Improving Students' Reading Comprehension on Descriptive Text Through Structured Note–Taking Strategy

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Abstract

This research aimed to improve the reading comprehension of tenth-grade students in understanding descriptive text by implementing the Structured Note-Taking Strategy at SMA Swasta Budi Agung Medan. The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR), carried out in two cycles, each comprising the phases of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The participants included 35 students from class X Muhammad Hatta, who faced challenges in recognizing main idea, supporting details, and structuring essential information from the text. Data collection involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data were gathered through multiple-choice comprehension tests, while qualitative data were obtained from observation sheets, interviews, documentation, and field notes. The results demonstrated consistent improvement over the two cycles, with the students' average score rising from 50.86 in the pre-test to 74.71 after the first cycle, and further increasing to 86.85 following the second cycle. These findings indicate that the Structured Note-Taking Strategy effectively aided students in identifying and organizing key information within descriptive text. These results suggest that the Structured Note-Taking Strategy effectively supported students in identify and organize important information in descriptive text, This strategy is suggested for broader application in reading activities to further strengthen students' comprehension.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Structured Note-Taking Strategy, Descriptive Text

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa kelas X dalam memahami teks deskriptif dengan menerapkan Strategi Penulisan Catatan Terstruktur di SMA Swasta Budi Agung Medan. Penelitian ini menggunakan Metode Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (CAR), yang dilaksanakan dalam dua siklus, masing-masing terdiri dari fase perencanaan, tindakan, pengamatan, dan refleksi. Peserta penelitian terdiri dari 35 siswa kelas X Muhammad Hatta yang mengalami kesulitan dalam mengidentifikasi ide utama, detail pendukung, dan mengorganisir informasi penting dari teks. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Data kuantitatif dikumpulkan melalui tes pemahaman pilihan ganda, sedangkan data kualitatif diperoleh dari lembar observasi, wawancara, dokumentasi, dan catatan lapangan. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan konsisten selama dua siklus, dengan rata-rata skor siswa naik dari 50,86 pada pra-tes menjadi 74,71 setelah siklus pertama, dan meningkat lagi menjadi 86,85 setelah siklus kedua. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa Strategi Penulisan Catatan Terstruktur secara efektif membantu siswa dalam mengidentifikasi dan mengorganisir informasi kunci dalam teks deskriptif. Hasil ini menyarankan bahwa Strategi Penulisan Catatan Terstruktur secara efektif mendukung siswa dalam mengidentifikasi dan mengorganisir informasi penting dalam teks deskriptif. Strategi ini disarankan untuk diterapkan secara lebih luas dalam aktivitas membaca guna memperkuat pemahaman siswa.

Kata Kunci: Pemahaman Membaca, Strategi Pencatatan Terstruktur, Teks Deskriptif

Introduction

Reading, together with listening, speaking, and writing, forms the foundation of language learning. It serves as a fundamental ability that enables learners to obtain knowledge, gather information, and enhance critical thinking. Anderson (2003) emphasizes that reading is not only about identifying written symbols, but more importantly, it involves grasping the meaning and messages conveyed by the author. In line with this, Hedglock & Ferris (2009) argue that reading represents an active and complex activity, requiring the use of strategies and cognitive skills while interacting with the information presented in a text. This means that effective reading is more than literal understanding; it also requires analyzing the context and interpreting the implications of the text(Fatin & Juliana, 2024).

Reading comprehension is therefore an essential element of learning, as it allows students to interpret meaning and connect written information with prior knowledge. Snow (2002) points out that successful reading comprehension requires not only cognitive skills but also emotional involvement to grasp the overall meaning of a passage. Each student must have good reading comprehension to support their learning. By having good reading comprehension of English text, students can develop the language skills they need to gain new information and understand what they read.

However, in the preliminary study at SMA Swasta Budi Agung Medan, the researcher identified various challenges encountered by students when comprehending English descriptive text in the classroom. Firstly, many students had difficulty achieving optimal comprehension in reading English text. This difficulty was often caused by a lack of mastery of reading strategies, which made it challenging for them to identify the main idea and key information. Secondly, they often failed to to recognize language features and text structures such as key components of the text that are essential for comprehension. And the last,the majority of students were capable of merely reading the text given by the teacher without understanding its meaning. This is due to students cannot understand what they read. Therefore, to overcome this problem in teaching reading comprehension, alternative strategies are needed in reading comprehension. One strategy that can be used and suits the needs of students is the structured note-taking strategy.

Structured Note-taking Strategy significantly contributes to improving students' ability to comprehend reading materials. Buehl (2023) explains that the structured note-taking strategy directs learners to focus on the most relevant information in a passage, which assists them in understanding the content and retaining it for a longer period. It also helps in organizing idea systematically, allowing students to identify central concepts and summarize effectively. Smith et al. (2016) explain that structured note-taking strategy enables students to see the relationships between different pieces of information, which enhances their ability to analyze and recall content(J. Juliana & Anggraini, 2024).

Structured Note-taking Strategy proves beneficial when engaging with descriptive text, as it assists students in systematically arranging detailed and varied information. Robinson (2020) states that descriptive text contains explicit details about objects, places, or people and structured note-taking allows students to manage this information efficiently. By identifying text structures, understanding relationships between details, and focusing on key points like title, main idea, supporting details, and conclusions, students develop better reading comprehension(- Juliana, 2018).

Buehl (2023) highlights that employing a structured note-taking strategy enables students to organize descriptive text in a structured way, making the content clearer, more engaging, and supporting better comprehension. Structured note-taking strategy allows students to identify and organize important elements in descriptive text that contain details that describe specific objects, places, or events such as adjectives, sentence structures, and patterns of description more systematically. According to Pauk (2013), when students write down the information of the text in a structured way, they can identify the relationship between idea more clearly, which helps them understand and remember the material more effectively. In summary implementing the structured note-taking strategy aims to improve tenth-grade students' understanding of descriptive text at SMA Budi Agung Medan, with the minimum mastery

criteria (MMC) is 75 and considered a challenging requirement, the researcher carried out Classroom Action Research (CAR) to help students achieve the target through this strategy(J. Juliana, 2016).

From the previous explanation, the researcher decided to conduct a study with the title "Improving Students' Reading Comprehension on Descriptive Text Through Structured Note-Taking Strategy at the Tenth Grade of SMA Swasta Budi Agung Medan."

Method

Classroom Action Research (CAR) was implemented to address challenges in learning and to improve students' ability to comprehend reading materials. CAR is characterized as a reflective research model that requires continuous implementation and evaluation in collaboration between teachers and researchers. Kemmis and McTaggart (2014) describe Classroom Action Research as a cycle that involves four repeating phases: planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting.

This study took place at SMA Swasta Budi Agung Medan**,** located at Jalan Platina Raya No. 7, Rengas Pulau, Medan Marelan District, Medan City, North Sumatra, in the academic year 2025/2026. The study focused on the tenth-grade students of the Muhammad Hatta class, which consisted of 35 students, 20 female and 15 male. Following a consultation with the English teacher acting as a collaborator, this particular class was selected due to the students' ongoing difficulties in comprehending descriptive text, particularly in identifying main idea, recognizing supporting information, and understanding the language features. Therefore, the Structured Note-Taking Strategy was applied as a way to improve their reading comprehension.

In accordance with the framework outlined by Kemmis and McTaggart (2014), the research was carried out through a cyclical sequence comprising four primary phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. If the issues were not completely resolved in the initial cycle, the researcher proceeded to the subsequent cycle by making revisions and enhancements to the prior action. Prior to conducting the cycles, a preliminary study was carried out to examine the students' initial in reading comprehension and to observe the classroom situation. This preliminary stage was important to identify the students' difficulties and to design an appropriate instructional plan.

During the planning stage, the researcher developed various elements, such as the lesson plan, instructional materials, structured note-taking worksheets, and instruments for observation and evaluation, all of which were intended to guide the process of acquiring knowledge within the classroom setting. The planning stage was carried out in coordination with the English teacher to guarantee that the interventions were effectively implemented and suited to the students' needs. During the action stage, the researcher implemented the Structured Note-Taking Strategy to teach descriptive text. In the first cycle, students were introduced to this strategy and engaged in exercises to apply it for better understanding of descriptive text. In cycle 2, adjustments were introduced to overcome the difficulties found in the first cycle, including revisions to the lesson plan, clearer guidance, and modifications to group tasks aimed at supporting students' comprehension.

Observation took place concurrently with the execution of the action. The researcher and the collaborator alike monitored the students' activities, classroom interactions, and learning outcomes throughout the teaching and learning process. These observations were documented through field notes and observation sheets. Subsequently, a reflection was conducted after each cycle to assess the effectiveness and identify any limitations of the strategy employed. The results of the reflection were used to determine whether the action had successfully improved students' reading comprehension or whether further modifications were necessary in the following cycle. By adhering to a systematic process involving preliminary study, planning, implementation, observation, and reflection, the research showed that the Structured Note-Taking Strategy significantly improve students' comprehension of descriptive text. The data collection tools comprised a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data was gathered through multiple-choice reading comprehension tests administered throughout the cycles. Qualitative data were collected using observation sheet, field notes, interviews, and documentation. The observation forms and field notes were employed to note the students' participation, behavior, and learning activities during the

lessons. Interviews with both the students and the English instructor were carried out to gain feedback on the implementation of the Structured Note-Taking Strategy. Moreover, documentation such as photographs and videos served as supporting evidence of the instructional and learning activities.

The reading comprehension test aimed to evaluate students' proficiency in understanding descriptive text. Before the intervention, a preliminary test was given to assess the students' existing skill levels. Following the first cycle, Post-test I was conducted to gauge their progress, and after the second cycle, Post-test II was given to assess additional improvements resulting from the revised actions. Each assessment comprised 20 multiple-choice questions, where each correct answer is awarded 5 points, resulting in a maximum achievable score ranging from 0 to 100.

The analysis of the data utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Regarding the quantitative component, reading comprehension test results were examined by determining the mean scores and the proportion of students who achieved the MMC of 75. Qualitative data from observations, interviews, field notes, and documentation were analyzed descriptively to show the classroom situation, students' responses, and participation. The use of both data types provided a clearer understanding of how the Structured Note-Taking Strategy can improve students' comprehension of descriptive text.

Result and Discussion

After the Structured Note-Taking Strategy was introduced, students demonstrated significant improvement in their understanding of descriptive text. Analysis of the results obtained at each stage highlights a steady rise in scores, indicating improved reading comprehension, which are presented in three parts: pre-test, post-test 1 in Cycle 1, post-test 2 in cycle 2.

1. Pre-Test (Preliminary Study)

During the initial Stage, it was observed that students encountered challenges in understanding reading materials. particularly in recognizing main idea, supporting details, and underlying meanings conveyed within English descriptive text. The average score obtained in Pre-Test was 50.86, with only 3 out of 35 students successfully achieved the MMC of 75. The outcomes of the pre-cycle assessment are detailed below.

Tabel 1 *Students' Performance in Pre-Test*

No.	Category	Value Range	Frequency	%
1.	Excellent	80-100	1	2.86%
2.	Good	70-79	3	8.57%
3.	Satisfactory	60-69	12	34.29%
4.	Poor	50-59	5	14.29%
5.	Very Poor	0-49	14	40.00%
	Total		35	100%

As shown in the table above, the percentage of students' scores on the descriptive text *"Cristiano Ronaldo"* indicates that only a small number were able to comprehend the material well, whereas most students remained in the poor and very poor categories. This finding demonstrates that students' reading comprehension levels were still below expectation. Among 35 students, just 1 student (2.86%) reached the excellent category, and 3 students (8.57%) were in the good category. Meanwhile, 12 students (34.29%) were classified as Satisfactory, and 5 students (14.29%) as poor. The majority, 14 students (40.00%), were in the very poor category. The findings indicate that students' reading comprehension were generally low and in need of considerable enhancement.

2 Post-Test 1(Cycle 1)

During the cycle 1, the Structured Note-Taking Strategy was applied to assist students in improving their comprehension on descriptive text. During this stage, students showed increased interest and motivation. This was seen in post-test 1 results, where 25 out of 35 students achieved the minimum mastery criteria (MMC) of 75, with the mean score of 74.71%. The results of cycle 1 are presented as follows.

Tabel 2. *Students' Performance in Post-Test 1 (Cycle 1)*

No.	Category	Value Range	Frequency	%
1.	Excellent	80-100	17	48.57%
2.	Good	70-79	11	31.43%
3.	Satisfactory	60-69	5	14.29%
4.	Poor	50-59	1	2.86%
5.	Very Poor	0-49	1	2.86%
	Total		35	100%

At this stage, the researcher applied the structured note-taking strategy using the descriptive text entitled *"Cristiano Ronaldo."* The strategy helped students organize key information, making it easier to identify main idea, supporting details, and language features. The outcomes from Cycle 1 demonstrated progress, with 17 students (48.57%) reached the excellent category, 11 students (31.43%) were in the good category, 5 students (14.29%) were classified as satisfactory, and only 1 student (2.86%) each was found in the Poor and very poor categories. Although these results showed better performance in students' reading comprehension, bnot all students had achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC), so the research was continued to Cycle 2.

3. Post-Test 2 (Cycle 2)

During cycle 2, the Structured Note-Taking Strategy was applied with improved planning to strengthen students' reading comprehension on descriptive text. A new text entitled *"Greysia Polii"* was used, which was interesting and relevant to the students. In post-test II, 34 of the 35 students successfully achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC) of 75, with the class mean score of 86.86. The results of cycle 2 are presented as follow.

Tabel 3. *Students' Performance in Post-Test 2 (Cycle 2)*

No.	Category	Value Range	Frequency	%
1.	Excellent	80-100	31	88.57%
2.	Good	70-79	4	11.43%
3.	Satisfactory	60-69	-	-
4.	Poor	50-59	-	-
5.	Very Poor	0-49	-	-
	Total		35	100%

At this stage, students were asked to share their experiences with the instruction and learning process of reading comprehension using the Structured Note-Taking Strategy. In Cycle 2, the researcher used a descriptive text entitled *"Greysia Polii,"* which was considered interesting and relevant for the students. During this cycle, the researcher improved the teaching process by giving clearer explanations and more guidance so that students could apply the Structured Note-Taking Strategy more effectively. The students stated that they felt more motivated and engaged in the reading process because the strategy made it easier for them to find the main idea, supporting details, and understand the language features on descriptive text more clearly and systematically.

The results score of post-test II indicated a substantial improvement from the first cycle. A total of 31 students (88.57%) achieved the excellent category and 4 students (11.43%) were in the good category. This means that 34 out of 35 students successfully achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC) of 75, with mean score of 86.86. No students were found in the satisfactory, poor, or very poor categories, indicating that almost all students achieved the minimum mastery criteria (MMC) of 75.

The results showed that students' reading comprehension on descriptive text improved steadily, with an increasing number of students passing the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC) from the pre-test to Cycle 1 and then to Cycle 2. In the pre-test, only a few students were able to pass the MMC. After implementing Cycle 1, 71.43% of the students achieved the MMC, showing some progress. In Cycle 2, the researcher revised the teaching plan to make it more effective and provided additional guidance and support to the students. As a result, 34 out of 35 students (97.14%) successfully achieved the MMC, with the mean score of 86.86%, demonstrating a clear and significant improvement compared to the previous stages.

From the interviews, students said that using the Structured Note-Taking Strategy helped them understand descriptive text better. They explained that the strategy made it easier to write down important points in an organized way and focus on the main idea. Many students also noticed that they could understand the structure, language features, and key details on descriptive text more clearly than before. Overall, they felt more confident and capable in reading and comprehending descriptive text after applying the strategy. Students also said that using the Structured Note-Taking Strategy

made reading more enjoyable and easier to follow. They explained that the notes they created served as a guide that helped them remember and review the important parts of the text. In addition, students felt more involved in the classroom because the strategy encouraged them to be active and engaged during reading. They also admitted that their understanding on descriptive text improved greatly after using the structured note-taking strategy. The English teacher reported positive outcomes from using the Structured Note-Taking Strategy. Students were observed to be more focused, organized, and enthusiastic during reading activities. The strategy not only improved their reading comprehension but also boosted their confidence in discussing and answering questions about the text.

Overall, the application of the Structured Note-Taking Strategy has demonstrated a notable enhancement in students' comprehension of descriptive text. This approach assisted learners in systematically organizing key information, concentrating on central idea, and boosting their confidence and engagement during reading tasks. Overall, the students' reading comprehension showed marked advancement from the pre-test to the post-tests over two cycles, indicating that this strategy effectively promotes better learning outcomes and deeper understanding of descriptive text.

The quantitative findings indicated a steady increase in the average scores, rising from 50.86 in the pre-test to 74.71 in Cycle 1, and further reaching 86.86 in Cycle 2. The percentage of students meeting the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC) showed a steady improvement across each cycle. Qualitative data gathered via observation sheet, field notes and interviews, indicated that students demonstrated increased engagement, interest, and active participation during the learning activities. These outcomes demonstrate that the Structured Note-Taking Strategy effectively to improve tenth-grade students' comprehension of descriptive text at SMA Swasta Budi Agung Medan.

Conclusion

This study sought to enhance tenth-grade students' understanding of descriptive text by implementing the Structured Note-Taking Strategy at SMA Swasta Budi Agung Medan. The study took place during the 2025/2026 academic year, specifically from May to June 2025, and involved 35 students from class X Muhammad Hatta. The study was carried out in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of four meetings. In the first cycle, the students used the descriptive text entitled *"Cristiano Ronaldo"* as the learning material, and in the second cycle, they used *"Greysia Polii."* Each cycle included reading activities, the implementation of structured note-taking and discussions. These activities enabled the teacher to effectively guide the students, assess their comprehension, and offer assistance as necessary.

This study found that using the Structured Note-Taking Strategy helped tenth-grade students at SMA Swasta Budi Agung Medan in enhancing their comprehension of descriptive text. In the pre-test, only a few students achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC), however by the conclusion of the second cycle, nearly all students (97.14%) had reached MMC. Observations and interviews also showed that students became more active and enthusiastic during learning. They said that the strategy made it easier to identify main idea, organize important information, and improved retention of the text. Overall, the Structured Note-Taking Strategy proved to be an effective strategy for advancing students' reading comprehension of descriptive text.

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Curriculum Vitae

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