

Improving Students' Reading Comprehension through Authentic Materials for Seventh Grade Students of SMP Negeri 3 Kota Ternate

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Abstract

This study aimed to improve the reading comprehension of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Kota Ternate through the use of authentic materials. The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) consisting of two cycles, with each cycle including the stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The participants were 24 students of class VII B who were selected based on their lower reading achievement compared to the other classes. The instruments used to collect the data were reading comprehension tests, observation sheets, and documentation. The reading tests were administered as a pre-test and post-test to measure students' progress, while observation sheets were used to examine students' participation and engagement during the teaching and learning process. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension after the implementation of authentic materials. The mean score increased from 55.12 in the pre-test to 70.28 in Cycle I, accompanied by an increase in the percentage of students achieving the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM). Classroom observations also showed that students became more active, motivated, and confident in participating in reading activities. After further improvements in Cycle II, the success criteria of the study were achieved, indicating that authentic materials effectively enhanced students' reading comprehension by providing meaningful, contextual, and engaging learning experiences. Therefore, authentic materials are recommended as an effective instructional strategy for teaching reading comprehension in junior high school EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *reading comprehension, authentic materials, improving, action research*

1 Introduction

English has become one of the most widely used international languages in the world (Harmer, 2015). In the era of globalization, English plays a significant role in communication, education, science, technology, and international collaboration. Many countries around the world use English as a medium for academic communication and global interaction. Therefore, mastering English is considered an essential skill for students in the modern world. In Indonesia, English

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is taught as a foreign language in schools with the aim of helping students develop their ability to communicate and access global knowledge.

In the Indonesian educational context, English teaching focuses on the development of four fundamental language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are interconnected and contribute to the development of students' overall language proficiency. Among these four skills, reading is considered one of the most important skills because it enables students to obtain information, develop knowledge, and expand their understanding of the language (Anderson, 1999). Reading is also closely related to academic success since many learning resources are presented in written form. Students who have good reading skills are more likely to succeed in understanding academic materials.

Reading comprehension is defined as the process of constructing meaning from written texts (Anderson, 1999). It involves the interaction between the reader and the text, where the reader uses linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, and cognitive strategies to understand the message conveyed by the writer. According to Stoller (2020), reading comprehension is not only about recognizing words but also about interpreting ideas, understanding relationships between sentences, and making inferences from the text. Therefore, reading comprehension requires active cognitive engagement from students.

However, many students who learn English as a foreign language still face difficulties in reading comprehension (Syamsia, 2024). Students often struggle to understand the main idea of a text, identify important details, and interpret unfamiliar vocabulary. These difficulties are commonly caused by limited vocabulary knowledge, insufficient background knowledge, and a lack of effective reading strategies. As a result, students may feel frustrated when they are asked to read English texts.

In many English classrooms, reading activities are often limited to answering comprehension questions from textbooks. Although textbooks provide structured learning materials, they sometimes fail to reflect the real use of language in everyday communication (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2018). As a result, students may find the texts less interesting or less relevant to their daily lives. When students are not interested in the reading materials, their motivation to read may decrease, which eventually affects their reading comprehension ability.

Motivation plays an important role in the success of language learning. Students who are motivated to learn tend to participate actively in classroom activities and make greater efforts to understand the learning materials. On the other hand, students who lack motivation may become passive and show little interest in learning activities. Therefore, teachers need to use effective teaching strategies and engaging materials to stimulate students' interest in reading activities.

One strategy that can be used to improve students' motivation and reading comprehension is the use of authentic materials. Authentic materials are materials that are originally created for real-life communication rather than specifically designed for language teaching purposes (Kılıçkaya, 2004; Lestari, 2022). Examples of authentic materials include newspapers, magazines, advertisements, restaurant menus, brochures, announcements, blogs, and social media posts. These materials represent the natural use of language in real-world contexts.

Authentic materials are believed to provide meaningful learning experiences for students

because they expose learners to real-life language use (Nguyen, 2022). According to Gilmore (2007), authentic materials can enhance language learning because they present language in real communicative contexts. When students interact with authentic texts, they are exposed to natural vocabulary, expressions, and discourse patterns used by native speakers. This exposure can help students develop a deeper understanding of how language functions in real communication.

In addition, authentic materials can increase students' motivation to read (Rahman, 2024). Authentic texts often contain topics that are relevant to students' daily lives, such as school activities, advertisements, entertainment news, or online messages. When students read materials that relate to their interests and experiences, they are more likely to engage actively in reading activities. According to Schmidt (2010), authentic materials can make language learning more meaningful because students feel that they are learning language that is actually used in real situations.

Authentic materials also help students develop important reading strategies. When reading authentic texts, students often encounter unfamiliar words or expressions. Instead of relying solely on dictionaries, students learn how to guess the meaning of words based on context. This strategy is important for developing independent reading skills. According to Nation (2022), contextual guessing is one of the essential strategies for improving reading comprehension because it enables learners to understand texts without translating every word.

For junior high school students, especially seventh-grade students, it is important to select authentic materials that are suitable for their level of language proficiency. The texts should not be too long or too complex, and the topics should be relevant to students' interests (Sari, 2023). Examples of suitable authentic materials for seventh-grade students include school announcements, simple advertisements, posters, short stories, and short news reports. By using such materials, teachers can create a more engaging learning environment that encourages students to read actively.

In the context of SMP Negeri 3 Kota Ternate, preliminary observations indicate that many seventh-grade students still experience difficulties in reading comprehension. Some students have difficulty identifying the main idea of the text, understanding specific information, and answering comprehension questions correctly. In addition, students sometimes show low motivation during reading activities because they feel that the reading materials are not interesting or meaningful for them.

These problems highlight the need for innovative teaching strategies that can improve students' reading comprehension and increase their motivation to read English texts. One possible solution is the integration of authentic materials into reading instruction. By using authentic materials, teachers can provide students with meaningful language input and create a more engaging learning environment.

Furthermore, authentic materials can help bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world language use. Students will not only learn English as an academic subject but also as a practical tool for communication. Through exposure to real-life texts, students can develop greater confidence in their ability to understand English materials outside the classroom.

Based on the explanations above, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is an essential skill in learning English, yet many students still face difficulties in understanding En-

glish texts. One of the factors contributing to this problem is the limited use of engaging and meaningful reading materials in the classroom. Authentic materials offer a promising solution because they provide real-world language exposure, increase students' motivation, and support the development of reading strategies.

2 Methods

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) as the research design. According to Harmer (2015), action research refers to a set of systematic procedures carried out by teachers or researchers with the purpose of improving their teaching practices or evaluating the effectiveness of certain instructional activities (Creswell, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014).

The population of this research is all seventh-grade students of SMP Negeri 3 Kota Ternate. It consists of three classes. Every class has 27 students. So the total number of population is 81 students at SMP Negeri 3 Kota Ternate. The sample of this research is the VII B students of SMP Negeri 3 Kota Ternate, they are 24 students.

In this study, the researcher employed three types of instruments to collect the data, namely reading tests, observation sheets, and documentation. The data analysis technique was carried out by calculating the average score of the students in each cycle of the classroom action research. The researcher also calculated the percentage of students who passed the test based on the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM).

3 Results

This Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted in two cycles. Cycle I consisted of three meetings, namely the pre-test session, the implementation of authentic materials, and Post-Test I. The pre-test was administered to assess the students' initial reading comprehension ability before the treatment. Following this, authentic materials were implemented in the reading class to facilitate students' comprehension of real-life texts. At the end of the cycle, Post-Test I was conducted to evaluate the students' progress. Cycle II consisted of two meetings. The first meeting focused on the continued implementation of authentic materials with several improvements based on the reflection of Cycle I. The second meeting was allocated for Post-Test II.

3.1 Pre-test Result in Cycle I

The first meeting was conducted during the pre-test session. The purpose of the pre-test was to identify the students' initial ability in reading comprehension before the implementation of authentic materials. The pre-test consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions covering several types of authentic texts such as descriptive texts, announcements, menus, chats, and social media texts.

During the pre-test activity, most students still experienced difficulties in understanding the reading texts. Some students had problems identifying the main idea, finding specific information, understanding vocabulary, and interpreting the meaning of the texts. In addition, many

Table 1: The Percentage of Pre-Test Score

No	Grade	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Criterion
1	75	3	12.5	Passed
2	<75	21	87.5	Failed
Total		24	100	

Table 2: The Percentage of Post-Test Cycle I

No	Grade	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Criterion
1	75	9	37.5	Passed
2	<75	15	62.5	Failed
Total		24	100	

students were still passive and lacked confidence in answering the questions.

The result of the pre-test showed that only a small number of students were able to achieve the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM). The KKM used at SMP Negeri 3 Kota Ternate was 75. From 24 students, only 3 students achieved scores equal to or higher than the KKM, while 21 students scored below the KKM. This result indicated that the students' reading comprehension ability before the implementation of authentic materials was still low and needed improvement.

Table 1 above presents the percentage of the students' pre-test results before the implementation of authentic materials. The data show that only 3 students (12.5%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75 or above, while 21 students (87.5%) scored below 75. The total score of the pre-test was 1322.9, with a mean score of 55.12, which was considerably lower than the required KKM.

These findings indicate that the students' initial reading comprehension ability was still low. Most students experienced difficulties in identifying the main idea, finding specific information, understanding vocabulary, and interpreting the meaning of authentic texts. Therefore, the implementation of authentic materials was considered necessary to improve the students' reading comprehension achievement.

3.2 Post-test Result in Cycle I

The results of the Post-Test I (Cycle I) indicate that students' reading comprehension improved after the first implementation of authentic materials. The total score obtained by the 24 students was 1686.7, with an average score of 70.28. Although this average score was still slightly below the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75, it showed a considerable improvement compared to the pre-test results.

The highest score achieved by the students was 93.3, while the lowest score was 50.0. Of the 24 students, 9 students (37.5%) successfully achieved the KKM, whereas 15 students (62.5%) were still below the required standard. These findings suggest that the implementation of authentic materials in Cycle I had a positive impact on students' reading comprehension. However, some students still encountered difficulties in understanding the reading texts, indicating that further improvements were necessary in Cycle II to achieve better learning outcomes.

Table 2 shows the percentage of the students' post-test I results after the implementation of

Table 3: The Percentage of Post-Test Cycle II

No	Grade	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Criterion
1	75	21	87.5	Passed
2	<75	3	12.5	Failed
Total		24	100	

authentic materials in the first cycle. The data indicate that 9 students (37.5%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75 or above, while 15 students (62.5%) scored below 75.

The total score of the post-test was 1686.7, with an average score of 70.28. Compared with the pre-test average score (55.12), the students' average score increased by 15.16 points. Although the majority of students had not yet reached the KKM, the percentage of students who passed increased from 12.5% in the pre-test to 37.5% in the post-test I. This improvement indicates that the use of authentic materials had a positive effect on the students' reading comprehension. However, further improvement was still needed because most students had not yet achieved the expected level of mastery.

3.3 Post-test Result in Cycle II

The results also revealed that 21 out of 24 students (87.5%) successfully achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75, while only 3 students (12.5%) failed to achieve the KKM. This finding indicates a substantial improvement compared to the pre-test, in which only 3 students (12.5%) achieved the KKM, and Cycle I, in which 9 students (37.5%) achieved the KKM.

Overall, the findings indicate that the use of authentic materials in Cycle II effectively enhanced students' reading comprehension. The increases in the total score, highest score, lowest score, average score, and the percentage of students achieving the KKM demonstrate that the actions implemented in Cycle II successfully improved students' reading performance and fulfilled the objectives of the classroom action research.

Table 3 above presents the percentage of the students' post-test II results after the implementation of authentic materials in Cycle II. The findings reveal that 21 students (87.5%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75 or above, while only 3 students (12.5%) scored below the KKM.

The total score of the post-test II was 1949.4, with a mean score of 81.23. Compared with the post-test I mean score (70.28), the students' average score increased by 10.95 points. Furthermore, the percentage of students who achieved the KKM increased significantly from 37.5% in post-test I to 87.5% in post-test II.

These results indicate that the implementation of authentic materials effectively improved the students' reading comprehension. Since more than 85% of the students met the Minimum Mastery Criterion, the success indicator of the classroom action research was achieved. Therefore, the action was considered successful, and no further cycle was necessary.

4 Discussion

4.1 The Use of Authentic Materials to Improve Students' Reading Comprehension

Based on the findings of the research, the use of authentic materials was able to improve students' reading comprehension through meaningful and contextual learning activities. Authentic materials such as announcements, menus, advertisements, chats, and social media texts helped students understand English texts more easily because the materials were closely related to students' daily lives and real-life situations.

During the implementation stage, the students became more interested and motivated in reading activities. The authentic texts attracted students' attention because the materials were familiar and relevant to their experiences. As a result, the students participated more actively during classroom discussions and showed greater enthusiasm in answering comprehension questions.

The use of authentic materials also helped students improve several reading skills, such as identifying main ideas, finding specific information, understanding vocabulary from context, and interpreting the meaning of texts. Through authentic texts, students learned how English is used in real communication situations. This made the learning process more meaningful and easier to understand compared to traditional textbook-based materials.

Furthermore, the observation results showed improvement in students' attention, participation, understanding, and cooperation during the learning process. In Meeting 1, many students still showed low participation and limited understanding of the reading texts. However, during the implementation of authentic materials in Meeting 2, the students became more active and confident in participating in classroom activities. In Meeting 3, the students demonstrated better comprehension and confidence during the post-test session.

The findings of this research support the theory proposed by Gilmore (2007), which states that authentic materials expose students to natural language use and help students develop better comprehension skills. In addition, the findings are also consistent with Albiladi (2021), who explains that authentic materials increase students' motivation and engagement in language learning activities.

4.2 The Improvement of Students' Reading Comprehension Through Authentic Materials

The findings of this study revealed that the use of authentic materials improved the students' reading comprehension achievement. This improvement was reflected in the increase in students' mean scores and the percentage of students who achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) throughout the research cycles.

The pre-test results showed that the students' reading comprehension achievement was relatively low. The mean score was 55.12, and only 3 out of 24 students (12.5%) achieved the KKM of 75. Most students experienced difficulties in identifying main ideas, finding specific information, understanding vocabulary, and interpreting the meaning of texts. These findings indicated

that the students needed a more engaging and meaningful learning approach to improve their reading comprehension skills.

After the implementation of authentic materials in Cycle I, the students' achievement improved. The mean score increased from 55.12 to 70.28, while the percentage of students achieving the KKM increased from 12.5% to 37.5%. Although the improvement was positive, the results had not yet met the criterion of success established in this research. Therefore, revisions and improvements were made in Cycle II.

In Cycle II, the researcher provided more appropriate authentic materials, pre-taught key vocabulary, and increased guided reading activities and discussions. As a result, the students showed greater participation, confidence, and understanding during the learning process. The post-test results of Cycle II showed a mean score of 81.23, with 21 out of 24 students (87.5%) successfully achieving the KKM. This substantial improvement indicated that authentic materials effectively enhanced the students' reading comprehension achievement.

The findings support Tomlinson's argument that authentic materials expose learners to real language used in real communication situations, making language learning more meaningful and motivating (Tomlinson, 2014). Through authentic materials such as announcements, advertisements, and social media posts, students were able to experience language as it is naturally used outside the classroom. This exposure helped them develop a better understanding of vocabulary, text structure, and contextual meaning.

Furthermore, Macalister (2020) emphasizes that authentic texts provide opportunities for learners to interact with meaningful content and develop reading strategies in realistic contexts. In this study, students were encouraged to identify main ideas, locate specific information, and infer meaning from authentic texts. These activities gradually improved their reading comprehension skills and increased their confidence in dealing with English texts.

The findings are also consistent with Martinez (2002), who found that authentic materials increase students' motivation and engagement in language learning. During the implementation of the action, students showed greater enthusiasm and participation because the materials were closely related to their daily lives. The relevance of the texts made learning more interesting and encouraged students to become active participants in the classroom.

Moreover, Long (2015) argues that meaningful language exposure facilitates language acquisition by allowing learners to focus on both meaning and form simultaneously. Authentic materials provide rich linguistic input that enables students to acquire vocabulary and comprehension skills naturally. This was evident in the present study, where students demonstrated significant improvement in understanding vocabulary and comprehending texts after repeated exposure to authentic materials.

The improvement from the pre-test to Cycle II clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of authentic materials in enhancing reading comprehension. The percentage of students achieving the KKM increased from 12.5% in the pre-test to 37.5% in Cycle I and finally to 87.5% in Cycle II. Similarly, the mean score improved from 55.81 to 70.28 and then to 81.23. These results indicate that authentic materials not only improved students' reading comprehension achievement but also increased their motivation, participation, and confidence in learning English.

5 Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of authentic materials successfully improved the students' reading comprehension achievement. The improvement was evident from the increase in the students' mean scores and the percentage of students who achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) throughout the research cycles.

The pre-test results showed that the students' mean score was 55.81, and only 3 out of 24 students (12.5%) achieved the KKM of 75. After the implementation of authentic materials in Cycle I, the mean score increased to 70.28, and the number of students achieving the KKM increased to 9 students (37.5%). However, the criterion of success had not yet been achieved, so the research was continued to Cycle II.

In Cycle II, after revising the teaching procedures and providing more suitable authentic materials, the students' achievement improved significantly. The mean score increased to 81.23, and 21 out of 24 students (87.5%) successfully achieved the KKM. This result exceeded the criterion of success established in the study, which required at least 65% of the students to achieve the KKM.

Furthermore, the observation results showed that authentic materials increased students' motivation, participation, confidence, and engagement during the learning process. The students became more active in discussions, showed better understanding of reading texts, and were more capable of identifying main ideas, finding specific information, understanding vocabulary in context, and interpreting text meanings.

Therefore, it can be concluded that authentic materials are effective in improving students' reading comprehension achievement and can be used as an alternative teaching strategy in English reading classes.

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