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## **Enhancing Students' Reading Comprehension Through Story Retelling Technique with a Story Map**

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### **Abstract**

This study employed a classroom action research design aimed at exploring the effectiveness of the story retelling technique using a story map to enhance students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. The participants were 28 eighth-grade students from class VIII D at SMPN 2 Kota Bengkulu. To evaluate students' progress, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Reading comprehension tests and an observation checklist were included in the research instruments. Based on the analysis of students' scores from narrative reading comprehension tests and interviews with the teacher, the researcher implemented actions over three cycles. Each cycle concluded with an evaluation test. The findings demonstrated a steady improvement in students' reading comprehension. The average score in Cycle I was 71.15, which increased to 74.60 in Cycle II, and further improved to 77.60 by the end of Cycle III. The use of the story retelling technique through story mapping effectively enhanced students' reading comprehension. This improvement was also reflected in students' more positive attitudes during reading lessons, where they showed greater enthusiasm and became more active in engaging with narrative texts.

**Keywords:** reading comprehension, story retelling, story map

## INTRODUCTION

Reading serves as a fundamental means for language acquisition, communication, and the assimilation of information (TESOL International Association, 2025). It functions as a critical tool through which individuals access information, engage in interaction, and internalize linguistic input. Among the four core language skills namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, reading is of particular importance for learners, as it reinforces and interrelates with the other skills. Its significance is evident in academic contexts, including textbooks and national English examinations, where learners are required to comprehend various types of texts. Empirical studies have confirmed the importance of reading comprehension in academic success. For example, Widodo and Fitriani (2022) found that Indonesian EFL learners' ability to understand narrative and expository texts significantly influenced their performance in national English exams. Furthermore, Nguyen and Le (2021) highlighted that comprehension of multiple text genres, such as argumentative and descriptive texts, directly supports learners' academic literacy, enabling them to perform better in task-based and standardized assessments.

The ultimate objective of reading is comprehension (University of Kansas, 2025). Reading comprehension pertains to a learner's ability to construct meaning from written text. Without genuine understanding, reading devolves into mere word recognition, lacking active engagement. As articulated by Rohim (1996), a learner demonstrates reading comprehension when they can accurately and coherently paraphrase the content using their own words. One key indicator of comprehension, therefore, is the learner's ability to recall and restate essential information from a text. Supporting this, Fang (2010), in a study published in the *Asian EFL Journal*, concluded that the act of retelling a text substantially

enhances students' reading comprehension. This finding implies that employing retelling as an instructional strategy may foster deeper textual understanding.

Based on classroom observations conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Bengkulu, the researcher identified significant challenge in students' comprehension of narrative texts. In this case, narrative texts presented considerable difficulty for students among five primary text types; descriptive, procedural, recount and report texts, as reflected in their performance on reading assessments. In the case of Class VIII D, data from the English teacher indicated that 61.53% of students scored below the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) of 74, with an average score of 62.94. Consequently, many students required remedial instruction.

Several factors may underlie these low achievement levels. Firstly, students exhibited difficulty identifying key information within narrative texts, which impaired their ability to answer comprehension questions. Secondly, students demonstrated low motivation during reading tasks, often relying excessively on teacher explanations and dictionary use rather than engaging actively with the text. This overreliance hindered the development of autonomous comprehension strategies and deep textual engagement.

To address these issues, the researcher proposed the integration of a story map. Story map is a graphic organizer designed to help learners identify fundamental narrative elements such as setting, characters, plot, and resolution—as a support tool within a story retelling strategy. By mapping the story structure, students can enhance their understanding without resorting to translation or passive decoding. The story map serves as a scaffold, encouraging learners to construct meaning and retell the narrative using their own interpretation and vocabulary, thus fostering improved comprehension.

Previous research by Fang (2010) demonstrated the efficacy of the retelling technique in enhancing comprehension of expository texts. The present study seeks to explore its impact on narrative text comprehension. By implementing the story retelling technique supported by story maps, the researcher aims to investigate its potential to improve reading outcomes among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Bengkulu. Although previous studies such as Fang (2010) have shown the effectiveness of the retelling technique in enhancing comprehension of expository texts, limited research has explored its application specifically in the context of narrative texts, especially within the Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom. Furthermore, while the use of graphic organizers like story maps has been acknowledged as a helpful tool in reading instruction, few empirical studies have examined their combined use with story retelling techniques to support students' independent comprehension and engagement with narrative texts. Most existing research tends to focus on teacher-led strategies or translation-based approaches, which do not sufficiently promote learner autonomy or active construction of meaning. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the integration of story maps within a story retelling framework as a method to improve narrative text comprehension among junior high school students in an EFL context.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design. According to Burns (2010), CAR refers to a form of inquiry conducted within the classroom context, where the researcher takes deliberate action to address and investigate specific issues in the learning environment. In this context, the researcher actively engages in the instructional process to gather relevant

data and insights. The implementation of this research was carried out collaboratively with the classroom teacher, Ms. Azalia, S.Pd., an English teacher at SMP Negeri 2 Kota Bengkulu, who served as the research collaborator. The essence of CAR lies in its practical objective to identify and apply effective solutions to challenges encountered in classroom teaching and learning.

The study was organized into iterative cycles. As described by Burns (2010), CAR is characterized by a cyclical process that continues until the intended outcomes are achieved and further intervention is deemed unnecessary. The action research cycle consists of four fundamental stages: (1) planning is designing a strategy to improve existing practices; (2) action is executing the planned intervention; (3) observation is monitoring and documenting the effects of the intervention within the classroom context; and (4) reflection is analysing and evaluating the results to inform future practice.

The participants of this study were the students of Class VIII D (second-year students) at SMP Negeri 2 Kota Bengkulu, comprising a total of 39 students consisting of 18 males and 21 females. This particular class was selected as the research subject based on preliminary observations and an interview conducted with the English teacher. The findings revealed that a significant number of students (24 out of 39) had reading comprehension scores below the minimum passing grade of 74.

## **Research Procedure**

According to Burns (2010), Classroom Action Research consists of four key phases within each cycle: planning, action, observation, and reflection. Based on this framework, the procedures of the research were carried out as follows:

## **Cycle 1**

### **1. Planning**

In the planning phase, the researcher identified the core issue and developed a structured plan of action aimed at achieving the desired improvements in students' reading comprehension. Several preparatory steps were undertaken, including:

1. Developing a research timeline
2. Designing a performance framework
3. Creating observation sheets for classroom activities
4. Preparing student observation sheets
5. Designing a lesson plan
6. Compiling instructional materials
7. Preparing story maps, and
8. Constructing an assessment rubric for evaluating students' performance.

### **2. Action**

During the action phase, the researcher implemented the planned teaching strategy, focusing on enhancing students' reading comprehension through the use of the story retelling technique with a story map. The steps involved in this phase were:

1. Using visual aids (pictures) related to the narrative text to capture students' interest.
2. Initiating class discussion with predictive and background knowledge questions as a form of brainstorming.
3. Guiding students to read the narrative text.
4. Conducting a discussion with students on the text's structure, specifically its generic elements: orientation, complication, and resolution, as well as narrative language features.

5. Assigning exercises related to the generic structure (e.g., use of simple past tense).
6. Explaining the procedure of the story retelling technique through story maps.
7. Presenting guiding questions to assist students in using the story map for retelling.
8. Introducing and discussing story elements such as characters, setting, events, problems, and resolutions.
9. Collaboratively retelling the story as a class by completing a story map using the provided narrative text.
10. Pair work: students worked in pairs to retell the story using the story map.
11. Individual work: students independently completed a story map and undertook related reading comprehension tasks.
12. The researcher monitored students' progress in using the story map to retell the story.
13. The collaborator observed the instructional process.
14. Students' performance and assignments were evaluated.
15. A reading comprehension test was administered at the end of the cycle to assess students' progress.

### **3. Observation**

In the observation phase, the English teacher (collaborator) systematically observed and documented the teaching and learning process using a structured observation sheet. This included noting students' behaviors, engagement levels, and the researcher's instructional approach. Observational data were collected to provide evidence on the impact of the intervention, both from classroom interaction and students' test results.

#### 4. Reflection

During the reflection phase, the researcher critically examined the outcomes of the implemented action. This involved:

1. Discussing the observation results and test scores with the collaborating teacher
2. Evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies applied in Cycle 1
3. Deciding whether further cycles were necessary based on the findings, and
4. Revising the action plan if continuation was required.

These same steps were repeated in subsequent cycles until the predetermined success indicators for reading comprehension were met.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Results

The enhancement of students' reading comprehension through the implementation of the story retelling technique using story maps is illustrated in the table below:

**Table 1. Students' Reading Comprehension Improvement**

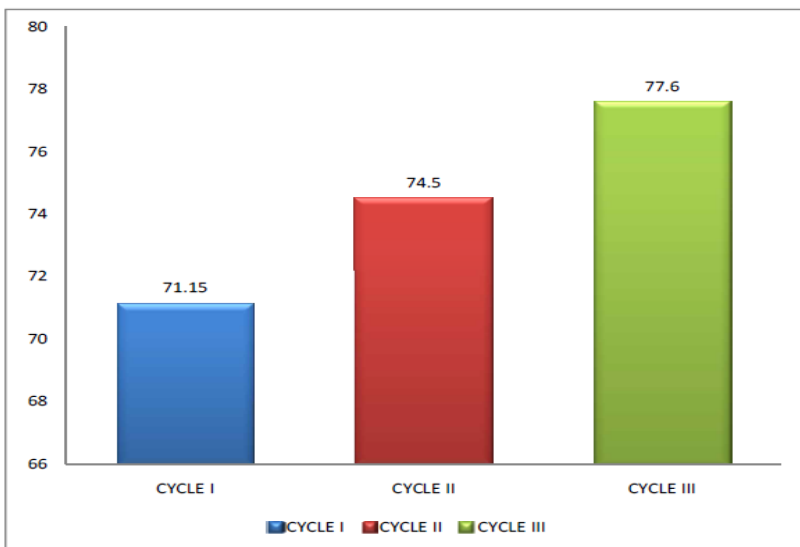
	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Mean	71.15	74.60	77.60
Improvement	6.45		

In Cycle 1, the average score achieved by students was 71.15, indicating a basic level of understanding but still falling short of the expected minimum standard. After implementing reflective revisions to the instructional strategy, the mean score increased to 74.60 in Cycle 2. This improvement of 3.45 points suggests that the adjustments made to the teaching approach had a positive

impact on students' comprehension and engagement, although the results were still slightly below the target benchmark.

Further refinement and consistent application of the enhanced teaching strategy led to an even greater increase in Cycle 3, where the mean score reached 77.60. The total improvement from Cycle 1 to Cycle 3 was 6.45 points, demonstrating significant progress in students' performance. This steady upward trend across the three cycles highlights the effectiveness of the instructional interventions in enhancing learning outcomes and achieving the desired academic standards. Referring to the table above, a notable enhancement in students' reading comprehension is evident. The progression of students' performance throughout the research is further illustrated in the following chart.

**Diagram 1. Chart of students' Mean Score Improvement**



The results of this study indicated a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension through the use of the story retelling technique with a story map. Notably, the technique helped students identify essential information by recalling story elements such as characters, problems, settings, events, and solutions. To measure comprehension, the researcher used the percentage of correct answers and assessed reading comprehension at the end of each cycle. Additionally, student motivation improved as a result of applying this technique, as observed through the students' engagement on the checklist.

In the initial test, students in grade VIII D at SMP 2 Bengkulu had low scores in their reading comprehension tests. Approximately 61.53% of the 39 students scored below the minimum passing grade (74), with an average score of 62.94. Two key issues were identified in the teaching and learning process: difficulties in identifying story elements and a lack of motivation. These findings showed that students' reading comprehension in narrative texts was still low, warranting remedial teaching. Therefore, the researcher decided to implement the story retelling technique using the story map to improve students' reading comprehension.

In Cycle I, the average score improved to 71.15, and 22 students passed the minimum standard, showing progress compared to the initial test. However, many students still struggled with the technique, as it was new to them. Some students had difficulty identifying the correct story elements, particularly the event and ending/solution. The researcher realized that better clarification of the story elements and the benefits of the technique were necessary. Furthermore, during pair work, the researcher did not monitor the students closely, which led to minimal participation in retelling the story through the story map.

As a result of the issues identified in Cycle I, the researcher continued with Cycle II, selecting materials that matched the students' level of difficulty. The researcher also provided clearer explanations of the story elements and the technique's benefits, offering additional support to students who struggled. By providing more guidance, motivation, and closer monitoring during pair and individual work, the researcher saw noticeable improvement in Cycle II. The students' average score increased to 74.60, and 28 students passed the minimum standard. Despite this progress, a few students still struggled, particularly with the event and ending/solution elements of the story. Additionally, some students lost interest towards the end of the second cycle.

In Cycle III, the researcher further clarified the story elements, especially the event and solution, and provided more motivational support. The material was more challenging, and the story maps were more colorful to maintain students' interest. As a result, the average score rose to 77.60, with 34 students passing the minimum standard and achieving the target score. This cycle also showed improved attitudes from both the researcher and students, with better engagement in the teaching and learning process.

## **Results**

The use of various strategies in the three stages of reading (pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading) contributed to the success of the technique. In the pre-reading stage, the researcher used pictures to engage students' attention, activate their prior knowledge, and encourage predictions. During reading, the researcher explained how the strategy helped in story comprehension and modeled the technique through classroom discussions and guided practice. In post-reading, students retold the

story and filled in the story map both in pairs and individually.

The use of pictures in story map was effective in capturing students' attention. According to Bee (2009), pictures in story map are an essential tool for motivating students before they begin reading. This pre-learning activity helps warm up students and prepares them for the lesson. Additionally, selecting relevant pictures that are meaningful to the material helps stimulate students' interest (Mulyadi & Hilda, 2009). Similarly, brainstorming through related questions encouraged students to predict the topic and activate prior knowledge (Porter, 2005; Presley, 2001).

Modeling and classroom discussions played a vital role in helping students comprehend the material. By demonstrating how to use the story retelling technique, the researcher provided students with clear examples. Through think-alouds and shared discussions, students gained a deeper understanding of the story elements and how to apply them in their retelling. In addition, working in pairs helped students learn collaboratively, share information, and improve their comprehension (Slavin, 2009).

However, there were two main challenges. One issue was students' off-task behavior during pair work, which hindered their contributions. To address this, the researcher needed to monitor students more closely and organize them based on their reading comprehension levels (Vaughn, 2001). Another challenge was that some students struggled with the event and ending/solution elements of the story, which affected their ability to complete the story map accurately. The researcher needed to provide additional clarification on these elements before assigning tasks.

Moreover, the study's results align with existing literature, indicating that the combination of story retelling

and story mapping is an effective strategy for improving reading comprehension in narrative texts. The approach not only increased comprehension but also motivated students and helped them identify important story elements. The improvements in students' reading comprehension, particularly in identifying key information, were evident after implementing this technique. These findings also support previous research by Fang (2010) and Nisa (2010), which demonstrated the positive effects of story retelling and story mapping on reading comprehension.

Furthermore, the cognitive, metacognitive, synthesis, and visual imagery strategies used in this study contributed to students' understanding. Students engaged in cognitive behaviors by recalling important story elements, utilized metacognitive strategies to monitor their thinking, synthesized information to make decisions about the story, and used visual imagery to retain the key points of the story.

Improving students' reading comprehension—particularly in understanding narrative texts—is a core goal of English language teaching. Your detailed description highlights the effectiveness of the story retelling technique paired with story mapping. These strategies activate multiple learning modalities, enhance student engagement, and support cognitive and metacognitive development. Below is a paraphrased version of your original explanation that maintains the same meaning and structure while using more concise and polished academic language.

The first key strategy involved using pictures related to the narrative text to capture students' attention. Visual aids stimulated students' interest, aligning with Bee (2009), who emphasized that images are among the few effective tools teachers can use to engage learners and motivate them before reading begins. This indicates that

while students' attention was initially unfocused, the use of relevant images helped redirect and warm them up for learning. Furthermore, as Ur (1996) noted, pre-reading activities are effective in language instruction, and choosing meaningful, relevant pictures (Mulyadi & Hilda, 2009) enhances their impact. Therefore, the researcher carefully selected pictures based on size, quality, color, and alignment with the reading material.

The second strategy was the use of brainstorming through relevant questions, which supported students' comprehension. This approach allowed learners to predict the topic and content of the text more accurately. When the researcher posed questions, students could anticipate the subject matter to be discussed. Asking pre-reading questions also activated prior knowledge, a process endorsed by Porter (2005), while Adler (2001) and Presley (2001) noted that questioning is a key reading comprehension strategy that enhances student thinking and engagement.

Third, modeling and classroom discussion played a crucial role in aiding comprehension. Through modeling, students were given concrete, visual examples of how to implement the story retelling strategy using a story map. This helped demystify the process and made it more accessible. Think-alouds were used to guide students in identifying story elements such as character, problem, setting, events, and resolution. During discussions, students collaborated with the researcher to complete the story map on the board, allowing for active participation and meaningful interaction. According to Elizabeth (2003), this combined strategy of modeling and discussion can significantly improve comprehension.

The fourth effective component was the use of pair work, where students retold stories collaboratively using story maps. As Slavin (2009) explained, working in pairs on structured tasks promotes motivation and improves

learning outcomes compared to working individually. Through this cooperative activity, students exchanged ideas and helped one another understand the narrative, which enhanced comprehension and increased engagement.

However, two main challenges emerged during implementation. The first involved pair activities, where some students veered off-topic, contributing minimally to the task. This lack of focus affected their performance and was exacerbated by insufficient monitoring. As Vaughn (2001) stated, grouping strategies can have both positive and negative effects on individual learners. Thus, the researcher needed to group students based on reading proficiency and provide closer supervision to ensure productive collaboration.

The second issue concerned individual work, where students struggled to identify certain story elements—especially events and resolutions—when completing the story map independently. This difficulty arose from a tendency to focus excessively on details rather than understanding the key points. To address this, the researcher provided further explanation and repeated practice with these elements until students could complete the task successfully and meet the expected standards.

Overall, the findings align with the theoretical framework presented in the literature review, confirming that the combination of story retelling and story mapping effectively enhances students' narrative comprehension (Trehearne et al., 2004). Kluth (2011) also found that this approach improves comprehension, helps students identify story elements, and increases motivation. The research showed measurable gains in students' comprehension scores, their ability to identify important information, and their motivation to engage with narrative texts.

The improvement can also be attributed to the integration of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, synthesis, and visual imagery. Cognitive behavior was observed when students recalled story elements from memory. Metacognitive strategies were used as they monitored their thinking and summarized ideas using their own words. Students also synthesized information by identifying essential content and making inferences. Lastly, the story map served as a visual aid, helping students mentally visualize the narrative structure and retain key story elements through imagery and sensory associations.

The research results also corroborate findings from earlier studies. Fang (2010) showed that story retelling enhances reading comprehension, while Nisa (2010) demonstrated the value of story maps in improving students' understanding of texts. By combining these two approaches, the current study proved that this dual strategy significantly benefits learners in comprehending narrative texts.

## **CONCLUSION**

After completing the research and analyzing the results, the researcher concluded that the story retelling technique using story maps effectively enhanced students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. It also increased students' motivation by encouraging active participation and engagement during the reading process. Through consistent practice with this technique, students became more involved in understanding narrative content. One of the key strategies that significantly contributed to this improvement was having students complete story maps individually. This approach enabled them to practice comprehension by recalling key information from the text. As a result, students' reading scores improved by 6.45 points, rising from 71.15 to 77.60—successfully

surpassing the research's target score of 75. The story retelling technique through story maps proved to be an effective method for enhancing reading comprehension. It helped students identify and recall essential narrative elements such as characters, setting, events, endings, and solutions, while also boosting their motivation to engage with texts. Overall, this technique successfully improved students' understanding of narrative texts.

Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that English teachers incorporate the story retelling technique using story maps as part of their instructional strategy, especially when teaching narrative texts. This technique not only enhances students' comprehension skills but also fosters active participation and motivation in reading activities. Teachers are encouraged to provide consistent opportunities for learners to independently complete story maps, as this practice helps reinforce key elements of narrative structure and supports deeper understanding. In addition, the use of visual organizers like story maps can be particularly helpful for students with varying proficiency levels, enabling them to process and organize information more effectively.

For future implementation, it is recommended that this strategy be integrated across multiple reading genres, not only narrative texts, to examine its broader effectiveness in developing reading comprehension. Researchers and educators may also consider combining story maps with peer discussion or digital tools to further enrich the learning experience. Moreover, school administrators are advised to support professional development sessions focused on equipping teachers with the skills to design and apply story map activities effectively. Lastly, future research could explore the long-term impact of this technique on students' overall literacy development, as well as its adaptability for other grade levels and learning contexts.

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