

# IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION TEACHING METHOD

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## Abstract

This study aims to improve the reading comprehension skills of Class 8C students at SMPN 01 Mempawah Hilir. This Classroom Action Research was conducted in two cycles. The research data were obtained by observation and measurement techniques by using field notes, observation checklists, and tests. The data collected from field notes and the observation checklist were analyzed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The tests were analyzed by comparing the individual scores of the students from the first cycle to the scores in the second cycle to see the improvement in individual learning. Besides, the mean score and the percentage of classical learning completeness were also calculated to show students' overall improvement. Classically, the mean scores of the test results in the first cycle increased from 83.12 to 91.48 in the second cycle. Meanwhile, the percentage of classical learning completeness increased from 68% in the first cycle to 96% in the second cycle. In addition, based on the observation, the students learned more actively and enthusiastically in the class. It can be concluded that the Small Group Discussion teaching method has improved the Class 8C students' reading comprehension.

**Keywords:** Classroom Action Research; Reading Comprehension; Small Group Discussion

## INTRODUCTION

In the curriculum of Indonesian education, learning English has been implemented since elementary education, then moving up to secondary education to higher education. The main English skills being taught in the school are expected to train students to be able to pursue higher education and jobs related to English in the future. As supported by Özdemir and Akyol (2019), reading comprehension plays a crucial role in lifelong learning and students require the skill to understand important ideas of a text and make inferences according to the text and background knowledge. The reading comprehension skill as the proficiency in understanding written texts is an important element in the language learning process because it shows the students' understanding of the text, and how they interpret the meaning of a text being read.

Reading comprehension is a pillar of reading activity, where a student processes and constructs an understanding of a text. According to Clarke et al. (2014), reading comprehension has formed knowledge through the interconnection between written texts and the reaction of the reader to the texts. From the statement, it implies that reading comprehension pertains to the ability to comprehend, understand, and analyze a reading text which involves the thinking processes of the reader to do complex tasks in selecting facts, detailed information, and/or main ideas of a certain text.

This is also supported by Kurniadi et al. (2020), that text comprehension is an active process that necessitates interaction between students and the text for students to understand the main idea of the text and the detailed information discussed in the description. In this case, reading comprehension is influenced by language knowledge, comprehension ability, and thinking

processes which in the end the student will give meaningful conclusions related to what the writer wants to convey in a text. Thus, it will be a combination of the knowledge of language use with the ability to comprehend what is being processed in mind to result in a comprehensive conclusion.

Based on the pre-observation at SMP Negeri 01 Mempawah Hilir, the class 8C students faced several problems in reading comprehension. Firstly, the students faced difficulties in understanding and comprehending personal recount texts. When the researcher interviewed the English teacher, the teacher said that it took time for most of the students in the class to understand the personal recount text provided, because they were unfamiliar with the use of past verbs. Most students were also confused about finding detailed information in a personal recount text. Secondly, the learning outcomes of class 8C students on average are unsatisfactory. In other words, the scores of most students averagely did not reach 75 as the minimum mastery criterion.

There are various types of text in teaching reading for the English subject. The text that is used by the researcher as the material in this research is the personal recount text. Thornbury and Slade (2006) explain that a personal recount text refers to a text that retells an event that is personally experienced by the writer or the other person. Based on the statement, it can be implied that a personal recount text refers to a text that informs the student as the reader by retelling a past experience or an event that occurred in a person's life. In this research, the researcher uses the personal recount text as the material following the English subject syllabus of grade eight students.

Generally, there are three parts in the structure of a personal recount text. The three parts of the text structure are mentioned by Thornbury and Slade (2006) as follows:

- a. Orientation: The opening of a personal recount text that introduces the characters, the setting of time and the place in the event.
- b. Record of events: It retells the sequential events experienced by a person, it usually includes several additional details about each event.
- c. Coda or Reorientation: An evaluative comment or an opinion that is expressed personally after retelling the events being described.

Additionally, the researcher chose the personal recount text as the teaching topic for this study. As mentioned by Sartika et al. (2022), a recount text refers to the type of text that uses past events to enlighten or amuse the reader. The part of the personal recount text that needed to be comprehended by the students is mostly the record of events part. This part of the text usually raises several questions that refer to detailed information or questions about how things happened after or before an event. Therefore, this research is expected to help students improve their reading comprehension on personal recount texts by understanding the language features commonly used in the text, text structure, and chronological order of events.

In teaching reading, it is required for the teacher to choose a teaching method that can coordinate the students who have different abilities in comprehending written texts. As supported by Outey and Juli (2006), the small group discussion teaching method is the solution to teach reading comprehension to students at different language levels. Additionally, Dewanti (2020) mentions that the term "heterogeneous group" refers to a group that is distributed into students depending on diverse ability, gender, and ethnicity. In line with the statement above, the small group is formed heterogeneously based on the ability of each student. In one group, two to three students who understand English better will be grouped with other students who are still lacking in English. This is intended to form a balanced group composition and to ensure there is no formation of a group containing all students who are good at English while there are still many students in other groups who are lacking in English.

In the Small Group Discussion teaching method, there are two sections mentioned by Outey and Juli (2006) introduced as follows:

- a. Instructional materials: A part of the small group discussion teaching method that makes the reading comprehension lesson comprehensible. The materials can be in the form of resources or realia, books, and materials.
- b. Teaching moves or teaching stages: Stages of teaching that consist of Start-up or Connection, Give Information, Active Involvement, and Off You Go.

By seeing the classroom problems, the researcher offered the Small Group Discussion method as a solution to overcome the students' reading comprehension problems. A small group discussion allows the students to discuss the results of their reading on the personal recount text with their group mates. With that, there is an exchange of ideas to sort or combine thoughts to reach the conclusion of the reading. According to Galanes and Adams (2013), small groups in educational contexts are formed therefore students are able to understand a subject better by combining their knowledge, perceptions, and opinions. In the small group discussion, each group was discussing several questions that had two sections. In the first section, the students identified and rewrote each text structure of the personal recount text (the orientation, a record of events, and the re-orientation) distributed by the researcher. In the second section, the students comprehended the detailed information (events that occurred before or after others) and the communicative purpose of the text and then chose the correct answers.

There are several previous studies in the area of "Reading Comprehension" and "Small Group Discussion teaching method" conducted by other researchers. Siswanti et al. (2014) chose the report text as the teaching topic by applying the small group discussion teaching method in an action research. Another action research conducted by Angelianawati and Simamora (2018) used the tenth graders of the vocational high school as the research participants and the group division was decided by the teacher without a specific grouping system. Furthermore, the previous study conducted by Handayani et al. (2022) applied a quasi-experimental as the research design in finding out the effectiveness of Small Group Discussion method in teaching reading comprehension to the eighth grade students.

In this study, the research participants were the 25 students of class 8C in SMP Negeri 01 Mempawah Hilir. The research gaps that became distinctions between this study and previous studies are the teaching topic and the grouping system. The researcher chose the personal recount text as the teaching topic in the classroom while the previous research used report texts and descriptive texts. This study also has a grouping system that unites students based on their abilities in English, for example, students who have a better understanding are grouped with students who are weak in English so that each group has an even distribution of group member abilities, while the small groups in one previous study were decided by the teacher and did not use a specific grouping system.

Based on the research background above, the objective of this research is to describe how the Small Group Discussion teaching method improves the grade eight students' reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 01 Mempawah Hilir.

## METHOD

### Research Design

In this study, the research design is Classroom Action Research. According to Mackey and Gass (2022), action research is a research design undertaken by teachers and is typically carried out to address the problem or need in a classroom. To sum up, this research design assisted the researcher in identifying the problems that occur in the classroom and finding the appropriate solution to the existing problems. By conducting the classroom action research, the researcher

solved the existing problems of the classroom by applying the small group discussion teaching method to improve students' reading comprehension.

In this study, there were four stages of the research including planning, action, observing, and reflecting. The four stages are described as follows:

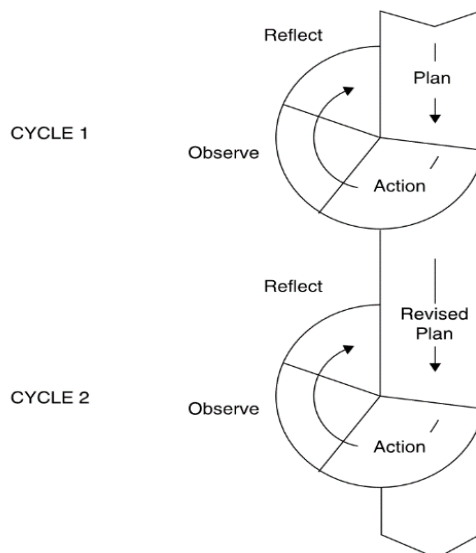


Figure 1. Action Research Model According to Kemmis and McTaggart in Burn (2010, p. 9)

In the planning stage, it involved developing a plan of some action which was designed to solve the students' problems in reading comprehension. In this stage, the researcher discussed with and asked the English teacher's opinion about the preparation for teaching activity in the action stage. The researcher prepared the lesson plan, teaching material, teaching media and test items which had been discussed together and approved by the English teacher as the collaborator in this research.

In the action stage, it involved implementing teaching plan to put into action. In this research, the researcher took the action as a teacher in applying the Small Group Discussion method in the class. The English teacher of the school as the collaborator became an observer during the process of teaching and learning in the classroom.

In the observing stage, the English teacher and a colleague of the researcher as collaborators in this study helped the researcher in observing the process of teaching and learning occurred in the action stage. The collaborators took notes on the teaching and learning activities, and checked lists of several observational guidance which include how the researcher as a teacher and the students' interaction, how the researcher used the teaching material and how the researcher formed the small groups.

In the reflecting stage, the researcher did reflection on the collected data that had been taken in the action stage, and then used it as a basis for further planning in the next cycle.

### Participants of the Study

The research participants of this study were the Class 8C students of SMP Negeri 01 Mempawah Hilir in the Academic Year 2022/2023. There were a total of 25 students in the class who participated in the study.

### Research Setting

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 01 Mempawah Hilir. The school is located at Jl. Gusti Abdul Hamid, Terusan, Kec. Mempawah Hilir, Kab. Mempawah, Kalimantan Barat.

### Research Instrument

In this research, the researcher collected the research data in both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data of this study was obtained through observation, while the quantitative data was acquired by conducting measurement data. The observation was done during the process of teaching and learning. During the observation, the observers took notes on the process by using field notes and observation checklists. The observation checklists were used to guide the researcher in observing one of or both students' and teachers' behaviors during the teaching and learning process.

The measurement data was in form of numerical data that was obtained through reading comprehension tests. Therefore, the measurement was done by calculating the average or mean score and the percentage of classical learning completeness. The classical learning completeness measures the level of success of students' learning as a whole. The percentage of classical learning completeness targeted in this study was 90% of 25 students in class 8C passing the KKM.

### Data Collection

The data for this study were acquired through the utilization of field notes, observation checklists, and reading comprehension tests. The field notes were used to record the collaborator's observation throughout the process of teaching and learning and the students' small group discussion activities. The observation checklists were used as the guidelines in observing both students' and the teacher's behaviors during the teaching and learning process. The reading comprehension tests related to certain topics of a personal recount text were given to the students to test their reading comprehension abilities.

### Data Analysis

Following the collection of research data, the researcher proceeded to analyze the results derived from field notes, observation checklists, and students' tests. In analyzing the data collected from field notes and the observation checklist, the researcher conducted three components as mentioned by Miles et al. (2014) which include data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.

In analyzing the results of students' reading comprehension tests, the researcher calculated the mean or average score (as in Burn, 2010) and the percentage of classical completeness (as in Woa, 2021) by using these formulas:

- a. Mean Score:

$$M = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

*in which:*

M = Mean (average) of the student's score

$\sum X$  = the sum (total) of the student's score

N = the total number of students

- b. Percentage of Classical Learning Completeness:

$$\text{Classical completeness} = \frac{\sum \text{the students who get } \geq 75}{\sum \text{the students in the class}} \times 100\%$$

In SMP Negeri 01 Mempawah Hilir, the student is declared to have passed the minimum mastery criteria if one gets a score of at least 75. Thus the targeted mean score to be achieved in this research was 75. Meanwhile, the classical learning completeness measures the level of success of students' learning as a whole. The percentage of classical learning completeness targeted in this study was 90% of 25 students in class 8C passing the KKM.

The students' reading comprehension scores were collected by considering the criteria:

Table 1. Scoring Rubric of Reading Comprehension

No.	Criteria	Score	Question Number in Cycle I	Question Number in Cycle II	Total of Item
1.	Students can identify <i>who, when and where</i> in the orientation part of the personal recount text.	10	Section 1 No. 1	Section 1 No. 1	1
2.	Students can identify an event based on its sequence from a personal recount text.	30	Section 1 No. 2, 3, 4	Section 1 No. 2, 3, 4	3
3.	Students can identify the re-orientation part of the personal recount text.	10	Section 1 No. 5	Section 1 No. 5	1
4.	Students can identify information contained in the personal recount text.	30	Section 2 No. 1, 2, 4	Section 2 No. 1, 3, 4	3
5.	Students can identify an event that occurred before or after other event by reading a series of activities in the personal recount text chronologically.	10	Section 2 No. 3	Section 2 No. 2	1
6.	Students can identify the communicative purpose of the personal recount text.	10	Section 2 No. 5	Section 2 No. 5	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>			<b>10</b>

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

After conducting the first cycle, the researcher analyzed field notes, observation checklists, and measurement data. In Cycle I, the mean score of the students' reading comprehension test was 83.12 from 25 students, which means that it was greater than 75 as the KKM or Minimum Mastery Criteria. However, there were still 8 students who scored below 75, which means that these students had not passed the minimum mastery criteria. In addition, the percentage of classical completeness showed only 68% of 25 students who passed the minimal mastery criteria. This means that it had not reached the expected percentage of this study, namely 90% of 25 students in Class 8C.



In Cycle II, the mean score of the reading comprehension test was 91.48 from 25 students. It showed a better result than the mean score in the first cycle which was 83.12. However, as shown in the table above, there was one student who scored below 75 which means that the students had not passed the minimum mastery criteria. Regardless of one student who had not meet the minimum mastery criteria, the percentage of classical completeness in this cycle showed 96% of 25 students who had passed the minimum mastery criteria. The percentage in this cycle had increased from the previous cycle which had 68% and it had completed the expected percentage of this study which was 90% of 25 students in Class 8C. The students' scores in Cycle I and Cycle II can be seen in the table 1 below.

Table 2. The Students' Test Results in Cycle I and Cycle II

No.	Students	Cycle I	Cycle II	Improvement
1	AR	100	100	—
2	ANFS	100	100	—
3	AEH	50	100	↑
4	CJ	70	80	↑
5	CIB	95	100	↑
6	CAL	72	95	↑
7	CMB	95	95	—
8	DAP	90	82	↓
9	DS	60	80	↑
10	DA	100	98	↓
11	H	90	95	↑
12	JCRS	100	100	—
13	MRAP	90	68	↓
14	NAF	47	100	↑
15	NK	70	100	↑
16	NML	100	95	↓
17	NZM	47	90	↑
18	RB	90	82	↓
19	RR	100	100	—
20	RA	85	95	↑
21	SC	90	82	↓
22	SR	90	82	↓
23	TPK	70	100	↑
24	ZS	77	90	↑
25	ZMY	100	78	↓
<b>Total Score</b>		2078	2287	
<b>Mean</b>		83.12	91.48	
<b>Classical Completeness</b>		68%	96%	

*Note.* This table demonstrates the students' improvement by comparing the test results of the two cycles. The three symbols as shown in the table were (↑) means improved, (—) means stayed/same, and (↓) means decreased.

Of the twelve students who had improved (↑), four students of them got improvement from the first cycle to the second cycle, they were also helping their group mates to understand the group task related to the personal recount text. The eight of twelve students scored under 75 in the first cycle. However, in the second cycle, they had better discussions with students in their

respective groups such as Group 1, Group 2, Group 3, and Group 5. The students who remained the same scores (–) as the first cycle were from Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3. The students got the same score in each cycle. Based on the observation, the students seemed to have consistency in the teaching and learning process. During the material explanation, the students understood the lesson fast and actively answered the researcher's questions. In the group discussion, the students participated actively in the group discussion.

Meanwhile, eight students got a decreased in scores, they are: Four students from Group 4 even though based on their observations, the discussion went well and one student of the group was included in the improved one. Two students from Group 1 and Group 3 had only two and five points decreased from the first cycle. The other two students who had a quite decreased in scores were from Group 2 and Group 5 although they had very good scores in the first cycle. Based on the observation, both were once talking out of topic when their own groups discussed on the group task. Although the eight students' scores in Cycle II decreased from their scores in Cycle I, they still passed the minimum mastery criteria (75).

After carrying out the four stages of Small Group Discussion teaching method within two meetings, the students have improved their reading comprehension. In the "Start-up" stage, the students formed the background knowledge of personal recount texts in the first cycle and developed it better in the second cycle. In the "Give Information" and "Active Involvement" stages, there were several students who initially did not pay attention to the researcher's explanation which focused on the process of vocabulary knowledge and understanding of text structure in the first cycle. However, with the addition of teaching media and a mini game in the second cycle, most students paid attention to the explanation and were more focused when discussing questions in the previous group task with the researcher. In the "Off You Go" stage, there were still 2 groups that carried out discussions less than optimally due to the constraints of group members who had not yet adapted to the small group. However, in the second cycle, the entire group discussed quite smoothly even though there were still some students who were sometimes distracted during the discussion.

## Discussion

In this study, the researcher applied Small Group Discussions as the teaching method to improve the reading comprehension skills of the 8C class students. The researcher used the chosen teaching method to solve the students' problems in comprehending personal recount texts. The most difficult part of the personal recount text for the students was the detailed information, which is mostly found in the "record of events" part. The students' problems in comprehending the personal recount text resulted in their unsatisfactory task scores.

Based on the results of the two cycles in the process of the research, the findings showed that there was an improvement in the students' test scores from the first cycle to the second cycle. This implies that the students' reading comprehension has been improved after the Small Group Discussion teaching method applied in the classroom. Besides, the Small Group Discussion teaching method in this study has also constructed an improved teaching and learning process. The process of teaching and learning carried out within two cycles has a positive impact on students' improvement in reading comprehension, as evidenced by the test results.

In the first cycle, the results of the students' reading comprehension test had not met the targeted mean score and percentage of classical completeness. Moreover, based on observations, several students did not pay much attention when the researcher gave an explanation regarding personal recount text. During the small group discussion, several students were still passive and shy to



involve in the discussions which caused the discussion process to be less optimal. From several students' answers on the individual test, they still could not identify the sequence of events chronologically based on their reading comprehension correctly and had difficulty in understanding and answering questions related to the detailed information contained in the personal recount text.

In the second cycle, the results of students' reading comprehension test had passed the targeted mean score and percentage of classical completeness. Based on the observation, the students seemed more enthusiastic in small group activities than the previous meeting and be more serious during the small group discussion. Most of the students could identify the sequence of events in chronological order and answer the questions related to the implicit information contained in the personal recount text correctly.

The finding of this research is in line with the finding of action research in Siswanti et al. (2012) that the heterogeneous grouping system helps in improving students' reading comprehension of the report text. Similarly, the heterogeneous grouping system in this study has contributed positive impact on the teaching and learning process in the reading comprehension lesson. 1-2 students who have good knowledge in English are grouped together with students who have lack knowledge in English. This is to ensure that there are no overpowered or weak groups. During the discussion, students who had better abilities could improve their own abilities by sharing knowledge and explaining what one understood to their group mates. The group mates were also helped by the group discussions and explanations from the students on the assigned personal recount text in the group task. The students helped each other and shared their ideas in understanding the personal recount text and doing the group task together so that it resulted in the improvement of students' reading comprehension.

The other related study, an action research conducted by Angelianawati and Simamora (2018) which involved the tenth graders of the vocational high school as the research participants. It revealed similar improvement in students' reading comprehension that could be seen from the increase of mean scores from Cycle I to Cycle II. However, in the related study, the group division was carried out without a specific grouping system. While, in this study, the grouping system was formed heterogeneously based on the ability of each student. Other than that, the related study used the reshuffling group system in the second cycle to solve the weakness in the first cycle. While, this current study used a mini game as the small group activity in the second cycle. During the mini game, the small groups seemed excited to do the activity. With this group activity as the bonding, students in each group become more active and coordinate with each other with their group mates in the next small group activity.

The finding of the current study is also in line with a quasi-experimental study conducted by Handayani et al. (2022). The Small Group Discussion teaching method has a positive impact on students' reading comprehension test results compared to the group of students who were taught without using the Small Group Discussion teaching method. Despite the difference in the research design, where the current study was a Classroom Action Research and did not use a control and experimental group, the result of the current study has a similarity to the previous study. Before doing the current study, the English teacher in the classroom always used the lecture and conventional method which included explanation from the teacher, whole class question and answer, reading textbook and doing on individual exercises. The repeated teaching and learning patterns was also likely to cause the students' unsatisfactory learning outcomes, according to the English teacher of the class. In this Small Group Discussion teaching method, the teaching was supported by instructional materials such as the use of PowerPoint slides as

the visual media to present the personal recount text material in colorful display and the addition of a mini game activity as one of the small group activities. In that way, students were attracted and excited to the teaching and learning activity, where previously students were passive and bored with the lecture teaching method during the lesson.

In conclusion, the use of Small Group Discussion as the teaching method to improve the students' reading comprehension reveals a significant improvement in the students' scores. The teaching stages of Small Group Discussion teaching method which consist of Start-up or Connection, Give Information, Active Involvement and Off You Go and the use of teaching media and mini game activities in the second cycle have contributed positively in the students' improvement in reading comprehension.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented in the preceding section, the students' improvement in reading comprehension was supported by the components of small group discussion teaching method. The components were the instructional materials and teaching moves or the stages of the small group discussion teaching method. The instructional materials such as Jenga block as the realia in the mini game and PowerPoint slides as the teaching media. By incorporating the realia, it basically invited students' interest at the initial small group activity before proceeding to the reading comprehension lesson. Besides that, the use of PowerPoint slides presented important points that students should know about personal recount text (the definition, the social function, language features, the text structure and the example of the personal recount text) clearly and concisely. All stages of Small Group Discussion teaching method and the use of teaching media and mini game activities added to the second cycle play an important role in the students' improvement in reading comprehension. The integration between the use of instructional materials and the teaching stages of Small Group Discussion method has provided positive impact on the class 8C students' improvement in reading comprehension.

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