

Fostering Students' Reading Comprehension through Visualization Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Comprehending explicitly stated information in reading passages remains a persistent challenge for many junior high school students, often hindering their ability to understand texts at the literal level, which forms the foundation for higher-order comprehension skills. Therefore, this study aims to determine whether the visualization strategy significantly improves literal reading comprehension among EFL students. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 20 Palu using a quasi-experimental design. The population consisted of 105 eighth grade students from classes VIII A, VIII B, VIII C, and VIII D, with class VIII C assigned as the experimental group and class VIII B as the control group through random sampling. Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to collect data. The findings revealed that the experimental group achieved a higher mean score (78) than the control group (63) in the post-test, and the statistical analysis showed a significance value of $p < 0.05$, indicating that the visualization strategy effectively enhanced students' reading comprehension, particularly in understanding literal information in descriptive texts. These findings suggest that visualization strategies can be integrated into EFL instruction to improve students' engagement, comprehension, and overall learning experience.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a crucial skill in learning English because it expands students' vocabulary, enhances comprehension, and develops their overall language proficiency. Through reading, learners can gain new knowledge, broaden their perspectives, and cultivate critical thinking skills. According to Hasanah and Lena [1], reading is a fundamental component of education that supports intellectual growth and lifelong learning. Moreover, recent research by Alias et al. [2] found that reading activities significantly help learners acquire new vocabulary, which, in turn, supports their ability to understand written texts. This indicates that reading

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not only functions as a linguistic activity but also as a cognitive process that integrates language, thought, and experience. Therefore, students must develop strong reading comprehension skills to understand, interpret, and evaluate written texts effectively, enabling them to apply knowledge across various subjects and real-life situations. In other words, reading serves as both the foundation and the bridge that connects classroom learning with practical understanding.

Despite its importance, many students still struggle to comprehend English texts. Preliminary observations at SMP Negeri 20 Palu revealed that numerous eighth-grade students struggled to identify main ideas, comprehend detailed information, and draw logical conclusions. Alvionita et al. [3] highlight that reading comprehension is one of the problematic competencies for EFL learners. These difficulties often arise from limited vocabulary mastery, low motivation, and the absence of interactive and effective learning strategies, which make reading activities less engaging and meaningful. Research by Kusumahwati et al. [4] found that students encountered significant difficulties connecting topics to their background knowledge and understanding the grammatical structure of English texts. Moreover, Nanda and Azmy [5] found that insufficient motivation, limited prior knowledge, and poor vocabulary are key factors contributing to poor reading comprehension among Indonesian secondary school learners. Hartini and Suri Ardini further support this observation. Hartini and Ardini [6] found a strong positive correlation between vocabulary knowledge and overall English proficiency, reinforcing the role of vocabulary as a key determinant in reading comprehension. Similarly, Ramadhianti and Somba [7] report that many Indonesian EFL learners struggle because they cannot link text topics to their background knowledge, lack vocabulary, and have weak grammatical awareness. Taken together, these studies suggest that reading difficulties among Indonesian students are not merely due to linguistic limitations but also to a lack of meaningful engagement with language and context.

To address these issues, teachers are encouraged to apply effective strategies that promote active engagement and a deeper understanding of texts. One such approach is the visualization strategy, which encourages learners to form mental images of the content they read, helping them process and retain information more effectively. Santi and Reflinda [8] found that visualization fosters active reading by enabling students to build mental images that enhance memory and understanding. Likewise, Fitriani et al. [9] state that visualization may occur internally through mental imagery or externally through visual representations such as drawings or diagrams. This approach not only stimulates imagination but also bridges abstract language comprehension with concrete visualization, making the reading process more interactive. By linking linguistic input with visual imagination, students can strengthen comprehension and make reading more meaningful. Recent empirical studies further corroborate this: Damiri et al. [10] demonstrated significantly higher reading comprehension scores among middle school students taught using visualization (mean = 84.42) than those taught conventionally (mean = 72.54). Moreover, Damayanti et al. [11] found that a metacognitive visualization strategy improved reading sub-skills (main idea, details, inference, reference, vocabulary) in Indonesian EFL learners. Similarly, Addina et al. [12] revealed that students who visualized texts through mental imagery or diagrammatic

representation achieved higher comprehension scores, particularly among field-independent learners, supporting the idea that visualization enhances active reading, understanding, and retention. Thus, visualization serves as a powerful pedagogical tool that can transform passive reading into an active, thought-provoking experience.

Despite previous studies confirming the effectiveness of visualization, limited evidence exists regarding its application among Indonesian junior high school EFL learners, particularly in improving literal comprehension—the ability to understand explicitly stated information. Moreover, few studies have used nonparametric analyses, such as the Mann–Whitney test, to validate its effectiveness. Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether the visualization strategy significantly improves literal reading comprehension among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 20 Palu. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether students taught through visualization achieve better comprehension outcomes than those taught through conventional methods. This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by providing empirical evidence of visualization’s impact on literal comprehension and offering insights for English teachers to design more engaging reading lessons in EFL classrooms.

2. METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental design involving two groups: experimental group and a control group [13]. Both groups received pre- and post-tests to assess their reading comprehension before and after the treatment. The experimental group was taught using the visualization strategy, which encouraged students to form mental images of the texts they read, while the control group received instruction through conventional methods, such as teacher explanations and textbook exercises. This design aimed to determine whether the visualization strategy significantly improved students’ literal reading comprehension [14]. The use of a quasi-experimental design was considered appropriate because it allows for comparing instructional interventions in a natural classroom context without manipulating existing class structures, thereby ensuring ecological validity.

Table 1. The Experimental Design

Groups	Pre-test	Independent Variable	Posttest
Experimental Group	O1	X	O2
Control Group	O3		O4

The study population consisted of 105 eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 20 Palu, divided into four classes (VIII A, VIII B, VIII C, and VIII D). A cluster random sampling technique was used via a lottery method (Gay et al. [15]), giving each class an equal chance of being selected. As a result, Class VIII C (26 students) was assigned as the experimental group, and Class VIII B (26 students) served as the control group. This sampling procedure ensured representativeness and objectivity consistent with quantitative research principles. Furthermore, the use of cluster random sampling minimized researcher bias and ensured that

group assignment was based on chance rather than subjective judgment. This strengthened the study's internal validity while maintaining classroom integrity.

The primary instrument used in this study was a reading comprehension test comprising 30 items: 20 multiple-choice and 10 true-false. The test focused on literal comprehension skills, including identifying main ideas, specific information, and vocabulary context. The test was administered twice — once as a pre-test to assess initial comprehension and again as a post-test to measure improvement after the treatment. This type of instrument was chosen because objective test formats, such as multiple-choice and true-false, allow for clear scoring, ensuring reliability and comparability between the groups.

Table 2. Scoring Rubric

No	Types of Text	Number of Items	Score of Each Item	Total Score
1	Multiple Choice	20	1	20
2	True False	10	1	10
Total		30 items		30

To ensure content validity, the test items were reviewed and validated by two English language experts, one university lecturer and one experienced English teacher [16]. They examined the test for relevance, clarity, and alignment with the school syllabus and learning objectives for eighth-grade students. Revisions were made based on their feedback to improve the quality and appropriateness of the test items before administration. This validation process helped ensure that the test accurately measured literal comprehension rather than other unrelated language skills, thereby increasing the construct validity of the research instrument.

The research procedure consisted of three main stages:

1. **Pre-test:** Both groups took a pre-test to assess their initial reading comprehension, focusing on identifying main ideas, specific information, and vocabulary in context.
2. **Treatment:** The experiment lasted for six meetings (2 × 40 minutes each). The experimental group was taught using the visualization strategy through activities such as drawing key ideas, labeling images, and creating mind maps, while the control group received conventional instruction using explanations, vocabulary drills, and comprehension exercises. All materials were adapted from the school's English textbook and syllabus.
3. **Post-test:** After the treatment, both groups completed the same reading comprehension test to measure improvement and determine the effectiveness of the visualization strategy.

Throughout these stages, the researcher served as the instructor and observer to ensure consistent treatment delivery and minimize procedural bias. Additionally, both groups received equal instructional time and scope of content to ensure that differences in outcomes could be attributed solely to the use of the visualization strategy.

Data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using SPSS version 27. Initially, the normality test was conducted to assess data distribution, since the data did not meet the

normality assumption. A nonparametric test (Mann–Whitney U test) was used to compare post-test scores between the experimental and control groups. This analytical approach was selected because the Mann–Whitney U test is robust to small sample sizes and non-normally distributed data, making it suitable for educational research contexts such as this study. Descriptive statistics were also used to provide a clear overview of students' performance before and after the intervention.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the school principal of SMP Negeri 20 Palu. All participants were informed about the study's purpose and procedures. Informed consent was obtained from the students and their English teacher, and the confidentiality of all participants was strictly maintained throughout the research process. By adhering to these ethical standards, the study ensured transparency, voluntary participation, and respect for participants' rights, aligning with ethical guidelines for educational research.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After obtaining the test data, the results were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test.

3.1. Result

The pre-test results of both experimental and control groups. The experimental group (n = 26) obtained a mean score of 54.88 (SD = 7.49), while the control group (n = 26) achieved a mean of 51.77 (SD = 7.86).

Table 3. Pre-test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Experimental	26	54.88	7.494	33	67
Control	26	51.77	7.863	33	67

These figures indicate that both groups had relatively comparable levels of reading comprehension prior to the treatment, confirming group equivalence at the study's outset. This comparability strengthens the internal validity, ensuring that any post-test differences can be attributed to the treatment rather than initial disparities.

Table 4. Post-test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Experimental	26	78.08	10.934	60	90
Control	26	63.69	9.344	53	83

The post-test results revealed a substantial improvement in the experimental group, with a higher mean score (78.08) than in the control group (63.69). This notable difference suggests that students taught through the visualization strategy performed better in reading comprehension than those who received conventional instruction.

Overall, the increase in the experimental group's performance demonstrates the positive impact of using visualization techniques in reading lessons, as students who were encouraged to create mental images showed greater engagement and comprehension.

Table 5. Normality Test Results

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Reading Comprehension	Pre-test	.117	26	.200 [*]	.965	26	.505
	Experimental (Visualization Strategy)						
	Post-test	.150	26	.134	.910	26	.027
	Experimental (Visualization Strategy)						
	Pre-test Control (Conventional method)	.192	26	.015	.882	26	.006
	Post-test Control (Conventional method)	.206	26	.006	.937	26	.115

The normality test indicated that the data were not normally distributed. Some Shapiro-Wilk values were below 0.05, suggesting non-normality. However, Levene's test for homogeneity of variances showed significance values above 0.05, confirming that the data had homogeneous variances. Therefore, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was used for further analysis to ensure accurate results.

Table 6. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Reading Comprehension	Based on Mean	.031	1	50	.860
	Based on Median	.086	1	50	.770
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.086	1	47.262	.770
	Based on trimmed Mean	.067	1	50	.797

According to the findings of the homogeneity test of variances test using Levene's Test at a 0.05 significance level, the obtained significance values were 0.860 for Based on Mean, 0.770 for Based on Median, 0.770 for Based on Median and with adjusted df, and 0.797 for Based on Trimmed Mean. Since all p-values exceed 0.05, the data have homogeneous variances. However, as shown in the previous normality test, some data were not normally distributed; therefore, the subsequent analysis used nonparametric tests. Table 7 presents the Mann-Whitney U test results comparing the post-test scores of both groups. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups ($U = 69.000$, $Z = -4.957$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 7. Mann-Whitney U Test

Test Statistics ^a	
	Reading Comprehension
Mann-Whitney U	69.000
Wilcoxon W	420.000
Z	-4.957
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: Class

Since the normality test indicated that some data are not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$), the Mann-Whitney U test was used instead of the independent t-test to ensure the accuracy of the statistical analysis. Unlike the t-test, the Mann-Whitney test does not assume normality, making it more appropriate for this dataset. The test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($U = 69.000$, $Z = -4.957$, $p < 0.05$), confirming that the visualization strategy had a meaningful effect on students' reading comprehension.

Thus, it can be concluded that applying the visualization strategy in the experimental group had a significantly positive effect on students' reading comprehension, compared with the control group that received instruction through traditional methods.

3.2. Discussion

The findings revealed that students' reading comprehension levels were relatively low prior to the implementation of the visualization strategy. Both the experimental and control groups performed poorly at identifying main ideas, locating specific details, and interpreting the text. Many students appeared unmotivated and passive, indicating that conventional methods—such as teacher-centered explanations and textbook-based exercises—were less effective in promoting active comprehension. This situation aligns with Santi and Rejlinda [8], who noted that traditional approaches often make learners overly dependent on teachers, limiting their ability to construct meaning independently.

After the visualization strategy was applied, students in the experimental group showed significant improvement in their reading comprehension and learning motivation. They became more active, focused, and confident during reading lessons. Visualization practices, including imagining, sketching, and mapping story elements, enabled students to transform abstract information into concrete mental representations, which made texts easier to understand and remember. This finding is consistent with Damayanti et al. [11], who showed that visualization helps students convert verbal information into mental images, thereby strengthening memory and comprehension. Similarly, Boerma et al. [18] found that learners with stronger mental imagery abilities performed better on story comprehension tasks, confirming that visualizing textual content deepens understanding.

The increased engagement observed in the experimental group also suggests that visualization enhances motivation and classroom interaction. Students became more enthusiastic, curious, and willing to share ideas during discussions. This finding supports Usman [19], who emphasized that visualization fosters a positive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, and Boerma et al. [18], who noted that visualization stimulates imagination and

focus. In the present study, visualization helped students shift from passive reading to active learning, turning reading comprehension into a creative, meaning-making process.

These results also correspond with previous research. According to Royhan et al. [20], visualization helps learners link main ideas and retain essential details, while Fitriani et al. [9] highlighted that combining verbal and visual input enhances comprehension. Sukmawati et al. [21] found that visualization accommodates diverse cognitive learning styles, and Thamrin et al. [22] reported that visualization-based instruction improves creativity and comprehension. Dequito. [23] and Moriyanti et al. [24], similarly showed that artistic and contextual visualization helps students connect new information with prior knowledge, improving retention and engagement. Collectively, these studies reinforce the present finding that visualization can effectively bridge language processing and mental imagery in EFL reading.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings underscore the value of visualization as a classroom strategy. Teachers can integrate visualization into daily lessons by asking students to draw characters or settings from texts, construct mind maps of main ideas, use imagery-based questioning, or design visual summaries. Such activities can make reading more interactive and meaningful, especially for students who struggle with abstract language processing. As Damiri et al. [10] pointed out, visual-based instruction enhances comprehension performance more effectively than conventional teaching methods. Likewise, Sangeetha [25] found that incorporating visual narratives, such as a storyboard, enhances both understanding and creative engagement. Therefore, implementing visualization not only supports comprehension but also nurtures creativity and learner autonomy.

However, this study has several limitations. The treatment period was relatively short—only six sessions—and involved a limited sample (N = 52) from a single school, which may restrict generalizability. Additionally, potential confounding variables such as teacher differences, students' prior reading ability, and individual motivation may have influenced the results. The absence of qualitative data, such as classroom observations or interviews, also limits a deeper understanding of how students engaged with visualization tasks. Future research should therefore employ a larger, more diverse sample, extend the intervention's duration, and use mixed-method designs to capture both statistical outcomes and students' lived experiences.

In summary, the study confirms that the visualization strategy is an effective approach for improving students' reading comprehension, motivation, and classroom engagement. By helping learners construct mental images of textual content, visualization encourages active meaning-making and long-term retention. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate visualization-based activities—such as mind mapping, scene illustration, and imagery-based discussions—into EFL reading instruction to foster deeper comprehension and make learning more dynamic and enjoyable.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of the visualization strategy in improving the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 20 Palu. The findings

demonstrated that students taught through visualization techniques showed greater improvement in reading comprehension than those who received conventional instruction. A significant improvement of 14.39 points in the mean score was found between the experimental and control groups, indicating that the visualization strategy had a substantial positive effect on students' reading performance.

The strategy effectively enhanced students' understanding at the literal level and created a more engaging and interactive classroom environment. These results indicate that visualization is a valuable instructional approach that helps students construct meaning, retain key ideas, and participate more actively in learning. Teachers are therefore encouraged to integrate visualization-based activities—such as mental imagery, mind mapping, and visual summaries—into their reading lessons to foster deeper comprehension and motivation.

However, this study was limited by short treatment duration, single-school context, and lack of qualitative observations, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to involve larger samples, multiple schools, and mixed-method designs to explore the long-term and broader impacts of visualization on various levels of reading comprehension.

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