AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION LEVEL AT NURUL FALAH SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL PEKANBARU

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the reading comprehension levels of students at Nurul Falah Senior High School Pekanbaru, focusing on three distinct categories: literal, inferential, and critical comprehension. A quantitative descriptive approach was employed, utilizing a reading comprehension test as the primary instrument. The population included 110 students, with a simple random sampling method selecting 20% for the study. The analysis revealed that the average literal comprehension score was 87.27, categorized as very good, indicating strong performance at this level. For inferential comprehension, the average score was 79.54, classified as good, demonstrating the students' ability to infer information effectively. However, the critical comprehension score averaged 53.75, falling into the less proficient category, highlighting a need for improvement in higher-order thinking skills. The findings underscore the necessity for targeted interventions to enhance critical reading abilities while sustaining strengths in literal and inferential comprehension. This research contributes to the broader discourse on literacy education, offering practical insights for educators and policymakers aiming to develop comprehensive reading skills in high school students.

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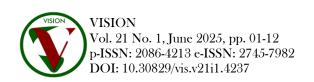e-mail: anggunoctaviani681@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The enhancement of human resources through education is a cornerstone of national development, particularly in an era defined by rapid technological advancement and global interconnectedness. Among the foundational competencies required for educational success, reading stands out as a critical skill that underpins the acquisition of knowledge, the development of cognitive abilities, and the cultivation of lifelong learning habits. Reading is not merely a mechanical process of decoding symbols; it is a complex cognitive activity that enables individuals to interpret, analyze, and engage with information meaningfully. As Dupuis (1992) asserts, reading is a central component of educational attainment and scientific literacy, serving as a gateway to intellectual growth and personal empowerment.

In the Indonesian context, however, reading proficiency remains a significant challenge. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the Organisation

for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2018 revealed that Indonesia ranked among the lowest globally in reading literacy, with an average score of 371—substantially below the OECD average of 487 (OECD, 2019). This stark disparity highlights systemic issues in literacy education and reflects a broader concern regarding students' ability to comprehend, interpret, and critically engage with texts. The implications of this deficiency are profound, affecting not only academic performance but also students' capacity to participate effectively in civic and professional life.
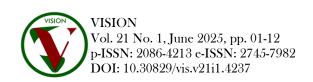
Within the framework of Indonesia's independent curriculum, secondary school students are expected to demonstrate proficiency in identifying factual information, making inferences, and evaluating textual content. These competencies correspond to three hierarchical levels of reading comprehension: literal, inferential, and critical. Literal comprehension involves the recognition of explicitly stated information; inferential comprehension requires the ability to deduce meaning from implicit cues; and critical comprehension demands evaluative judgment and analytical reasoning (Richards, 1985). Despite these curricular expectations, empirical observations suggest that many students, including those at SMA Nurul Falah Pekanbaru, struggle to move beyond the literal level. Their inferential and critical reading skills remain underdeveloped, limiting their ability to engage with complex texts and construct nuanced interpretations.

This gap in reading proficiency can be attributed to several interrelated factors. Chief among them is the low interest in reading and the absence of a robust literacy culture within schools. Students' limited exposure to diverse reading materials and the predominance of rote learning practices hinder the development of higher-order thinking skills. Without regular engagement in reflective and analytical reading activities, students are unlikely to cultivate the inferential and critical faculties necessary for academic success and informed citizenship.

While previous research has predominantly focused on general strategies for improving reading skills, there is a paucity of studies that examine students' performance across the distinct levels of comprehension. This study seeks to address that gap by conducting a detailed analysis of reading comprehension among students at Nurul Falah Senior High School, specifically evaluating their abilities at the literal, inferential, and critical levels. By identifying specific strengths and weaknesses, the research aims to provide actionable insights for educators, inform curriculum development, and promote the integration of literacy-rich practices in the classroom. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on literacy education in Indonesia and underscores the need for targeted interventions to enhance students' reading comprehension and critical thinking capabilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading comprehension is a central focus in literacy education, yet the nuanced understanding of its hierarchical levels—literal, inferential, and critical—remains underexplored in many empirical studies. While numerous researchers have investigated strategies to enhance general reading proficiency (Etfita, 2014; Syahid et al., 2024), fewer have delved into the specific cognitive dimensions that differentiate surface-level understanding from deeper analytical engagement. This gap is significant, as comprehension is not a monolithic skill but a layered construct involving multiple cognitive processes that interact dynamically during reading.

According to Nunan (1988), reading comprehension is an interactive process wherein readers actively construct meaning by integrating textual information with their prior knowledge, experiences, and interpretive strategies. This view aligns with constructivist theories of learning, which posit that comprehension emerges from the interplay between the reader and the text, rather than from passive absorption of information.

Definition of Reading

Reading is widely recognized as a foundational academic skill that underpins learning across all disciplines. It serves not only as a gateway to acquiring knowledge but also as a critical tool for developing higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. According to O'Dell (1987), reading involves the ability to comprehend both specific details and the overarching message conveyed by a text. This dual focus requires readers to engage with content at multiple levels, from decoding individual words to grasping the broader thematic and rhetorical structures.

Reading is far more than a mechanical process of recognizing letters and words; it is a complex cognitive activity that involves interpreting context, discerning tone, and understanding the author's intent. Effective readers must navigate a range of textual features, including syntax, semantics, and discourse structures, to construct coherent meaning. This process is particularly important in academic settings, where texts often contain abstract concepts, technical vocabulary, and implicit arguments.
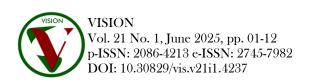
Seafross and Readence (1994) emphasize that reading is a transactional process, meaning that comprehension is not solely derived from the text itself but is co-constructed through the interaction between the reader and the text. This perspective aligns with constructivist theories of learning, which posit that readers bring their own experiences, background knowledge, and cognitive frameworks to the reading process. As a result, meaning is not passively received but actively negotiated and reconstructed.

In this sense, reading becomes a dynamic and personalized act of meaning-making. It requires readers to continuously monitor their understanding, make inferences, and adjust their interpretations based on new information. This interactive nature of reading highlights its role not only as a skill but as a cognitive and metacognitive process essential for academic success and lifelong learning.

Definition of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension extends far beyond the basic act of decoding words on a page. It encompasses a complex set of cognitive processes that enable readers to synthesize information, draw inferences, and critically evaluate content. Effective comprehension involves not only understanding what is explicitly stated but also interpreting what is implied, recognizing the structure and purpose of a text, and integrating new information with existing knowledge. This multifaceted nature of comprehension makes it a cornerstone of academic success and intellectual development.

Snow (2002) conceptualizes reading comprehension as a triadic interaction among three essential components: the reader, the text, and the reading activity. This model highlights that comprehension is not a static or isolated event but a dynamic process shaped by the reader's background knowledge, the characteristics of the text, and the specific purpose for reading. For instance, a student reading a scientific article for a class assignment will engage with the text

differently than when reading a novel for leisure. The reader's goals, prior experiences, and cognitive strategies all influence how meaning is constructed.

Freeman (2002) further emphasizes that the ultimate goal of reading is to achieve deep understanding. This involves moving beyond surface-level interpretation to engage critically with the text—questioning assumptions, evaluating arguments, and applying insights to new contexts. Deep comprehension allows learners to transfer knowledge across disciplines, solve problems creatively, and participate meaningfully in academic and societal discourse.

In essence, reading comprehension is both a cognitive and metacognitive process. It requires readers to monitor their understanding, adjust their strategies when confusion arises, and reflect on the meaning and implications of the text. As such, fostering strong comprehension skills is essential not only for academic achievement but also for developing informed, thoughtful, and literate individuals.

Levels of Reading Comprehension

Richards (1985) offers a comprehensive taxonomy of reading comprehension that delineates four distinct levels, though in educational practice, three levels—literal, inferential, and critical—are most commonly emphasized. These levels represent a continuum of cognitive engagement, progressing from basic understanding to complex analytical reasoning. Each level plays a crucial role in shaping a reader's ability to interact meaningfully with texts and to derive both surface-level and deeper insights.
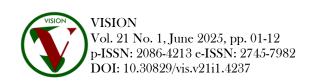
Literal Comprehension

Literal comprehension is the foundational level of reading and involves the direct retrieval of information explicitly stated in the text. At this stage, readers are expected to identify facts, recognize main ideas, understand vocabulary in context, and recall specific details. It is the most straightforward form of comprehension and serves as the building block for more advanced interpretive skills. Students who operate primarily at this level can answer "who," "what," "when," and "where" questions with relative ease. While essential, literal comprehension alone does not equip learners to engage with texts in a critical or reflective manner. Nonetheless, it remains a necessary precursor to higher-order comprehension, as it ensures that readers have a clear grasp of the basic content before moving on to more complex interpretive tasks.

Inferential Comprehension

Inferential comprehension requires readers to go beyond the text and deduce meaning that is not directly stated. This level involves interpreting implications, identifying relationships between ideas, predicting outcomes, and drawing conclusions based on textual evidence and prior knowledge. Inferential comprehension is essential for understanding nuanced arguments, recognizing themes, and appreciating the subtleties of tone and perspective. It demands a more active engagement with the text, as readers must fill in gaps, make logical connections, and construct meaning that extends beyond the literal content. This level is particularly important in academic contexts, where students are often required to interpret complex texts and synthesize information from multiple sources.

Critical Comprehension

Critical comprehension represents the highest level of reading and involves the evaluation of textual content in terms of credibility, logic, and relevance. At this stage, readers assess the author's intent, detect bias or assumptions, critique the strength of arguments, and compare the text with external knowledge or alternative viewpoints. Critical comprehension is closely aligned with critical thinking and is vital for academic discourse, informed decision-making, and civic engagement. It empowers readers to question the validity of information, consider ethical implications, and form independent judgments. Developing this level of comprehension requires not only cognitive maturity but also instructional support that encourages analytical reasoning and reflective dialogue.

Interdependence and Instructional Implications

These three levels of comprehension are not mutually exclusive but are interdependent and sequential. Mastery of literal comprehension provides the foundation for inferential reasoning, which in turn supports critical evaluation. As Day and Park (2005) emphasize, effective reading instruction must scaffold students' progression through these levels, gradually increasing the complexity of texts and the depth of questioning.

However, in many educational contexts—including Indonesia—reading instruction tends to focus disproportionately on literal comprehension. This emphasis is often driven by standardized testing and curriculum constraints, which prioritize factual recall over interpretive and evaluative skills (Sulistyo, 2011). As a result, students may perform well on basic comprehension tasks but struggle with more complex reading demands that require inference and critical analysis.
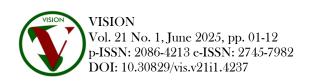
This study builds on the theoretical foundations outlined above by empirically examining students' performance across these three levels of comprehension. By identifying specific strengths and weaknesses, the research aims to inform the development of reading pedagogy that supports holistic cognitive growth and prepares students for the demands of academic and real-world literacy.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to systematically assess the reading comprehension levels of students at Nurul Falah Senior High School in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. The primary objective was to evaluate students' performance across three cognitive domains—literal, inferential, and critical comprehension—using a structured and statistically grounded approach. The descriptive design was selected to provide a comprehensive snapshot of students' existing reading abilities without manipulating variables, thereby allowing for objective analysis and interpretation of the data within the natural educational context.

Research Design Rationale

Quantitative descriptive research is particularly suited for studies that aim to measure and describe phenomena as they exist. In this case, the design facilitated the identification of patterns and trends in students' reading comprehension without the influence of experimental conditions. This approach is widely used in educational research to assess learning outcomes, diagnose instructional needs, and inform pedagogical strategies (Creswell, 2014). By focusing on measurable indicators such as test scores and performance categories, the study was able to generate data that are both reliable and actionable for educators and policymakers.

Population and Sampling

The population for this study consisted of 110 students enrolled at Nurul Falah Senior High School, distributed across five academic streams: Grade X, XI MIA (Mathematics and Natural Sciences), XI IIS (Social Sciences), XII MIA, and XII IIS. These streams represent a diverse cross-section of the student body, encompassing various academic interests and cognitive profiles.

To ensure representativeness and minimize selection bias, the researchers employed a simple random sampling technique. This method is recognized for its ability to produce unbiased samples by giving each member of the population an equal chance of selection. Using this technique, a sample of 22 students was drawn, representing 20% of the total population. The sample size was deemed appropriate for descriptive statistical analysis, allowing for meaningful interpretation of performance trends across the three comprehension levels.

Random sampling also enhances the generalizability of the findings, as it reduces the likelihood of systematic error and ensures that the sample reflects the broader population. This is particularly important in educational research, where demographic and academic variability can influence learning outcomes.

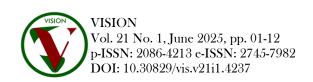*Instrument Design and Validation*

The primary data collection instrument was a reading comprehension test specifically designed to measure students' performance across three hierarchical levels of comprehension:

- Literal comprehension: Items at this level assessed students' ability to identify information explicitly stated in the text. This included recognizing facts, definitions, main ideas, and specific details. Literal comprehension serves as the foundation for more complex interpretive skills and is essential for basic textual understanding.
- Inferential comprehension: Questions at this level required students to interpret implied meanings, draw logical conclusions, and connect ideas that were not directly stated. Inferential comprehension involves higher-order thinking and the ability to integrate textual clues with prior knowledge to construct meaning.
- Critical comprehension: Tasks at this level involved evaluating arguments, identifying bias, assessing the credibility of information, and determining the relevance of textual content. Critical comprehension is the most advanced level and is closely associated with analytical reasoning and reflective judgment.

The test consisted of 25 multiple-choice questions, distributed proportionally across the three levels to ensure balanced assessment. The items were carefully constructed to align with Richards' (1985) taxonomy of reading comprehension, which provides a theoretical framework for categorizing cognitive engagement with texts.

To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by two experts in English language education. These experts evaluated the test items for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the intended comprehension levels. Their feedback was used to refine the questions, eliminate ambiguities, and confirm that each item accurately measured the targeted cognitive skill. This validation process is critical in educational research, as it enhances the reliability and interpretability of the results.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted in a controlled classroom environment to minimize distractions and ensure consistency. Students were given a fixed amount of time to complete the test, and instructions were provided to clarify the format and expectations. The researchers monitored the testing process to address any procedural issues and to ensure that the data collected were valid and representative of students' true abilities.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from both students and school administrators. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process, including confidentiality of student responses and anonymity in data reporting.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29.0, a widely used software for quantitative data analysis in educational research. The analysis focused on descriptive statistics, including:

- Mean scores: Calculated for each comprehension level to determine average performance.
- Frequency distributions: Used to identify the number of students falling within specific score ranges.
- Percentage rankings: Provided insights into the proportion of students achieving various performance categories.

To interpret the results, the researchers applied Arikunto's (2002) classification criteria, which offer standardized benchmarks for categorizing academic achievement in Indonesian educational settings. These criteria include performance categories such as "Very Good," "Good," "Fair," "Poor," and "Very Poor," based on numerical score ranges. This framework enabled the researchers to contextualize the findings within the national educational standards and to draw meaningful conclusions about students' reading abilities.
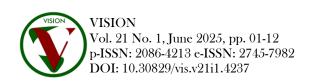
Methodological Strengths and Limitations

One of the strengths of this methodological framework is its ability to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of students' reading comprehension across multiple cognitive levels. By combining rigorous sampling techniques, validated instruments, and robust statistical analysis, the study offers reliable insights that can inform instructional practices and curriculum development.

However, the study also has limitations. The sample size, while adequate for descriptive analysis, may not capture the full diversity of the student population. Additionally, the use of multiple-choice questions, while efficient for data collection, may not fully capture the depth of students' interpretive and evaluative thinking. Future research could incorporate qualitative methods, such as interviews or open-ended responses, to gain a richer understanding of students' reading processes.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to evaluate the reading comprehension levels of students at Nurul Falah Senior High School in Pekanbaru, Indonesia, across three hierarchical domains: literal, inferential, and critical comprehension. Data were collected through a structured reading comprehension test comprising 25 multiple-choice items, each designed to assess specific cognitive skills associated with textual understanding. The results revealed distinct patterns in

students' performance across the three levels, highlighting both strengths and areas requiring pedagogical intervention.

1. Literal Comprehension

The analysis indicated that students performed exceptionally well at the literal level, with a mean score of 87.27, placing them in the "Very Good" category according to Arikunto's (2002) classification. Notably, 48% of students achieved a perfect score of 100, while only 4.4% scored as low as 50. These results suggest that students are proficient in identifying explicitly stated information, such as main ideas, specific details, vocabulary meanings, and the sequence of events. This high performance may be attributed to instructional practices that emphasize factual recall and grammatical accuracy, which are commonly reinforced through textbook exercises and standardized assessments.
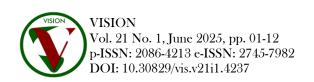
2. Inferential Comprehension

At the inferential level, students achieved a mean score of 79.54, which falls within the "Good" category. The distribution of scores showed that 27.2% of students scored 80, while 22.1% scored 70, indicating a moderate level of proficiency in interpreting implied meanings and establishing logical connections between ideas. Although students demonstrated the ability to draw basic inferences, the variability in scores suggests that some learners struggle with more complex interpretive tasks. This may be due to limited exposure to texts that require deeper engagement or insufficient scaffolding in classroom instruction to support inferential reasoning. As noted by Etfita (2014), inferential comprehension requires not only linguistic competence but also cognitive flexibility and contextual awareness.

3. Critical Comprehension

The most significant challenge emerged at the critical comprehension level, where the mean score was 53.75, categorized as "Lacking". Only 9% of students attained a perfect score, while the majority scored between 40 and 60, reflecting limited ability to evaluate, critique, and synthesize textual information. Critical comprehension involves higher-order thinking skills such as assessing the credibility of sources, identifying bias, and forming reasoned judgments—skills that are essential for academic success and informed citizenship. The low performance in this domain may be attributed to a curriculum that prioritizes rote learning over analytical discourse, as well as a lack of instructional emphasis on argumentation and evaluative reasoning (Sulistyo, 2011).

The findings of this study reveal a clear hierarchical pattern in students' reading comprehension abilities at Nurul Falah Senior High School, with the strongest performance observed at the literal level, moderate proficiency at the inferential level, and significant deficiencies at the critical level. This stratification is not unique to this school but reflects broader trends in literacy education, particularly in developing contexts where foundational skills are emphasized at the expense of deeper cognitive engagement. Understanding the underlying causes of this pattern is essential for designing effective interventions that promote comprehensive literacy development.

Instructional Focus and Pedagogical Practices

One of the primary factors contributing to the dominance of literal comprehension is the nature of instructional practices in many Indonesian classrooms. Teaching methods often prioritize factual recall, vocabulary acquisition, and grammatical correctness, largely driven by the demands of standardized testing and national examinations. These assessments typically emphasize surface-level understanding, encouraging teachers to focus on preparing students to identify explicit information rather than interpret or critique it.

This exam-oriented approach, while effective in reinforcing basic reading skills, inadvertently limits students' exposure to higher-order thinking tasks. As a result, students become adept at locating facts and answering direct questions but struggle when required to infer meaning or evaluate arguments. Research by Grabe and Stoller (2011) supports this observation, noting that reading instruction in many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts remains heavily focused on decoding and literal comprehension, with insufficient attention to inferential and critical skills.

Moreover, classroom activities often lack the cognitive complexity needed to challenge students beyond the literal level. Teachers may rely on worksheets, textbook exercises, and rote memorization, which do not foster analytical reasoning or interpretive thinking. Without opportunities to engage in discussions, debates, or reflective writing, students are unlikely to develop the skills necessary for inferential and critical comprehension.
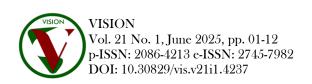
Textual Exposure and Reading Materials

Another significant factor influencing students' reading comprehension is the nature and diversity of the texts they encounter. Many students have limited access to rich, varied reading materials that stimulate inferential and critical thinking (Sadri, 2024). The school curriculum may include narrative and expository texts, but these are often simplified and lack the complexity required to challenge students cognitively.

Exposure to argumentative essays, opinion pieces, editorials, and literary texts is essential for developing evaluative skills (Nasution et al., 2021). These genres require readers to interpret authorial intent, assess the strength of evidence, and consider alternative perspectives—skills that are central to critical comprehension. However, such texts are rarely incorporated into classroom instruction, and students may not encounter them outside of school due to limited library resources or lack of a reading culture at home.

The absence of diverse reading experiences restricts students' ability to engage with texts at a deeper level. As Kintsch (2005) argues, comprehension is not merely a function of decoding but involves constructing a mental representation of the text that integrates prior knowledge, contextual cues, and inferential reasoning. Without exposure to challenging texts, students cannot practice these integrative processes, resulting in stagnation at the literal level.

Curricular Design and Policy Implications

The structure of the national curriculum also plays a critical role in shaping students' reading comprehension abilities. While the curriculum outlines objectives related to inferential and critical reading, these goals are often not operationalized in classroom practice. Teachers may lack the training or resources to implement activities that support these higher-order skills, and the curriculum itself may not provide sufficient guidance on how to scaffold students' progression from literal to critical comprehension.

Furthermore, the emphasis on content coverage and exam preparation can lead to a superficial treatment of reading skills. Teachers may feel pressured to complete the syllabus rather than delve deeply into texts or facilitate student-centered learning experiences. This tension between curriculum goals and classroom realities undermines efforts to promote comprehensive literacy development.

To address these issues, curriculum designers must integrate critical literacy components more explicitly into learning outcomes and instructional materials. This includes providing sample texts, guiding questions, and assessment rubrics that emphasize analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Additionally, curriculum reform should prioritize depth over breadth, allowing teachers to spend more time on fewer texts while engaging students in meaningful interpretive and evaluative tasks.

Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

Teacher preparedness is another crucial determinant of students' reading comprehension outcomes. Many educators may not have received formal training in teaching higher-order comprehension strategies, such as inferencing, critical questioning, and textual analysis. As a result, they may feel more comfortable teaching literal comprehension, which is easier to assess and aligns with traditional pedagogical models.
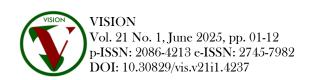
Professional development programs must address this gap by equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to foster inferential and critical reading. Workshops, peer mentoring, and collaborative lesson planning can help teachers design activities that challenge students cognitively and encourage deeper engagement with texts. Training should also focus on formative assessment techniques that allow teachers to monitor students' progress across comprehension levels and adjust instruction accordingly.

Moreover, teacher beliefs and attitudes toward reading instruction can influence their pedagogical choices (Purnama & Sadri, 2021). Educators who view reading as a passive activity may be less likely to incorporate interactive strategies, such as Socratic questioning, literature circles, or reciprocal teaching. Changing these perceptions requires a shift in professional discourse, emphasizing reading as a dynamic, interpretive process that involves active meaning-making and critical reflection.

Strategies for Enhancing Comprehension Across Levels

To address the challenges identified above, a more balanced and scaffolded approach to reading instruction is needed—one that supports students' progression from literal understanding to inferential reasoning and ultimately to critical evaluation. Several evidence-based strategies can be employed to achieve this goal:

a. Reciprocal Teaching: This strategy involves students taking turns leading discussions about a text using four key skills: summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting. Reciprocal teaching has been shown to improve comprehension by encouraging students to think actively about the text and engage in metacognitive reflection (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

b. Socratic Questioning: By posing open-ended, thought-provoking questions, teachers can guide students to explore deeper meanings, challenge assumptions, and consider multiple perspectives. This method fosters critical thinking and helps students develop the ability to evaluate textual content.

c. **Literature Circles**: In small groups, students read and discuss texts collaboratively, assuming different roles such as summarizer, questioner, connector, and evaluator. Literature circles promote peer learning and allow students to practice inferential and critical skills in a supportive environment.

d. **Textual Annotation and Close Reading**: Encouraging students to annotate texts and engage in close reading helps them identify key ideas, analyze language use, and evaluate arguments. These practices support deeper comprehension and facilitate critical engagement with texts.

e. **Reflective Writing**: Assigning reflective essays or journals allows students to articulate their interpretations, connect texts to personal experiences, and critique ideas. Writing enhances comprehension by reinforcing analytical thinking and encouraging synthesis.
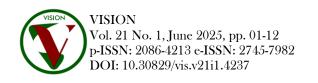
Creating a Literacy-Rich Environment

Beyond instructional strategies, creating a literacy-rich environment is essential for fostering comprehensive reading skills (Sadri et al., 2019). Schools should invest in libraries, provide access to diverse reading materials, and promote reading as a valued cultural practice. Reading clubs, book talks, and author visits can generate enthusiasm for reading and expose students to a wide range of genres and perspectives.

Parental involvement also plays a role in shaping students' reading habits. Encouraging parents to read with their children, discuss books, and model critical thinking can reinforce literacy development at home. Community partnerships with local libraries, bookstores, and cultural organizations can further support a vibrant reading culture.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the reading comprehension levels of students at Nurul Falah Senior High School in Pekanbaru, Indonesia, focusing on three levels: literal, inferential, and critical. The results indicate that students have a strong foundation in literal reading comprehension, achieving a "very good" level. Their inferential comprehension skills also fall into the "good" category, showing a decent understanding of implied meanings. However, the students struggled with critical reading comprehension, achieving a "less" category, indicating a lack of ability to analyze and evaluate texts critically. These findings highlight the importance of addressing critical reading comprehension skills in educational settings. While students may excel at basic levels of comprehension, developing the ability to critically analyze and evaluate information is crucial for success in academic and professional settings.

Future research should focus on understanding the factors contributing to the low critical reading comprehension scores at Nurul Falah Senior High School, such as teaching practices, student motivation, and the availability of resources. Additionally, researchers can investigate effective strategies for improving critical reading skills in students. These strategies could include incorporating more critical thinking activities into the curriculum, providing students with opportunities to engage in discussions and debates, and encouraging them to question information and form their own interpretations. By addressing these needs, educators can help students develop the critical thinking skills necessary for navigating the complex world of information and making informed decisions.

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