



The Use of Story Face Strategy to Enhance Reading Comprehension in Narrative Text of Junior High School Students in EFL Context

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of the Story Face Strategy to enhance students' reading comprehension of narrative texts at one of public junior high school in Padang. The research was motivated by students' difficulties in understanding narrative texts, particularly in identifying the main idea, characters, setting, conflict, and resolution—common challenges faced by eighth-grade students. The objective of this study is to determine whether the implementation of the Story Face Strategy significantly enhances students' reading comprehension. A one-group pre-test and post-test pre-experimental design was employed, with instruction delivered using the strategy across multiple sessions. Data were collected through a 25-item multiple-choice reading comprehension test administered before and after the intervention. The results showed a notable enhancement in students' performance, with the average score increasing from 53.5 (pre-test) to 76.9 (post-test). A paired sample t-test confirmed the statistical significance of this improvement at the 0.05 confidence level. These findings suggest that the Story Face Strategy is effective in helping students understand narrative elements and can serve as an engaging and structured method for enhancing reading comprehension in junior high school contexts.

Keywords: *Story Face Strategy, Reading Comprehension, Narrative Text*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is an essential skill that plays a vital role in students' academic success. It enables learners to access new knowledge, interpret information, and think critically across different subjects. Among the four core English skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, reading provides the foundation for developing broader language competence and lifelong learning habits (Anderson, 2003).

In the Indonesian curriculum, narrative texts are introduced at the junior high school level. These texts aim not only to entertain but also to convey values and life lessons through

structured elements such as characters, setting, conflict, and resolution (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). However, many students find narrative texts challenging. They struggle to identify main ideas, sequence events logically, and understand how characters and plot interact. This issue was observed among eighth-grade students at SMP PGRI 4 Padang, where learners had difficulty recognizing the structure of narrative texts and comprehending their meaning as a whole.

One of the contributing factors to this problem is the limited use of effective instructional strategies. In many classrooms, reading is still taught through conventional methods, students read texts while teachers explain the content, leaving little room for student engagement. Brown (2001) argues that such approaches often result in low comprehension outcomes because they do not provide students with the tools needed to analyse and internalize the text.

To address this challenge, more engaging and structured teaching strategies are needed. One such strategy is the Story Face Strategy, which uses a face-shaped diagram to help students visualize and organize key narrative elements, including characters, setting, problem, and solution (Staal, 2000). This visual approach allows students to better understand the story's structure, making reading more accessible and meaningful.

Motivation is another critical factor that influences students' reading comprehension. Learners who are not motivated are less likely to engage with texts or put effort into understanding them (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Unfortunately, traditional reading instruction often fails to stimulate student interest, especially when activities are repetitive or disconnected from students' experiences.

Incorporating interactive and student-centred strategies can enhance both motivation and comprehension. Learning activities that involve visual aids, hands-on tasks, and collaboration can create a more dynamic reading environment (Leipzig, 2001). The Story Face Strategy offers this potential by encouraging students to break down a story into parts and see how those parts connect, promoting a deeper understanding of narrative structure.

Despite its practicality and low-cost nature, the Story Face Strategy is not yet widely applied in Indonesian classrooms. Many teachers are unaware of its benefits or hesitant to shift away from traditional methods due to time constraints or lack of exposure to alternative strategies. However, its ease of use, adaptability, and visual appeal make it a promising tool for enhancing reading comprehension, especially among students who struggle with narrative texts.

This study focuses on the use of the Story Face Strategy to enhance reading comprehension in narrative texts among eighth-grade students at SMP PGRI 4 Padang. The purpose is to determine whether the strategy can help students enhance their understanding of narrative structure, identify key elements of the story, and achieve better overall reading comprehension. From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the field of strategy-based reading instruction. From a practical standpoint, it offers teachers a concrete, effective method for enhancing students' reading comprehension in real classroom settings.

In conclusion, many junior high school students face ongoing challenges in understanding narrative texts. These challenges often stem from low motivation, lack of strategic support, and the complexity of text structure. The Story Face Strategy presents a viable solution by combining structured thinking, visual organization, and student engagement. Through this research, it is hoped that teachers will be encouraged to adopt

innovative and effective strategies to enhance students' reading comprehension and support their broader language development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading comprehension refers to students' ability to understand written texts, particularly in identifying the main idea, details, vocabulary, and text structure. According to Pang et al. (2003), reading comprehension involves the ability to understand, remember, and communicate meaning from written texts. Anderson (2003) also views reading as an active process of constructing meaning. Leipzig (2001) adds that comprehension occurs when readers actively connect prior knowledge with the information in the text.

Visual-based reading strategies have been proven effective in enhancing students' comprehension. The Story Face Strategy, introduced by Staal (2000), is one such visual approach that helps students map out narrative components. Rahayu and Sudarsono (2019) found that using graphic organizers in reading activities can enhance comprehension by guiding students through text structures. Similarly, Yusuf and Wulandari (2018) showed that visual mapping enhances students' ability to grasp the main ideas and details in narrative texts.

Recent studies have also emphasized the role of structured reading strategies in enhancing comprehension. Lee and Chen (2022) demonstrated that visual strategies significantly enhance reading performance among EFL learners, especially in organizing and interpreting story elements. Wahyuni and Styaningsih (2023) further supported this by highlighting that strategy-based instruction leads to enhanced narrative comprehension outcomes.

Based on these findings, this study aims to examine the effect of using the Story Face Strategy on students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. It specifically investigates whether this structured and visual strategy can enhance students' understanding of narrative elements in a junior high school context.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a pre-experimental design with a one-group pre-test and post-test model to investigate the use of the Story Face Strategy in enhancing students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. The research was conducted at SMP PGRI 4 Padang during the 2024/2025 academic year. The sample consisted of 10 students from Class VIII, selected purposively as the target group for this study due to their low reading comprehension performance.

The instructional material consisted of narrative texts appropriate for eighth-grade students, drawn from the national English curriculum. These texts featured typical narrative elements such as characters, setting, conflict, and resolution. The Story Face Strategy, a visual method developed by Staal (2000), was used to guide students in identifying and organizing the elements of each story. Students were provided with a face-shaped diagram, where they filled in each narrative component during reading sessions.

The research was carried out in four meetings. The first meeting was dedicated to administering a pre-test to assess students' initial reading comprehension skills. The pre-test consisted of 25 multiple-choice questions measuring understanding of narrative structure, vocabulary, and key ideas. The second and third meetings were used for treatment, during which students applied the Story Face Strategy to analyse and map the structure of selected

narrative texts. In the fourth meeting, a post-test was administered using a similar structure and difficulty as the pre-test.

The data were collected from students' pre-test and post-test scores. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean and standard deviation. A paired sample t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in students' reading comprehension after using the strategy. The statistical analysis was performed using Microsoft Excel. This method offers a clear and replicable approach for evaluating the impact of visual strategies like Story Face in improving narrative text comprehension among junior high school students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings of this study were derived from the pre-test and post-test results of ten eighth-grade students at SMP PGRI 4 Padang. The test consisted of 25 multiple-choice questions related to narrative text, with each correct answer scored as 4 points, making the maximum score 100. The data were analysed to determine individual scores, mean values, indicator-based performance, and the significance of the score difference.

Table 1. Students' Pre- and Post- Test Scores

No	Students Initial	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score
1.	APF	40	72
2.	HTTP	50	75
3.	IS	45	70
4.	MW	55	78
5.	MS	60	80
6.	MF	50	74
7.	NS	65	85
8.	NAS	55	77
9.	PPM	70	90
10.	RP	45	68
TOTAL		535	769

All students showed an enhancement in their reading comprehension scores after receiving instruction using the Story Face Strategy.

Table 2. The Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of Students' Pre-Test and Post-Test

Tests	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	53,5	9,39
Post-test	76,9	7,57

The results show a substantial increase in the mean score after treatment and a decrease in standard deviation, indicating more consistent performance among students.

Table 3. Indicators of Comprehension of Narrative Text Based on Research Result

Indicators	Pre-test score	Post-test Score	Enhancements
Identifying Main Idea	73.0	90.0	+17.0
Identifying Character	69.5	86.0	+16.5
Identifying the Setting	67.5	86.0	+18.5
Identifying the Problem	67.5	86.0	+18.5

Understanding Vocabulary in Context	67.5	86.0	+18.5
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The table above shows a consistent enhancement in all narrative comprehension indicators. The most significant Enhancements were seen in understanding vocabulary, identifying setting, and identifying the problem.

Table 4. T-Test Result

Variable	T-Test Value	T-Table-Value	Result
Reading Comprehension	5.03	1.833	Significant

The t-test result (5.03) exceeded the critical t-table value (1.833), indicating that the enhancement in students' reading comprehension after treatment with the Story Face Strategy was statistically significant. This confirms the strategy's effectiveness in supporting students' understanding of narrative texts.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate a clear and statistically significant improvement in students' reading comprehension after the implementation of the Story Face Strategy. All ten eighth-grade students showed increased post-test scores compared to their pre-test results, indicating that the strategy was effective across different proficiency levels. This finding is consistent with previous studies which report that graphic organizers and strategy-based instruction contribute significantly to students' reading comprehension achievement (Rahayu & Sudarsono, 2019; Wahyuni & Styaningsih, 2023). The increase in the mean score from 53.5 to 76.9, accompanied by a decrease in standard deviation, suggests not only improved achievement but also more stable and consistent comprehension performance, which is a key indicator of effective instructional intervention.

The substantial improvement can be attributed to the visual and structured nature of the Story Face Strategy. By organizing narrative elements, such as main idea, characters, setting, problem, and resolution, into a coherent visual framework, students were better able to process, retain, and connect textual information. This supports Staal's (2000) argument that story mapping techniques help learners recognize narrative structure and relationships among story components. Similarly, Lee and Chen (2022) found that visual strategies play a crucial role in improving EFL learners' reading comprehension by making abstract textual information more concrete and accessible.

From a theoretical perspective, the effectiveness of the Story Face Strategy can be explained through schema theory. Anderson (2003) argues that reading comprehension occurs when readers actively relate new textual information to their existing knowledge structures. The Story Face Strategy facilitates this process by providing an explicit organizational schema that guides students in constructing meaning from narrative texts. In line with this view, Leipzig (2001) emphasizes that comprehension improves when readers understand how texts are structured and how ideas are connected.

Notably, students with lower initial proficiency experienced marked improvement. For example, student APF's score increased from 40 to 72, indicating that the strategy was particularly beneficial for struggling readers. This finding aligns with Brown's (2001) principle that effective language teaching requires meaningful scaffolding and learner support, especially for students who lack independent learning strategies. The visual guidance offered by the Story Face Strategy helped these learners engage more actively with the text and reduced difficulties in identifying essential information.

Indicator-based analysis further reveals that the most significant improvements occurred in identifying the setting, identifying the problem, and understanding vocabulary in context. These aspects of narrative comprehension often require higher-level processing, including inference and contextual interpretation, which are challenging for EFL learners (Yusuf & Wulandari, 2018). By visually mapping these elements, the Story Face Strategy appears to have reduced students' cognitive burden and supported deeper comprehension. This finding resonates with Knapp and Watkins' (2005) view that explicit attention to text structure enables learners to engage more critically with meaning rather than focusing solely on surface-level decoding.

In addition, the improvement in students' comprehension may also be linked to increased engagement and motivation. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) argue that instructional approaches that actively involve students in meaning-making processes enhance both motivation and comprehension. The interactive and visual nature of the Story Face Strategy likely contributed to greater student engagement, which in turn supported improved reading outcomes.

The statistical analysis strengthens these qualitative observations. The t-test value (5.03) exceeded the critical t-table value (1.833), confirming that the observed improvement was statistically significant. This indicates that the gains in reading comprehension were not incidental but directly associated with the instructional treatment. Similar statistically significant results have been reported in studies examining the use of graphic organizers and visual mapping strategies in EFL reading instruction (Rahayu & Sudarsono, 2019; Yusuf & Wulandari, 2018).

Overall, this study reinforces the pedagogical value of the Story Face Strategy as an effective instructional tool for teaching narrative reading comprehension at the junior high school level. By supporting schema activation, enhancing learner engagement, and providing structured scaffolding for diverse proficiency levels, the strategy offers a practical and theoretically grounded approach to improving reading comprehension in EFL classrooms.

The findings of this study have several important implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching and learning, particularly in the context of junior high school reading instruction. First, the significant improvement in students' reading comprehension indicates that the Story Face Strategy can be effectively integrated into reading lessons as an instructional tool to support students' understanding of narrative texts. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate this strategy during pre-reading and while-reading activities to help students identify and organize key narrative elements systematically.

Second, the strategy demonstrates strong potential for supporting students with lower reading proficiency. The substantial gains observed among initially low-performing students suggest that the Story Face Strategy can serve as a scaffolding tool that reduces cognitive load and guides learners toward meaningful comprehension. This implies that teachers should consider using visual organizers as part of differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learning needs in EFL classrooms.

Third, the improvement across all narrative comprehension indicators, particularly in identifying setting, problem, and vocabulary in context, highlights the importance of explicitly teaching text structure. Curriculum designers and textbook developers may consider embedding Story Face-based activities or similar visual frameworks into reading materials to promote deeper engagement with narrative texts and to support higher-order comprehension skills.

Finally, the statistically significant results suggest that strategy-based and visual-supported instruction should be emphasized in teacher training and professional development programs. Equipping teachers with practical strategies such as the Story Face Strategy can enhance instructional effectiveness and contribute to more consistent learning outcomes. Future research may extend this study by involving larger samples, different text genres, or longer intervention periods to further validate and refine the use of visual reading strategies in EFL contexts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the Story Face Strategy was effective in enhancing students' reading comprehension of narrative texts by helping them understand and organize key story elements. This strategy successfully addressed the research problem and fulfilled the study's purpose. The research contributes to the field by providing evidence that structured and visual-based strategies can enhance reading comprehension, particularly for junior high school students learning narrative texts.

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