text, such as one about Cristiano Ronaldo. They read the text individually or in pairs and complete a worksheet consisting of questions based on the four QARs categories. Example questions include:

Right There: Where did Cristiano Ronaldo start his career?

Think and Search: How did Ronaldo's early life influence his career?

Author and You: Is Ronaldo's discipline important for his success? Why?

On Your Own: What sport would you like to try and why?

This activity enables students to recognize that not all questions can be answered directly from the text, thus helping them develop more structured and analytical approaches to locating and interpreting information. The activity is followed by group discussions, during which students share their reasoning particularly for the *Author and You* and *On Your Own* question types, which encourage higher-order thinking and personal reflection. At the end of the session, a reflection phase is conducted. Students are asked which question types they found most challenging, and many often identify the types that require combining textual understanding with personal opinion. Additional reflection questions such as *"Does this strategy help during exams?"* are posed, and responses generally indicate that students feel better equipped to identify question types and locate answers efficiently. Overall, the QARs strategy not only enhances students' comprehension skills but also supports the development of confidence and independence in dealing with complex reading tasks.

Instructional Planning Based on Student Needs and Curriculum Goals

The teacher's instructional planning took into account students' proficiency, cultural relevance, and personal interests:

"I choose texts that are appropriate for first grade, sometimes simplifying authentic texts to make them easier to understand, but without removing the meaning."

The integration of student interests, topic relevance, and flexible content selection is in line with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on autonomy and context-based learning. The teacher also applied a project-based learning approach, allowing students to choose topics, work in groups, and present their findings, also reflects the curriculum's focus on meaningful and real-world learning experiences. This approach is consistent with the views of Martatiyana et al. (2023), who state that the Merdeka Curriculum allows greater flexibility for teachers to design learning experiences that are tailored to students' needs, abilities, and real-life contexts.

Interactive Techniques and Technology Integration

The use of interactive techniques and technology integration in the classroom reflects the principles of social constructivism proposed by Vygotsky (1978), which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and contextual learning. By encouraging collaboration, discussion, and the use of varied media, the teacher creates opportunities for students to actively construct meaning based on their prior knowledge and shared experiences.

To improve engagement and comprehension, the teacher incorporated various interactive techniques such as:

- Predicting text content from titles or images.
- Using open-ended group discussions.
- Activating prior knowledge with videos or pictures.
- Using online reading platforms and storybooks.

These methods supported different learning styles and helped students actively construct meaning, further enhancing their motivation and participation.

Assessment and Student Participation

The teacher's approach to assessment and student participation is also consistent with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process. By involving students in group discussions, reflective questioning, and peer interaction, the assessment process becomes not only a tool for measuring understanding but also a means of scaffolding learning and promoting independence. Assessment was conducted through formative methods, including observation, comprehension questions, and checklist evaluations. The teacher emphasized the importance of participation:

"I give students opportunities to discuss in groups, ask questions, and express their own interpretations. This builds their confidence and creates a student-centered learning environment."

This approach supports the Merdeka Curriculum's goal of fostering independent and reflective learners.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirmed that the application of effective and student-centered teaching strategies plays a vital role in enhancing students' reading comprehension. The teacher at SMAN 6 Palangka Raya implemented two primary strategies: Digital and Multimodal Reading Strategy and Question Answer Relationship (QARs), both of which were adapted to the Merdeka Curriculum. The Digital and Multimodal Reading Strategy successfully integrated various media formats to cater to students' interests and learning styles, making reading activities more engaging and contextually relevant. The QARs strategy, on the other hand, equipped students with the ability to distinguish different types of questions and locate answers efficiently, thus improving their critical thinking and comprehension skills. These findings emphasize the importance of innovation and adaptability in teaching, as well as the need for instructional planning that considers students' needs, digital literacy, and curriculum goals. In terms of theoretical contribution, the study supports the application of social constructivist principles—especially Vygotsky's view that learning occurs best through interaction, collaboration, and active engagement with content. Practically, the study offers insights for English teachers seeking to apply more engaging and effective reading comprehension strategies under the Merdeka Curriculum. The use of digital texts, multimodal materials, and structured questioning like QARs can serve as practical models for improving students' comprehension, motivation, and autonomy in language learning.

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