

OPTIMIZING READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH THE COMMUNICATIVE METHOD IN TEACHING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to improve the eighth-grade students' reading comprehension at SMP Plus HKBP Pematangsiantar through the application of the Communicative Method in teaching descriptive texts. Preliminary research revealed that students struggled to understand descriptive texts due to limited vocabulary, a lack of understanding of text structure, and few opportunities to practice reading interactively. These issues often result in poor comprehension and low student interest in English subjects. This program adopted a classroom mentoring model consisting of three phases: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. Eighth-grade students at SMP Plus HKBP were involved using learning tools such as lesson plans, descriptive text materials, task-based worksheets, and assessment rubrics focused on vocabulary recognition, understanding text structure, and interpreting meaning. During the implementation phase, students participated in communicative reading activities such as group discussions, vocabulary games, and collaborative text analysis, which aimed to foster meaningful interaction and enhance learning motivation. In the evaluation phase, student performance was measured through structured activities and participation observation sheets. The findings showed a significant improvement in students' ability to recognize the social function, structural elements, and linguistic features of descriptive texts. In addition, students also demonstrated increased confidence, more active participation, and better collaboration skills. In conclusion, the Communicative Method proved effective in enhancing reading comprehension and creating an active, student-centered learning environment in junior high school especially English classes.

Keywords: Descriptive Text; Reading Comprehension; English language teaching

1. Introduction

Education plays a key role in developing students' knowledge, skills, and character. English, as a core subject in the Indonesian curriculum, supports both academic advancement and the ability to communicate globally. In the process of learning English, reading is a fundamental skill that supports vocabulary acquisition, grammatical understanding, and the ability to interpret meaning, which in turn strengthens speaking and writing skills. At the junior high school level, descriptive texts are an important genre because they teach students to observe details, organize information, and connect language with real objects, places, and people.

The quality of learning improves when educational media and technology are applied wisely. Images, presentations, and short videos help students visualize meaning, recognize text patterns, and stay actively engaged. Both print and digital media also support lower-achieving students by introducing vocabulary and structures in a repetitive and meaningful way.

Observations at SMP Plus HKBP Pematangsiantar reveal recurring challenges a lot of eighth grade students struggle to understand descriptive texts, especially when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, topic-related details, or paragraph organization. The reading process tends to be teacher-dominated, peer interaction is minimal, and the use of media is suboptimal; as a result, students tend to wait for translations instead of attempting to construct meaning collaboratively. To address this issue, the researcher implements the Communicative Method in reading instruction. Students engage in group-guided reading activities, image-based vocabulary games, and collaborative meaning negotiation. This approach frames reading as an interactive process of meaning-making, rather than simply decoding, with the goal of enhancing students' understanding of the social function, structure, and language features of descriptive texts, while also increasing their engagement in learning.

2. Literature Review

Reading comprehension is the most important aspect of reading. According to Gilakjani et al, (2016), reading comprehension is a process that requires word recognition skills, vocabulary knowledge, fluency, and prior knowledge so that readers can quickly understand be text. Saini et al (2021) states that reading comprehension is a crucial factor in reading. According to the above definition, reading comprehension is the process of understanding and interpreting text to absorb information or the content of the text. According to Brown (2004), there are four different types of reading. They are perceptive, selective, interactive, and extensive.

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method focuses on interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of study. When applied to reading comprehension, it shifts the focus from rote memorization of grammar to understanding the communicative intent of the writer.

Table 1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method

Advantages	Disadvantages
Increased Motivation: Students find it more fun to talk and share opinions than to just answer multiple-choice questions.	Loud Classrooms: The high level of student interaction can make the classroom noisy and difficult to manage.
Meaning over Form: Students focus on the <i>message</i> of the descriptive text, which helps with long-term retention.	Grammar Neglect: Since the focus is on communication, students might overlook specific grammatical structures (like adjective order).
Social Skills: It encourages teamwork and peer-teaching, as students help each other decode the text's meaning.	Heavy Preparation: Teachers must create or find authentic materials and interactive tasks, which takes more time.

According to Sipayung. (2018), descriptive text is very important for students. Descriptive text is the ability to describe a person, something, place, or object. It can be imaginative, or objective description. Furthermore, according to Faliyanti. (2015), descriptive text is text that explains something, such as a person, an animal, a place, or an object. The

general structure of descriptive text is also identification and description. The purpose of descriptive text is to describe someone, something, an animal or an object. Mendale et al. (2019) say that descriptive text language features into five parts, namely: using simple present tense, using linking verbs, using action verbs, using adjectives, and using adverbs.

3. Research Method

3.1 Design

This research applies a classroom mentoring model based on the Communicative Method to improve students' reading skills in descriptive texts. This approach was chosen because effective English language learning should center on the students and encourage meaningful interaction. From a reading perspective, the Communicative Method views reading as more than just decoding words; it is a process of meaning-making that occurs through collaboration. Therefore, the planned activities focus on active student participation, including discussions, vocabulary games, and group analysis of text structures.

The implementation plan is divided into three main stages:

- 1) **Preparation:** Preparing learning tools, media, and reading materials.
- 2) **Implementation:** Applying communicative strategies in the reading learning process.
- 3) **Evaluation:** Assessing student learning outcomes through performance-based assessment and reflection.

3.2 Data source

The participants of this research were eighth grade students of SMP Plus HKBP Pematangsiantar. They were selected as a whole group because they represented a range of abilities within the class: some students had basic, intermediate, and advanced levels of understanding. The involvement of all students was essential to ensure that the communicative approach could work effectively through peer interaction.

Not only students, but also the English subject teacher was involved as a facilitator. The teacher's role was to:

- 1) Provide initial information about the classroom situation.
- 2) Offer feedback on lesson plans (RPP) that apply the Communicative Method.
- 3) Assist during implementation so that the method could be sustained after the program ends.

The supporting environment included a classroom equipped with a projector and a whiteboard. Visual media such as pictures of objects, tourist destinations, and concept maps were used to connect the content of the texts with students' real-life experiences.



Phase 1: Preparation

The preparation phase is a crucial first step before the core learning activities are carried out. The success of the program greatly depends on how well the preparations are made administratively, technically, and pedagogically. Therefore, the service team began the process by conducting formal communication and coordination with the school, specifically the Principal of SMP Plus HKBP Pematangsiantar. During the meeting, the team explained the program's objectives, the types of activities involved, and the expected benefits for both students and teachers. Besides seeking permission to implement the program, the meeting

also aimed to build a strong commitment and collaborative synergy between the school and the implementation team.

After obtaining approval, coordination continued with the English teacher who teaches eighth grade students. The teacher acted as the main partner in adjusting the program schedule so it would not interfere with the regular teaching and learning process. The teacher also helped prepare all the technical needs in the classroom, such as ensuring a comfortable learning space, access to electricity, a projector, and a whiteboard. The service team also brought additional equipment such as a laptop and speakers to support the presentation so that the material could be delivered effectively.

The main material developed for this research focused on the theme “*Describing Pets*.” This theme was chosen because it is highly relevant to students’ daily lives and appropriate to their cognitive development at the junior high school level. The targeted skill to be developed was *reading*, which is one of the fundamental aspects of learning English. The reading activities aimed to train students in understanding the content of descriptive texts, recognizing important vocabulary, understanding text structure, and improving critical thinking skills through content analysis.

Unlike approaches that use videos or audio recordings, this activity relied entirely on **written descriptive texts** as the main learning medium. Several simple example texts were prepared, including “*My Cat*,” “*My Pet Rabbit*,” and “*My Brother’s Bird*.” These texts were written using language suitable for eighth grade students, with clear paragraph structures and vocabulary that is commonly used yet still offers some challenge. Each text was accompanied by comprehension questions to assess how well students understood the content, along with text structure analysis tasks to train students in identifying the key parts of a descriptive text, such as topic sentences, supporting details, and the use of adjectives.

To support the effectiveness of the activity, the team also prepared a PowerPoint presentation explaining the characteristics of descriptive texts, their general structure (identification and description), and examples of vocabulary commonly used when describing pets. **Student worksheets (LKPD)** were designed to allow students to participate actively in both individual and group activities. The worksheets included activities such as matching vocabulary, completing information tables based on the text, and answering multiple-choice and short-answer questions.

Overall, this phase focused on creating comprehensive readiness in terms of materials, media, and teaching methods so that the implementation of the Communicative Method in the reading activity could proceed smoothly, enjoyably, and meaningfully, contributing positively to the improvement of students' reading skills.

Phase 2: Implementation

After all technical preparations and learning materials were completed in the previous stage, the research moved into the classroom implementation phase. This activity was carried out with eighth grade students at SMP Plus HKBP Pematangsiantar, focusing on the development of reading skills through a communicative method approach. The learning session was divided into two main interconnected activities designed to create an interactive and meaningful learning experience.

Activity one: Reading and analyzing descriptive texts in pairs

The session began with a brief introduction to descriptive texts. The facilitator explained the general characteristics of descriptive texts, their structure (identification and description), and the types of vocabulary commonly used to describe pets, including color,

size, behavior, and traits. This explanation was delivered through a PowerPoint presentation and interspersed with open-ended questions to activate the students' prior knowledge. After the introduction, students were divided into pairs. Each pair received a simple descriptive text about a pet, such as "My Cat," These texts were designed to be appropriate for the comprehension level and language ability of eighth-grade students, and they included linguistic elements that could be analyzed, such as the use of adjectives, sentence structure, and paragraph organization.

In their pairs, students took turns reading the text and then discussed the content together. They analyzed the text's structure by identifying the identification and description parts and recorded unfamiliar vocabulary. The discussions were active, as students felt more comfortable interacting in smaller groups. The classroom atmosphere became lively as each pair engaged in meaningful conversation. The facilitator moved around the classroom, supporting each pair's discussion process by clarifying the meanings of unfamiliar words, assisting with pronunciation, and answering questions related to the text's content and structure. This approach not only developed reading and critical thinking skills but also encouraged collaboration and increased student confidence in using English for communication.

Activity two: Reinforcement through worksheets and text production

After completing the paired reading and discussion activity, students were directed to complete a student worksheet based on the text they had previously read. The worksheet included various exercises, such as:

- a) Reading comprehension questions to assess students' understanding of the text
- b) Table completion tasks using descriptive information from the text
- c) Vocabulary matching with meanings
- d) Text structure analysis, where students were asked to identify the main sentence and supporting details from paragraphs

This activity aimed to reinforce their understanding and provide an opportunity for students to reflect on the content individually. The facilitator remained actively involved, moving around to ensure that each student understood the instructions and completed the tasks effectively. Upon completing the worksheet, the session continued with a text production task, where students were asked to write a descriptive text about a pet of their choice. They could choose a pet they owned or one they liked. In the text, they were required to include information about the pet's name, species, color, size, habits, and further develop the description using their imagination.

After finishing their writing, students were instructed to conduct a personal analysis of their work. They identified the elements of identification and description and highlighted the use of adjectives in their writing. For students who encountered difficulties, the teacher and facilitator provided guidance to help them revise or improve their writing. This activity not only integrated both writing and reading skills but also encouraged students to apply their language knowledge in a practical and contextual way. Additionally, by analyzing their own texts, students learned to evaluate and improve their work an important aspect of reflective learning.

Classroom atmosphere and student response

Overall, the implementation of these activities went smoothly, with students showing a high level of enthusiasm. They appeared more engaged than in traditional lessons, especially because they were involved in pair work and creative tasks. The interactive learning method made students feel more confident to discuss, ask questions, and express their opinions. Some students even volunteered to read their descriptive texts in front of the class, demonstrating that this approach was effective in enhancing student participation and motivation. The English teacher also noted that this method was different from their usual teaching practices and positively impacted student engagement in the classroom.

Phase 3: Evaluation

The reflection and evaluation phase are the final stage of the teaching cycle and is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of the activities that have been carried out. In this phase, the teacher and facilitator work together to observe and analyse both the process and outcomes of the learning that took place in the classroom. This reflection does not focus solely on students' cognitive achievements, but also considers affective aspects and their participation in the activities. During the session, students worked in pairs to read, design, and analyse descriptive texts. This method supports interaction and collaboration among students, which are the core of the communicative approach. The observation showed that most students demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm, especially in discussion and completing the tasks in the worksheet. They appeared more focused, motivated, and actively involved compared to traditional one-way teaching methods.

The use of texts that matched their language level, along with challenging yet realistic tasks, also encouraged students to think critically and express their understanding independently. Supporting media such as images and worksheets added visual reinforcement that helped deepen their comprehension of the text content. The teacher and facilitator noted that this approach successfully created an interactive, enjoyable, and meaningful learning environment. Even in just one session, students showed noticeable progress in understanding the structure of descriptive texts and were able to write simple texts independently. This reflection lays a strong foundation for developing similar instructional strategies in the future, with adjustments made based on the specific needs of each class.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Result

Phase 1: Preparation

The preparation phase is a crucial initial step in the implementation of the lesson, where the focus is on strengthening students' reading skills through a communicative method. This stage aims to ensure that all technical aspects, teaching materials, and instructional methods are appropriate for eighth grade students at SMP Plus HKBP Pematangsiantar. The first step taken was conducting a needs analysis. The teachers held preliminary discussions to identify the main problems students faced when reading English texts. It was revealed that students struggled with vocabulary, text structure, and were generally passive in reading activities. Based on this information, the teacher developed a Lesson Plan (RPP) focused on descriptive texts about pets, aligned with Phase D curriculum and Basic Competencies 3.7–4.7. Next, the teaching materials were developed by selecting descriptive texts that were appropriate, engaging, and suited to the students' abilities. These

texts were designed to spark interest and facilitate comprehension. The teacher also prepared various teaching aids such as animal pictures, vocabulary cards, and interactive worksheets to enrich the learning experience and support students' visual understanding.

Phase 2: Implementation

After all teaching components were ready, the implementation phase was carried out in the classroom. This process was divided into two main activities.

1. In the first activity, students were grouped in pairs to read and analyze descriptive texts about pets, such as "My Cat" or "My Pet Rabbit." Students read together and discussed the text structure, especially the identification and description sections. They also noted down newly encountered vocabulary. The discussions were active, supported by a positive and enjoyable learning atmosphere. The roles of the teacher and facilitator were essential in providing guidance, clarification, and assisting with pronunciation and text comprehension.
2. The second activity was reinforcement, where students worked on worksheets related to the texts they had read. These worksheets included comprehension exercises, vocabulary matching, and text structure analysis. Afterwards, students were asked to write their own descriptive text about a pet they had or liked, and then analyze it by identifying the identification and description components.

Phase 3: Evaluation

This final stage is important for evaluating the effectiveness of the learning process that has taken place. The teacher and facilitator worked together to reflect on the learning implementation and assess the students' engagement levels, both cognitively, affectively, and in terms of their participation in the activities. Based on observations, students showed high interest, especially during the paired activities. They remained focused and enthusiastic in completing the worksheets and writing their own texts. This indicates that the communicative approach used along with visual media and collaborative task greatly contributed to enhancing students' engagement and understanding. This reflection provides a strong foundation for the teacher to develop similar teaching methods in future sessions, with adjustments tailored to students' needs.

4.2 Discussion

Challenges in implementing

During the implementation of English language teaching focused on descriptive texts through a communicative approach in Grade VIII at SMP Plus HKBP Pematangsiantar, *several key challenges emerged:*

1) *Differences in Students Reading Abilities*

The reading abilities among students varied significantly. Some students had already developed a good understanding of descriptive text structure, while others still struggled with recognizing vocabulary and comprehending the content of the reading. This discrepancy led to imbalances in group or pair work, where less proficient students tended to be passive and relied heavily on their partners.

2) *Limited Instructional Time.*

The time allocated for a single lesson session was considered insufficient to complete all planned activities starting from reading and analyzing texts, completing worksheets, to writing and analyzing their own descriptive texts. Teachers had to race against time to ensure that all stages of the lesson could be carried out as intended.

3) **Limited Teaching Media and Facilities**

Not every classroom was equipped to support the optimal use of multimedia. For example, poorly arranged seating or the lack of equipment such as projectors or good-quality speakers hindered the smooth running of activities that depended on visual media. These limitations affected the delivery of materials designed to enhance student engagement and comprehension.

Steps to overcome the challenges

To tackle the various obstacles encountered during the learning process's implementation, the educators and facilitators employed multiple approaches to ensure the activities were successful and the learning goals were met.

1) **Differentiated Instruction Strategies**

To address the different reading skills, present in the classroom, the teacher adopted differentiated instruction by offering extra assistance to students who were having difficulty. For example, during cooperative activities, the teacher intentionally paired students who excelled with those who required more support, facilitating learning from one another. Additionally, the teacher supplied reading materials with varying levels of complexity, allowing students to read according to their own skill levels.

2) **More Efficient Time Management**

To make the most of the limited classroom time, the teacher broke the activities into smaller segments and established specific time frames for each segment. Reading activities, for example, were carried out in a structured and guided way to avoid excessive time consumption. The teacher also focused on the most critical aspects of the lesson to maximize time efficiency. When needed, follow-up tasks like reviewing texts or reflecting on lessons were given as homework.

3) **Optimization Of Available Facilities**

To address the shortage of media and teaching resources, the instructor utilized simple yet effective materials. For instance, printed images of animals were used when a projector was not available. The teacher also configured the seating arrangements to promote better teamwork, even without advanced technology. When feasible, students were permitted to use their personal devices, such as cell phones, to access visual content as a viable alternative.

By implementing these strategies, the challenges were reduced, allowing the learning experience to progress smoothly and achieve the desired results.

5. Conclusion

This research illustrates how effective a communicative method can be for teaching descriptive writing to students in the eighth grade. By following a well-defined process of preparation, execution, and reflection, students exhibited enhancements in their reading comprehension, vocabulary skills, and their self-assurance when using English. Thoughtful lesson design, appropriate resources, and interactive media were crucial in developing a relevant and student-focused learning environment. Although there were hurdles like differing reading skills among students and limited time for lessons, these issues were tackled through personalized instruction and effective classroom management. The reflection stage showed that students were highly engaged, especially during collaborative and writing tasks. In summary, the communicative method was shown to effectively promote language abilities and active involvement, and it is promising for future use in teaching English.

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