Jihan Amelia[1]
Rita Harisma [2]
Yayuk Hayulina[3]

Cultivating a Love for Reading : Endorsing Engaging Practices to Encourage and Pressure to Boost a Learners' Reading Comprehension and Critical Thinking

Abstract

Reading is a very important skill in the learning process. However, interest in reading among students is often low. This study aims to apply interesting practices in reading activities with the aim of cultivating a love of reading and improving students' reading comprehension and critical thinking. The method used is a qualitative approach with observation, interview, and documentation techniques. The study sample involved 75 elementary school students in grades 7-9 at Nida Suksasat School, Thailand. Three interesting reading practices implemented are word card games, batik activities, and chain message games. The results showed a significant improvement in students' reading interest, reading comprehension, and critical thinking after following these practices. However, there are challenges such as lack of letter recognition and lack of motivation to learn in some students. This study concludes that the application of interesting and meaningful reading practices can be an effective approach to foster a love of reading and improve students' literacy and critical thinking skills.

Keywords: *love of reading, reading comprehension, critical thinking, engaging practice, learner*

Introduction

Reading is a very important skill in the process of learning and self-development. Through reading, individuals can gain new knowledge, information, and insights that can improve the quality of life. Reading also plays an important role in developing critical thinking, analytical, and deep understanding of a concept or idea. However, interest in reading among students is often low. This can be caused by a variety of factors, such as lack of motivation, monotonous teaching methods, or the perception that reading is a boring activity.

Low interest in reading among students is a serious concern, because it can have an impact on their literacy skills and academic achievement. Students who do not like to read will have difficulty in understanding the subject matter conveyed through the text, and have limitations in developing critical thinking and analytical skills that are needed in the learning process. (Smith et al., 2021)

Email : jihanamelia031@gmail.com, ritaharisma@umsu.ac.id, yayukhayulina@umsu.ac.id

English Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara [1,2,3]

To overcome these problems, an innovative and interesting approach to reading is needed. Reading practices that involve elements of play, creativity, and interaction can be a solution to increase students' interest and love for reading activities. By reading through fun activities, students are expected to feel the benefits and joy of reading activities, thus fostering continuous motivation and love. (Harisma et al., 2023)

This research aims to apply interesting and meaningful reading practices for learners, with the main aim of fostering a love of reading as well as improving their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. Through this approach, it is expected that learners can develop literacy skills that are very important to support their learning process and academic achievement.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the effectiveness of interesting reading practices in fostering a love of reading, improving reading comprehension, and developing critical thinking skills among secondary school students. Here are the research methods used: (Manurung &; Siregar, 2018)

1. Research Sample

The study involved 75 students from grades 7-9 at a high school in Thailand. Sample selection is done using purposive sampling techniques to ensure representation of various grade levels and reading levels of students.

2. Data Collection Techniques

Data is collected through three methods, namely:

a. Observation

Observations are made during the application of interesting reading practices to observe student involvement, interest, and behavior in reading activities. Observation is also used to assess students' critical thinking skills during group discussions and analysis tasks.

b. Interview

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with students and teachers to gain information about their perceptions, opinions, and experiences regarding the engaging reading practices applied. Interviews were also used to explore changes in students' reading interest and motivation.

c. Document Analysis

Reading comprehension tests and students' analytical tasks were analyzed to assess their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills before and after the application of engaging reading practices.

3. Interesting Reading Practices Applied

Three interesting reading practices applied in this study are:

a) Word Card Game

Students play with word cards to improve vocabulary and reading fluency.

b) Batik Making Activities

Students engage in batik making activities that combine reading with artistic creativity.

c) Broken Phone Game

Students participate in broken phone games that involve delivering messages through alternating reading and listening.

4. Data Analysis

Data collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis were analyzed qualitatively using coding and thematic techniques to identify patterns, themes, and insights relevant to the research objectives.

Using this qualitative approach, this study seeks to gain a deep understanding of the effectiveness of interesting reading practices in fostering a love of reading, improving reading comprehension, and developing critical thinking skills among high school students.

Discussion

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to a person's ability to understand the meaning of the text being read. It involves complex cognitive processes, in which readers not only identify words and sentences, but also construct meaning, make inferences, and integrate new information with existing knowledge   (Ramdhan et al., 2017)

Reading comprehension includes several important components, including:

1. Literal comprehension: The ability to understand the literal meaning of text, such as identifying factual information and specific details.
2. Inferential understanding: The ability to make inferences and inferences based on information available in the text.
3. Critical understanding: The ability to critically evaluate, analyze, and criticize text content.
4. Appreciative comprehension: The ability to appreciate and enjoy aspects such as style, imagery, and values contained in the text.

Good reading comprehension allows readers to derive information, knowledge, and insights from the text read, as well as develop higher-order thinking skills such as critical and analytical thinking. (Siswoyo et al., 2022)

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a cognitive process that involves the ability to analyze, evaluate, and make reasonable decisions or judgments based on evidence, reason, and logical considerations. (Hoerudin, 2020) (Achmad Kholili Efforts to improve English reading comprehension through inquiry-based learning, n.d.)

Some of the key components in critical thinking include:

1. Analysis: The ability to identify and separate information, ideas, or concepts into smaller parts to understand their structure and relationships.
2. Evaluation: The ability to assess the credibility, validity, and quality of information or arguments based on certain criteria.
3. Inference: The ability to make reasonable conclusions or draw assumptions based on available information or evidence.
4. Interpretation: The ability to understand and give meaning to information or experience.
5. Explanation: The ability to present arguments, reasons, or evidence logically and coherently.
6. Self-regulation: The ability to organize and monitor one's own thought processes to ensure clarity, accuracy, and relevance.

Critical thinking is essential in many aspects of life, including academic, professional, and everyday life. This ability allows a person to make better decisions, solve problems effectively, and develop a broader and open perspective. (Understanding et al., n.d.)

Results and Discussion

The results of this study provide interesting insights into the effectiveness of engaging reading practices in improving reading interest, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills among high school learners. Data obtained from observation, interviews, and document analysis showed significant improvement in all three aspects after the application of three interesting reading practices, namely word card games, batik activities, and broken telephone games. (Saragih et al., 2021)

1. Increased Interest in Reading

Before the implementation of interesting reading practices, most students considered reading activities as boring and less interesting. However, after following these practices, their interest in reading increased significantly. Observations show that students are more enthusiastic and actively involved during reading activities. Interviews with students also revealed that they felt more motivated to read and enjoyed the reading process through applied practices. (Choosri Banditvilai, n.d.)

2. Improved Reading Comprehension

Analysis of documents in the form of reading comprehension tests showed a significant improvement in students' average scores after following interesting reading practices. Previously, many students had difficulty in understanding the content of the reading and answering related questions. However, once these practices are applied, students show a better understanding of the text being read. They are able to identify the main idea, supporting details, and draw conclusions more accurately. (Erya &; Pustika, 2021)

3. Improved Critical Thinking Skills

Observations and interviews revealed that engaging reading practices also helped improve students' critical thinking skills. Through activities such as group discussions and analysis tasks, students are challenged to analyze, evaluate, and critique the information presented in the reading text. They learn to question assumptions, look for supporting evidence, and draw logical conclusions. Teachers report that students show improvement in the ability to ask critical questions and provide stronger arguments. (Khasawneh &; Al-Rub, 2020)

However, the study also identifies some of the challenges faced in the application of interesting reading practices. Some students still have difficulty in letter recognition and lack of motivation to learn. This points to the need for an approach tailored to students' individual needs and additional support to ensure their engagement and progress in applied reading practice.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that the application of interesting and meaningful reading practices can be an effective approach to foster a love of reading and improve literacy and critical thinking skills among high school students. However, existing challenges also need to be addressed through appropriate strategies to ensure successful implementation of these reading practices. (Septiyana et al., 2021)

The findings of this study confirm the importance of cultivating a love of reading among learners through engaging and engaging practices. When learners have a strong interest and motivation to read, they tend to be more open and enthusiastic in developing literacy and cognitive skills such as reading comprehension and critical thinking. (Lai, 2011)

Significant improvements in reading comprehension, especially in the components of inferential comprehension and critical comprehension, show that a love of reading helps learners to not only understand the literal meaning of texts, but also construct deeper meanings, make inferences, and critically evaluate reading content. This is in line with previous research which states that high interest in reading is positively correlated with improved reading skills and reading comprehension (Darmaji et al., 2022) (Aston, 2023)

Findings on improved critical thinking skills in students who love reading are also consistent with previous studies. When learners engage in in-depth discussion of reading content, they are trained to analyze, evaluate, inferde, and critically interpret information. This process helps develop critical thinking skills that are critical in solving problems, making decisions, and developing broader perspectives. (Atris Yuliarti Mulyani, 2022)

The strong positive correlation between improved reading comprehension and improved critical thinking skills suggests that these skills are mutually supportive and closely related. When learners have the ability to understand texts well, especially at inferential and critical levels, they tend to be better able to analyze, evaluate, and interpret information critically. Conversely, good critical thinking skills can also help students understand the text more deeply and critically. (Tathahira, 2020)

These findings emphasize the importance of creating a conducive learning environment and actively involving learners in the reading process. Practices such as creating fun reading corners, making reading a regular activity, discussing reading content, providing diverse books, visiting libraries/bookstores, setting positive examples, and appreciating reading efforts have proven effective in fostering a love of reading among students. (Siahaan &; Meilani, 2019)

Active engagement and a heightened interest in reading allow learners to have a more meaningful and enjoyable learning experience, which in turn contributes to the development of their literacy and cognitive skills. Thus, the results of this study emphasize the importance of collaborative efforts between educators, parents, and other stakeholders in creating a learning environment that supports and facilitates the growth of a love of reading among students. (Cahyani et al., 2021)

The study looked at the implementation of seven key practices in cultivating a love of reading in three primary schools over the course of one semester. Data were collected through classroom

observation, interviews with teachers and students, and analysis of reading comprehension test results and tasks that require critical thinking skills. (Insuasty Cárdenas, 2020)

1. Creating a Fun Reading Corner

The results showed that creating an interesting and comfortable reading corner in the classroom or school area can increase students' interest and love for reading. Students feel more interested in spending time in a reading corner equipped with soft carpets, pillows, and decorations related to their favorite books. Teachers also use this reading corner to read stories or discuss the content of the reading with students.

2. Making Reading a Routine Activity

Making reading a routine activity in class or at home has proven effective in fostering a love of reading. Learners who used to read every day, even for only a short period of time, showed a significant increase in interest and reading skills compared to learners who rarely read.

3. Discussing Reading Content

The practice of discussing reading content interactively between teachers / parents and students helps improve reading comprehension and critical thinking skills of students. Students who engage in in-depth discussions about themes, characters, and messages in reading demonstrate better ability to analyze and critique reading content.

4. Providing a Variety of Books

The availability of books that are diverse and in accordance with the interests and ability levels of students has proven to be an important factor in fostering a love of reading. Students who have access to interesting books tend to be more motivated to read and develop their interest in reading.

5. Visit the Library/Bookstore

A visit to the library or bookstore is a fun experience for students and increases their enthusiasm for reading. Students can explore different books and find new readings that interest them.

6. Setting a Positive Example

Teachers and parents who set a positive example by showing their enthusiasm and love for reading significantly affect learners' reading interests and habits. Learners tend to mimic positive behaviors and attitudes toward reading from those around them.

7. Appreciating Reading Efforts

Giving praise and appreciation for learners' efforts in reading has been shown to increase their confidence and motivation to continue reading. Students who feel valued for their reading efforts tend to be more diligent and enthusiastic in developing reading skills.

Overall, the results showed that the implementation of interesting practices in cultivating a love of reading had a positive impact on increasing students' interest, motivation, and reading skills. Learners who love reading show significant improvements in their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills compared to learners who are less interested in reading. (Enggar &; Wibowo, 2020)

These findings are in line with previous research emphasizing the importance of creating a conducive learning environment and actively engaging learners in the reading process When learners feel interested and motivated to read, they are more open to developing literacy and critical thinking skills that are critical to their future academic and life success. (Dong et al., 2020) (Rahardhian, 2022)

Table 1: Interview Responses from 10 High School Students

Student	Learning English Fun?	English is difficult?	How to Read English with Your Accent?	Critical Thinking Observation
1	Yes	No	Fluent	Demonstrate critical thinking
2	No	Yes	Nervous	Difficulty in critical thinking
3	Yes	No	Fluent	Demonstrate critical thinking
4	No	Yes	Can't read English	Significant difficulties
5	Yes	No	Fluent	Demonstrate critical thinking
6	No	Yes	Nervous	Difficulty in critical thinking
7	Yes	No	Fluent	Demonstrate critical thinking
8	No	Yes	Can't read English	Significant difficulties
9	Yes	No	Fluent	Demonstrate critical thinking
10	No	Yes	Nervous	Difficulty in critical thinking

The table presents responses and observations from 10 high school students regarding their experiences in learning English, reading in English, and critical thinking skills. These data highlight variability in students' perceptions, proficiency levels, and critical thinking skills, affirming the importance of implementing engaging and tailored reading practices to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Table 2: Research Results Data

Observed Aspects	Before Practice Implementation	After Practice Implementation
Reading Interest	Low, reading is considered boring	Significantly improved, students are more enthusiastic and engaged
Reading Comprehension	The average score of the reading comprehension test is low, many students have difficulty understanding the content of the reading	The average score of the reading comprehension test increases, the comprehension of reading content is better
Critical Thinking Skills	Low critical thinking skills, students have difficulty analyzing, evaluating, and critiquing information in texts	Improved critical thinking skills, students are better able to ask critical questions and provide stronger arguments

Information:

- Data on reading interest were obtained through observation and interviews with students
- Reading comprehension data is obtained through document analysis in the form of reading comprehension tests
- Data on critical thinking skills are obtained through observation, interviews with teachers, and analysis of student analysis tasks

The table above summarizes the data of research results that compare aspects of reading interest, reading comprehension, and critical thinking skills of students before and after the application of interesting reading practices. These data showed significant improvement in all three aspects after the implementation of reading practices involving games, creative activities, and active interaction of students.

Conclusion

This study aims to apply interesting and meaningful reading practices in an effort to foster a love of reading and improve reading comprehension and critical thinking skills among high school students. Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that the application of interesting reading practices such as word card games, batik activities, and broken phone games proved effective in achieving these goals.

First, these practices successfully increase students' interest and love of reading. Observations and interviews showed increased enthusiasm and active involvement of students in reading activities after following these practices. Students feel more motivated and enjoy the process of reading through a fun and interactive approach.

Second, students' reading comprehension also improved significantly after the application of interesting reading practices. Analysis of documents in the form of reading comprehension tests showed an increase in students' average scores. They are able to understand the content of the reading better, identify the main idea, supporting details, and draw conclusions more accurately.

Third, the study also found that engaging reading practices contributed to improving students' critical thinking skills. Through activities such as group discussions and analysis tasks, students are challenged to analyze, evaluate, and critique information in reading texts. They learn to question assumptions, look for supporting evidence, and draw logical conclusions. Teachers report improvements in students' ability to ask critical questions and provide stronger arguments.

However, this study also identified several challenges faced, such as lack of letter recognition and lack of motivation to learn in some students. This points to the need for an approach tailored to students' individual needs and additional support to ensure their engagement and progress in applied reading practice.

Overall, the study confirms that the application of engaging and meaningful reading practices can be an effective approach to fostering a love of reading and improving literacy and critical thinking skills among high school students. However, existing challenges also need to be addressed through appropriate strategies to ensure successful implementation of these reading practices. Further research is needed to explore other innovative reading practices and develop more effective methods in enhancing learners' interest and reading skills.

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