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The Implementation of Problem-Based Learning in Teaching Reading Descriptive Text to Eighth Grade Students at SMPN 2 Cibugel

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Abstract

This study investigated the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching reading descriptive text to eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Cibugel and explored the obstacles encountered during the learning process. The study employed a descriptive qualitative design involving 22 eighth-grade students in the 2023/2024 academic year. The data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results revealed that the implementation of PBL followed five stages: orientation, organization, investigation, presentation, and analysis. The model was effective in promoting meaningful learning, student engagement, and active problem solving in reading activities. However, several obstacles were identified during the implementation, namely limited vocabulary, difficulties in collaboration, and difficulties in oral presentation. These results indicate that although PBL can create a dynamic and student-centered learning environment in teaching reading descriptive text, its successful implementation requires additional support in vocabulary development, group participation, and speaking confidence.

Keywords: Problem-Based Learning; Reading Descriptive Text; Qualitative Research; Students' Obstacles; Junior High School

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill in English language learning because it enables students to understand written information, develop knowledge, and support the mastery of other language skills (Grabe & Stoller, 2013). In the school context, reading also becomes a major component of classroom activity because students are expected to comprehend various text types and extract meaning effectively from written discourse. Grabe & Stoller (2013) define reading as the ability to draw meaning from written text and interpret it appropriately, while Sun Yuanke (2021) emphasizes that reading also involves conceptual understanding and visualization. In addition, Arwita Putri et al.,(2023) argue that reading requires the ability to process written symbols, apply techniques, and understand content accurately. These perspectives indicate that reading instruction should not merely focus on pronunciation or word recognition, but should also build comprehension and critical engagement with texts.

In junior high school, one of the important genres taught in English is descriptive text (Kaganang et al., 2019). This genre requires students to identify and understand detailed information related to people, places, animals, or objects (Dwi et al., 2019). Rahmayanti et al. (2023)state that descriptive text is used to describe people, places, or things in such a way that a mental image is formed in the reader's mind. In addition, descriptive text commonly uses present tense, adjectives, linking verbs, and detailed descriptions from general to specific

information (Waruwu, 2023). Therefore, teaching descriptive text requires students not only to read literally, but also to process characteristics and details in an organized way.

However, classroom observation and initial interviews at SMPN 2 Cibugel revealed that many eighth-grade students still struggled to comprehend descriptive texts due to limited vocabulary. This constraint hindered their ability to identify textual meaning, describe animals in English, and participate actively in learning. Vocabulary mastery is crucial because it directly influences reading comprehension and students' ability to respond meaningfully to texts (Habsah et al., 2025). Traditional reading instruction at the school tends to rely on routine activities such as worksheet completion, word translation, or vocabulary memorization. Although these practices may support basic recognition, they rarely promote critical thinking, collaborative inquiry, or meaningful engagement with texts (Brown, 2004). Consequently, a more student-centered and contextual approach is needed to enhance reading comprehension effectively.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) offers a potential solution by presenting students with authentic problems and encouraging collaborative investigation to construct knowledge. Through its five stages—orientation, organization, investigation, presentation, and analysis—PBL promotes active, independent, and reflective learning (Arends 2012, as cited by Setyaningrum et al., 2023). In reading instruction, PBL can help students connect text comprehension with real-life contexts, making learning more meaningful.

Several previous studies have reported positive contributions of PBL to students' reading development. Rosmiyati (2021) found that PBL improved students' reading comprehension achievement. Rosyidin et al. (2022) and Lahonda et al. (2023) also reported positive effects of PBL on reading comprehension. These studies suggest that PBL has strong potential in reading instruction. However, studies specifically describing how PBL is implemented in teaching reading descriptive text at the junior high school level, as well as the obstacles encountered by students during the process, remain limited.

Therefore, this study was conducted to describe the implementation of Problem-Based Learning in teaching reading descriptive text and to identify the students' obstacles during the process at the eighth grade of SMPN 2 Cibugel. The results of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by providing a clearer description of how PBL can be applied in reading instruction and what supporting factors need to be strengthened.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research method with a descriptive qualitative design (Creswell, 2018). The study aimed to investigate students' experiences and perspectives on the implementation of Problem-Based Learning in teaching reading descriptive text. A descriptive qualitative design was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to present a systematic and factual description of the phenomenon being investigated and to reflect participants' experiences closely (Bradshaw et al., 2017, as cited in Doyle et al., 2020)
The study was conducted at SMPN 2 Cibugel. The participants were 22 eighth-grade students in the 2023/2024 academic year. The class was selected because many students in this setting experienced difficulties in comprehending English texts, especially descriptive texts.

To enhance the credibility of the data, the study applied triangulation through two instruments: observation and interviews. Observation was used to record classroom activities during the implementation of the five stages of PBL, while interviews were conducted after the teaching and learning process to gather students' responses and identify the obstacles they experienced during the implementation (Mazhar, 2021)

The implementation of PBL was conducted in two sessions. The first session, held on 21 February 2024, covered the stages of orientation, organization, and investigation and involved 22 students. The second session, held on 23 February 2024, continued with the presentation and analysis stages and involved 19 students. The learning material focused on descriptive texts about animals, which were relevant to the eighth-grade curriculum.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of data analysis consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Matthew B. Miles, 2014). In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused the data based on the research objectives. In the data display stage, the data were organized and described narratively. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the results and verified them to ensure consistency with the observed and reported data

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in this study followed the five stages proposed by Arends: orientation, organization, investigation, presentation, and analysis. The implementation was conducted in teaching descriptive texts about animals to eighth-grade students. The results presented in this section were obtained through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews conducted during the learning process.

1. **Implementation of Problem-Based Learning in Teaching Reading Descriptive Text**
   Orientation

   During the orientation stage, the researcher introduced the learning objectives and presented an authentic problem related to descriptive texts about animals. Students were asked to imagine that a local zoo needed descriptive signs for animal cages so that visitors could understand the characteristics of the animals. Based on classroom observations, many students experienced difficulty answering the initial questions because they had limited vocabulary to describe animals in English. After receiving examples and explanations from the researcher, the students gradually understood the learning task and were ready to continue to the next stage.

   Organization

   During the organization stage, students were divided into heterogeneous groups consisting of four to five members. Each member was assigned a specific role, including discussion leader, note-taker, researcher, and presenter. The researcher also distributed guiding questions and a checklist of descriptive text elements to support group discussions. Observation showed that most groups were able to complete the assigned tasks. However, some groups demonstrated unequal participation, as several students were less involved in the discussion. Interview data indicated that most students did not experience major difficulties in carrying out the assigned group activities.

Investigation

During the investigation stage, students worked collaboratively to gather information from descriptive texts and identify the characteristics of the assigned animals. The researcher monitored each group, answered students' questions, and explained unfamiliar vocabulary when necessary. Based on classroom observations and interviews, most students were able to identify relevant information from the reading materials and complete the investigation activities. Although several students initially experienced difficulty analyzing the texts, they were able to continue the activities after receiving guidance from the researcher.

Presentation

During the presentation stage, each group presented the results of its discussion in front of the class. Observation showed that all groups were able to present their work. However, many students experienced difficulty expressing their ideas orally in English. Their presentations were frequently interrupted by pauses, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation problems, which affected the clarity of their explanations.

Analysis

During the analysis stage, the researcher guided students to reflect on the learning activities and discuss the solutions they had developed throughout the learning process. Students participated in question-and-answer sessions after each group presentation and were encouraged to provide comments and feedback. Observation indicated that many students actively responded to questions, shared opinions, and participated in the reflection activities.

2. Students' Obstacles in Comprehending Descriptive Text through PBL

The classroom observations and interviews identified three main obstacles experienced by students during the implementation of PBL in learning descriptive texts: limited vocabulary, difficulties in collaboration, and difficulties in oral presentation.

Limited Vocabulary

Limited vocabulary was the most frequently reported obstacle during the learning process. Students often experienced difficulty understanding unfamiliar words and describing animals in English. This result was supported by interview responses. One student stated, *"Yes, when the teacher asked me to mention the descriptions of animals, I felt confused when I had to say it in English"* (S1). Another student explained, *"I was confused, and my brain went blank when the teacher asked me to mention the characteristics of rabbits"* (S2). These responses indicate that students experienced difficulty understanding and expressing information because of their limited English vocabulary.

Difficulties in Collaboration

Observation and interview data showed that collaboration was not equally effective across all groups. Although most groups completed the assigned tasks, several students participated less actively during group discussions. One student stated, *"When doing assignments together, only two people help, while the rest play with their cellphones and say they don't know what to do"* (S3). Another student commented, *"During group work not everyone participates; some students remain silent and do not want to help others"*

(S4). These results indicate that unequal participation occurred during collaborative learning activities.

Difficulties in Oral Presentation

Students also experienced challenges during the presentation stage. Classroom observations showed that many students hesitated while presenting because they had difficulty expressing their ideas in English. This result was supported by interview data. One student stated, *"During the presentation, I didn't feel confident, and I was confused about what to say because I didn't know what to say in English"* (S5). Another student explained, *"When I was presenting, I knew the English language, but it was difficult to say it. I was afraid it would be wrong"* (S6). These results indicate that limited vocabulary and low confidence affected students' oral presentations.

Discussion

The results indicate that the implementation of Problem-Based Learning generally promoted students' active engagement in learning descriptive texts. The authentic problems presented during the orientation stage encouraged students to activate their prior knowledge and participate in classroom discussions. This result supports the principle of PBL proposed by Barrows and Tamblyn (1980 as cited in Setyaningrum et al., 2023), who argue that authentic problems stimulate meaningful learning.

Furthermore, collaborative learning during the organization and investigation stages enabled most students to identify information from descriptive texts effectively. The use of group roles and guiding questions appeared to facilitate students' participation and problem-solving processes. These results are consistent with Lahonda & Karmila (2023)and Li & Sihes (2022), who reported that PBL improves students' reading comprehension through collaborative inquiry.

However, the results also reveal that several obstacles reduced the effectiveness of PBL. Limited vocabulary emerged as the most prominent challenge, affecting students' ability to comprehend descriptive texts and communicate their ideas during discussions and presentations. This result is consistent with Habsah et al., (2025), who emphasize that vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to reading comprehension and language production.
Another challenge involved unequal participation during group discussions. Although PBL emphasizes collaborative learning, some students remained passive while others dominated the activities. This imbalance limited opportunities for shared knowledge construction and reduced the effectiveness of group work. Similar results were reported by Oktavia et al., (2024), who noted that successful PBL implementation depends on active participation from all group members.

Finally, students experienced considerable difficulty during oral presentations because of limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems, and low self-confidence. These results suggest that while PBL effectively supports reading comprehension, it may not sufficiently develop students' oral communication skills without additional instructional support. Therefore, integrating vocabulary reinforcement and speaking practice into PBL activities could enhance students' confidence and presentation performance. This interpretation supports (Hidayati & Wagiran (2020) and Ismail & Edi (2022), who emphasize that communication skills are essential for the successful implementation of PBL.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) model in teaching reading descriptive text at the eighth grade of SMPN 2 Cibugel during the 2023/2024 academic year was consistent with the lesson plan and created an active, meaningful, and dynamic learning environment. Through the stages of PBL, students were encouraged to participate more actively in reading activities and problem solving, indicating that the model was effectively implemented in accordance with its instructional objectives.

The study also identified three main obstacles faced by students in comprehending descriptive text through PBL, namely limited vocabulary, difficulties in collaboration, and difficulties in oral presentation. Limited vocabulary hindered students' understanding of the text and their ability to express ideas, while collaborative challenges emerged because not all group members participated equally. In addition, some students experienced a lack of confidence when presenting their results in English. These results suggest that, although PBL was effective in promoting active learning, additional support is still required to strengthen students' language proficiency and collaborative skills.

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