

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

English has become the dominant international language, serving as the primary means of communication across sectors such as education, economics, diplomacy, and technology. In today's globalized environment, access to knowledge, innovation, and collaboration is largely facilitated through the English language. According to the International Language Center (2024), mastering English is a vital skill for navigating global connectivity, as it enables the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and culture among diverse communities. Similarly, Mauliska et al. (2024) highlight that English serves as a bridge for communication, strengthening international cooperation and understanding. As a result, English reading comprehension is not only an academic requirement but also a strategic competency that enables individuals to participate and contribute to the global flow of information.

In English language learning, reading occupies a central position among the four key skills -listening, speaking, reading, and writing- because it helps students gain knowledge and improve their language abilities. Grabe and Stoller (2019) emphasize that reading provides students with the means to expand their vocabulary, internalize grammar, and apply comprehension strategies essential for proficiency. Meanwhile, Anderson (2014) describes that reading is a thinking process where

readers use their existing knowledge to create understanding from written words. When learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia, reading comprehension means actively thinking about texts to find identify main ideas, infer meaning, and evaluate arguments. Therefore, helping students understand what they read not only just improve their language skills but also helps them how to think deeply and carefully for successful academic and global participation.

In response to developments in 21st-century of education, the Indonesian Ministry of Education introduced the Kurikulum Merdeka. This new curriculum focuses on learning that is centered around the student, helps them develop reading and writing skills, and builds good character through learning that is connected to real-life situations and meaningful experiences. In this context, narrative texts are a key part of English language learning in junior high school, which helps students' linguistic and moral development by teaching them to interpret meaning and understand the cultural and ethical values contained in these stories (Febrianti et al., 2023). Therefore, students' understanding of narrative texts is a critical measure of their literacy achievement in the Kurikulum Merdeka.

Although the curriculum aims to improve literacy skills, the latest 2022 PISA results for Indonesia show that students' reading skills remain relatively low. This is because schools in Indonesia still use a teacher-centered approach in teaching English in the classroom. This suggests that a teacher-dominated learning environment can limit students' opportunities to actively interact, discuss meaning, or clarify understanding through collaboration (Bhardwaj et al., 2025). Conversely, a study by

Almadayanti and Nugroho (2023) found that implementing student-centered learning methods significantly improved students' reading comprehension and motivation by fostering greater interaction, autonomy, and collaboration among classmates during the learning process. This shows that when reading activities are transformed into interactive and communicative experiences rather than mechanical routines, students develop deeper understanding and analytical skills that support lifelong literacy development.

The implementation of Cooperative Learning Theory supports this pedagogical transformation. According to Johnson and Johnson (2013), cooperative learning emphasizes the value of students working together in structured groups or pairs, where each member contributes to group goals, supports peers' learning, and is individually accountable. Through active collaboration, peer support, and face-to-face interaction, students can develop a deeper understanding, foster positive social skills, and achieve improved learning outcomes. This collaborative, student-centered approach is highly aligned with the values and objectives of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

In an effort to find effective strategies for teaching reading that can increase students' interest and mastery, the Partner Reading Strategy has emerged as a promising alternative. This strategy involves pairing two students to read alternately, allowing them to help and correct each other in real-time during reading activities. Nurafni (2019) explains that the Partner Reading Strategy provides opportunities for students to talk and think about information together, which helping them to better understand the content of the text. Rutgers and Schwanenflugel (2006) found that

students who regularly engaged in the Pair Reading Strategy showed significant improvement in reading fluency, demonstrating the strategy's ability to model fluent reading and provide positive feedback for reading skills. In addition, Meisinger et al. (2004) describe partner reading as a process in which students support each other in reading connected texts alternately until completion, while providing encouragement and corrective assistance when reading errors occur. This peer interaction fosters fluency, comprehension, social skills, and confidence. Studies by Zulmaidah et al. (2020) show that partner reading significantly improves students' reading motivation and understanding, especially in narrative texts, by combining academic skill development with social engagement.

Based on the author's observations at SMPN 2 Tanjungpinang, reading activities generally follow a teacher-centred approach, where students are expected to read independently and answer questions without engaging in peer discussion or collaboration. In contrast, most existing research on the Partner Reading Strategy has been conducted in schools that adopt a student-centered approach and active classroom interaction. This gap highlights the need to test how the effect of the Partner Reading Strategy works in the learning setting at SMPN 2 Tanjungpinang. Therefore, this study, entitled "The Effect of Partner Reading Strategy on Students' Reading Comprehension of Narrative Texts at SMPN 2 Tanjungpinang," aims to find out if using this strategy can significantly improve students' ability to understand narrative texts, and how it can help create a more interactive and student-centred learning practices.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

In light of the research background presented above, several issues can be identified regarding students' comprehension of narrative texts at SMPN 2 Tanjungpinang. Students tend to read only to find answers without building a complete understanding, the learning process is still teacher-centered with limited interaction among classmates. Students have limited opportunities to interact and collaborate with their peers during reading activities, and the effectiveness of the Partnered Reading Strategy in this context has not yet been studied.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem

This research focuses specifically on examining the effect of the Partner Reading Strategy on the reading comprehension of narrative texts among eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Tanjungpinang. This study does not examine other reading strategies, other types of texts, or other language skills.

1.4 Research Question

In accordance with the research limitation presented above, the following research question is proposed:

Does the Partner Reading Strategy have a significant effect on the reading comprehension of narrative texts among eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Tanjungpinang?

1.5 The Objective of the Research

In line with the research question formulated above, this study aims to determine whether the Partner Reading Strategy has a significant effect on the reading comprehension of narrative texts among eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Tanjungpinang.

1.6 The Significance of the Research

The findings of this study are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the teaching and learning of reading comprehension, particularly through the implementation of the Partner Reading Strategy.

1.6.1 Theoretically

This study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the field of English Language Teaching by expanding existing knowledge through the Partner Reading Strategy to improve students' reading comprehension, particularly in understanding narrative texts.

1.6.2 Practically

1. Teachers

This study is expected to provide valuable insight for teachers, particularly English teachers, in selecting and implementing effective instructional strategies to improve students' reading comprehension of narrative texts.

2. Students

The finding of this study are expected to provide students with a better understanding of how the Partner Reading Strategy can be used to improve their reading comprehension of narrative texts.

3. Other researchers

The finding of this study are expected to provide reference for future researchers who conducting reading instruction, especially studies focusing related on pair-based learning techniques such as the Partner Reading Strategy.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1. Partner Reading Strategy

★ The Partner Reading Strategy refers to a cooperative learning method in which two students collaborate by reading and discussing a text together to enhance their understanding. One student reads aloud while the other listens, provides feedback, and helps clarify difficult parts. Then, they switch roles. This strategy is designed to improve comprehension through interaction, mutual support, and active participation.

2. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to the ability to construct and interpret meaning from written texts. In this study, it specifically involves identifying main ideas, drawing inferences, recognizing explicit and implicit information, and relating the content of narrative texts to students' prior knowledge.

3. Narrative Text

Narrative text is a literary genre commonly taught in the junior high school level. It designs to tell an event or series of events, whether imaginative or factual, to entertain readers. In this research, narrative texts are used as reading materials to assess students' comprehension.

