

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the research background, emphasizing the importance of reading comprehension in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and the challenges that learners often encounter. It discusses how Reciprocal Teaching (RT) has emerged as an effective instructional method to address these challenges and foster students' reading skills. In addition, this chapter reviews previous studies to identify the research gap, particularly concerning the application of reciprocal teaching among Indonesian junior high school students in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting. Finally, it outlines the formulation of the research problems, operational definitions, and the significance of the study, clarifying the objectives and expected contributions of this research.

A. Background of the Study

Reading comprehension is recognized as one of the most complex and essential skills in language learning, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Chen, 2023). Unlike listening or speaking, reading requires the integration of multiple cognitive and linguistic processes, such as decoding written symbols, understanding vocabulary, analyzing sentence structures, and constructing meaning from the text. As a result, reading becomes a cognitively demanding task that requires deliberate instructional support.

Effective reading comprehension involves more than just decoding words or understanding sentences at a surface level; it requires readers to actively engage with the text to construct meaning. Abenojar (2024) explains that successful comprehension depends on a reader's ability to connect ideas, analyze information, and reflect on the overall message of the text. This aligns with the view of Peng et al. (2024), who define reading comprehension as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction with written language. According to them, comprehension is influenced by three key elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for which the reader is

reading. This suggests that effective comprehension is not a passive skill but a dynamic and interactive process that demands cognitive effort. Therefore, developing students' ability to comprehend texts effectively is essential in shaping independent, critical, and reflective readers, particularly in academic contexts.

Although reading is essential in language learning, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners continue to struggle with reading comprehension. These difficulties extend beyond limited vocabulary and include challenges such as identifying main ideas, making inferences, and understanding grammatical relationships within a text (Viona et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2020; Schmitt, 2020). These struggles are often caused by limited exposure to English texts and a lack of familiarity with language structures and reading conventions commonly used in academic materials. Consequently, without sufficient support and explicit instruction, EFL learners may become disengaged, discouraged, and unable to develop essential reading skills.

Moreover, traditional teaching approaches, which tend to prioritize pronunciation over comprehension, often fail to engage students deeply with texts, thereby hindering the development of critical analytical skills (Mafarja et al., 2021). Such limitations underscore the necessity for comprehensive teaching methods that focus on fostering deeper comprehension and promoting active engagement with texts. Implementing interactive and strategy-based reading instruction, such as reciprocal teaching, can provide learners with the scaffolding they need to enhance their understanding and critical thinking skills. This shift in pedagogy is crucial for addressing the diverse challenges faced by EFL learners and enhancing their overall reading proficiency.

Reciprocal teaching (RT) has emerged as an effective approach to address these challenges. Initially introduced by Palincsar and Brown (1984), reciprocal teaching is a scaffolded instructional method that integrates four key strategies: predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. In the predicting stage, students are encouraged to anticipate the content of the text by examining the title

images, or introductory elements. This activates their prior knowledge and sets a purpose for reading (Kula & Budak, 2020). In the questioning stage, students collaboratively generate questions based on the portion of the text they have read, helping them identify the main ideas and engage more critically with the material (Murti et al., 2023). During the clarifying stage, students work together to address confusing parts of the text, such as unfamiliar vocabulary or complex sentence structures, with the teacher providing guidance as needed (Kawamura et al., 2025). Finally, in the summarizing stage, students restate the main ideas of the text in their own words, reinforcing comprehension and information retention (Wahyudi & Rozimela, 2024). These four strategies work together to promote active reading, enhance metacognitive awareness, and support a deeper understanding of texts (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Oczkus, 2018; Klingner et al., 2012). Furthermore, reciprocal teaching is considered an adaptive instructional strategy whose implementation can be adjusted according to students' proficiency levels and classroom needs (Anderman, 2013), making it suitable for diverse educational contexts.

These strategies are specifically designed to engage students in active interaction with texts, thereby promoting both comprehension and critical thinking (Islam, 2020; Pangaribuan, 2019; Rojabi, 2021). At the beginning of the implementation, teachers are expected to model how to apply the four reciprocal teaching strategies predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing to their students. Subsequently, students begin to practice these strategies with teacher support, gradually shifting the focus from teacher-centered to student-centered learning (Ahmada, 2019; Pangaribuan, 2019; Oo et al., 2021). This shift allows students to take a more active role in leading group discussions and in making sense of the text at both cognitive and personal levels (Kula, 2021). With consistent practice and adequate instructional support, students are more likely to experience improvements in reading comprehension. This is supported by a study conducted by Mafarja et al. (2023), which found that students engaged in reciprocal teaching demonstrated increased engagement with texts and improved mastery of reading content. These findings reinforce the notion that the structured

yet interactive nature of reciprocal teaching contributes to better retention and understanding of reading materials.

A previous study conducted by Qotub (2020) investigated the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching in improving the attitudes of female high school students toward reading in a second language. The results of this quasi-experimental study showed a significant correlation between the reciprocal teaching strategy and reading comprehension and motivation, as well as improvements in students' perceptions of their reading skills. The study by Shafiq (2021) supports the notion that reciprocal teaching has a positive impact on the academic achievement of fifth-grade elementary school students in general science. The results of this actual experimental study revealed that the use of reciprocal teaching not only increased student participation but also improved their academic achievement, particularly in reading comprehension and question generation. This demonstrates the versatility of the reciprocal teaching technique across various subjects, although its primary application is focused on learners at the primary level. Furthermore, a previous study conducted by Alsalhi (2024) using a quasi-experimental design demonstrated the significant impact of reciprocal teaching on the reading comprehension of graduate students, comprising 80 diverse and multicultural female students from the international student body at Ajman University, who came from various countries.

In one of the private Islamic schools in Tasikmalaya, several reading challenges were identified through preliminary interviews with English teachers prior to the implementation of Reciprocal Teaching (RT). The teachers observed that many students encountered significant difficulties in understanding English texts. Firstly, students often lost focus when reading longer passages, which made it difficult for them to process information effectively. Secondly, they struggled to connect the different parts of the text, which limited their ability to grasp the overall meaning and structure. Thirdly, many students relied heavily on word-for-word translation rather than interpreting the meaning of sentences or paragraphs, which frequently led to misunderstandings. These challenges underscore the need for a reading strategy that promotes critical thinking, provides structured

guidance, and fosters active engagement with the text, as supported by Cahyani (2024). Additionally, their critical thinking skills were underdeveloped, as they often read without deeper analysis.

To address these challenges, the teacher implemented reciprocal teaching as the primary instructional strategy. Reciprocal teaching, which involves the strategies of predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing, is applied in nearly all reading classes to align with the school's objective of promoting active engagement with reading materials. In the predicting stage, students, grouped from the beginning of the lesson, are provided with a narrative text accompanied by a title and illustrations. Before reading the entire text, they are instructed to carefully observe the title and images and then discuss their predictions about the content with their group members. The teacher guides this process by asking questions that encourage critical thinking and justification of predictions based on available clues. In the questioning stage, students work in groups to formulate questions based on the text they have read. They focus on identifying the main ideas and thinking critically by creating and exchanging questions with other groups during discussion sessions. In the clarifying stage, students continue working in groups to discuss challenging aspects of the text, such as unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, or difficult concepts. The teacher acts as a facilitator, providing additional explanations and context while encouraging students to develop problem-solving strategies. In the final stage, summarizing, students collaboratively summarize the text using their own words, focusing on identifying key points and excluding irrelevant information. This group activity helps them understand the structure of the text, organize content effectively, and enhance their overall reading comprehension.

Previous studies have demonstrated the overall effectiveness of reciprocal teaching in various educational settings, particularly at the high school, primary school, and higher education levels. However, there is limited research that explores the experiences of Indonesian junior high school students with the use of reciprocal teaching, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the experiences of junior

high school students in Indonesia when engaging with reciprocal teaching strategies, thus filling the identified research gap.

B. Formulation of the Problem

The research questions of this study are:

1. What challenges do students face when participating in reciprocal teaching strategies for reading activities in an English classroom?
2. What solutions do students use to overcome these challenges while engaging in reciprocal teaching strategies for reading activities in an English classroom?

C. Operational Definitions

1. Reading Challenges

In the context of this study, the challenges students encountered during reading activities were identified through their participation in reciprocal teaching sessions. These difficulties were expressed during semi-structured interviews in which students shared their experiences using the four reciprocal teaching strategies: predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. The reported challenges were categorized and analyzed to understand how they affected students' engagement and comprehension during English reading activities. The specific challenges identified included difficulties in understanding unfamiliar topics and vocabulary, challenges in prioritizing and identifying relevant information, and issues with emotional engagement during the reading process. Recognizing these challenges is essential for developing more targeted and effective reading instruction approaches.

2. Reading Solutions

In the context of this study, solution refers to the specific strategies or actions students employ to overcome challenges encountered during reading activities. These solutions reflect the practical ways students improve their comprehension and engagement when applying reciprocal teaching. Based on students' self-reports during interviews, the identified solutions include using textual clues predicts better, connecting prior knowledge to understand the context, taking notes to assist in summarizing information, re-reading complex parts for clarity, and relying on peers or teachers for support during comprehension breakdowns.

These approaches demonstrate how students actively adapt their use of reciprocal teaching strategies or supplement them with additional techniques to address difficulties such as unfamiliar vocabulary, complex ideas, or gaps in understanding. Importantly, these solutions align with the core principles of reciprocal teaching, promoting critical thinking, active engagement, independent learning strategies, metacognitive regulation, and collaborative learning to foster deeper comprehension. The effectiveness of these student-driven solutions is evaluated to assess their impact on enhancing reading comprehension and promoting active participation in reciprocal teaching activities.

3. Reading Activities

In this study, reading activities involve structured group exercises designed to enhance students' engagement in understanding and analyzing various text types, including recounts, descriptions, and narratives, using the reciprocal teaching method. The activities begin with the *predicting* stage, where students work in groups to predict the topic of the text based on titles and illustrations under teacher guidance, followed by reading the text section by section. Next, during the *questioning* stage, each student in the group formulates one question about the text, and the group selects the best question to ask another group. The teacher then facilitates a question-and-answer session between groups, with answers provided randomly by group members, continuing until all groups have participated. Afterward, in the *clarifying* stage, students identify unclear parts of the text and discuss these within their groups; if peers cannot answer, the teacher provides detailed explanations to ensure understanding. Finally, during the *summarizing* stage, each group summarizes the text in their own words and presents their summaries to the class. Afterward, the teacher awards points to the most active group to encourage participation and collaboration.

4. Reciprocal Teaching

In this study, Reciprocal Teaching refers to a teaching method applied by English teachers at a private Islamic school in Tasikmalaya to support students' reading comprehension. It functions both as an instructional method and a learning strategy, aiming to improve students' engagement, critical thinking, and

collaborative skills during reading activities. As a method, Reciprocal Teaching provides a structured, student-centered approach that guides classroom instruction through four sequential strategies: predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. These strategies are used consistently in group-based reading sessions where students interact with the text and with each other.

As a strategy, these four components are the practical tools students use to process and understand reading materials. Students are encouraged to activate prior knowledge (predicting), formulate and respond to questions (questioning), resolve confusion (clarifying), and synthesize information (summarizing). Together, these strategies help students to construct meaning from the text and engage in deeper comprehension.

In this study, the term “*method*” refers to reciprocal teaching as the overall instructional approach applied in classroom reading activities. Meanwhile, the term “*strategy*” refers to the four core components predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing that students use within the method. This distinction is made to clarify the dual role of reciprocal teaching in both instructional design and student reading practice.

D. Aims of the Study

The aims of this study are:

1. To identify and describe the challenges students face when using reciprocal teaching to enhance their reading comprehension.
2. To investigate the solutions students apply to overcome these challenges.

E. Significance of the Study

1. Practical Significance

This study can serve as a consideration for teachers to adjust their approach to students' reading activities in the classroom.

2. Empirical Significance

The results of this study can provide deeper insights for the researcher into previously established strategies and demonstrate how these strategies can be applied more effectively in English language teaching in the classroom.