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The Read–Cover–Remember–Retell (RCRR) Technique in Enhancing EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension: A Lesson from Junior High School Context

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the Read–Cover–Remember–Retell (RCRR) technique in enhancing EFL learners' reading comprehension of narrative texts in a junior high school context. The research was conducted with ninth-grade students of SMP Negeri 15 Palu using a quasi-experimental design involving two intact classes. One class was assigned as the experimental group, taught using the RCRR technique, while the other served as the control group and received conventional reading instruction. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test reading comprehension assessments consisting of multiple-choice items that measured students' ability to identify main ideas, supporting details, vocabulary meaning, and inferences. Descriptive statistics were used to examine students' initial and final performance, and an independent samples t-test was employed to determine the significance of differences between the two groups. The results showed that the experimental group's mean post-test score increased substantially compared to its pre-test score and outperformed the control group, which demonstrated only modest improvement. The statistical analysis confirmed that the difference between the post-test scores of both groups was significant, indicating that the RCRR technique had a positive impact on students' reading comprehension. The findings suggest that the structured stages of RCRR promote active engagement, deeper processing of textual information, and better recall, making reading a more interactive and meaningful activity. This study concludes that RCRR is an effective and practical strategy for improving reading comprehension in EFL classrooms and offers pedagogical implications for teachers seeking student-centered approaches aligned with curriculum demands.

Keywords: Read-Cover-Remember-Retell (RCRR); Reading comprehension; Narrative text

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INTRODUCTION

Reading plays a central role in language learning because it enables students to interact with written texts, construct meaning, and access information or experiences conveyed by the writer. As Fangesti (2022) explains, "Reading is a process of decoding message which readers own experience and knowledge," emphasizing that comprehension is shaped by the interaction between the text and the reader's prior knowledge. From this perspective, reading is not merely recognizing words but understanding the writer's message through written media. Within the broader domain of reading, reading comprehension is a critical skill because it requires students to make sense of textual information, infer meaning, and integrate new ideas with existing cognitive frameworks. Savage (2022) reinforces this view by stating that "Reading comprehension is a complex process that involves several cognitive skills, including decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and background knowledge," highlighting the multidimensional nature of the

comprehension process.

In the context of the Indonesian Curriculum 2013 (K13), reading comprehension is one of the essential competencies that students must master. This curriculum requires learners to understand various genres of short functional texts—including recount, narrative, descriptive, and analytical exposition texts—according to the communicative purpose and linguistic features of each genre (Sudiatama, Dehghani, & Zamorano, 2023; Nurdiana et al., 2023). Students are therefore expected not only to recognize information but also to interpret, evaluate, and articulate ideas presented in the text. However, fulfilling these expectations can be challenging for many learners, especially those with limited vocabulary mastery, insufficient background knowledge, or low motivation to engage with reading tasks (Habibi, Jupri, & Dehghani, 2022). These challenges underscore the importance of adopting effective instructional strategies that support students' comprehension and promote active engagement with texts.

One strategy that has gained attention for its potential to improve reading comprehension is the Read-Cover-Remember-Retell (RCRR) technique. RCRR is designed to make reading an active cognitive process by encouraging students to read a portion of the text, cover it, recall its content, and retell it in their own words. Regita (2021) describes the technique as "a collaborative strategy for increasing the reader's knowledge and comprehension," emphasizing its value in enhancing students' participation and cognitive involvement. The structured steps of RCRR support students in slowing down, focusing on meaning, and internalizing key information. Dahler, Putra, Zaim, and Fauzan (2018) further explain that "This strategy is designed to help students read slowly and for meaning. Students begin by reading a small amount of text, then covering the print with their hands (Qunayeer, 2021; Trisnayanti et al., 2020). Then, students take a moment to wonder while their hands are over the page. Last, students retell the conclusion of the text they had read." Through these stages, students practice memory retrieval, summarization, and oral expression—skills that contribute significantly to comprehension.

Previous research on the RCRR strategy generally reports positive outcomes. Studies have shown that RCRR can improve comprehension, increase students' engagement, and support memory recall during reading activities across various educational levels and linguistic contexts (Dahler et al., 2019; Maryansyah & Ramadhani, 2021; Fangesti, 2022). Many of these studies, however, have limitations. Some focused exclusively on specific reading subskills, such as identifying main ideas; others involved small sample sizes or examined only one text genre. Additionally, there is limited research applying RCRR in Indonesian secondary schools where English is taught as a foreign language and where students often struggle simultaneously with low reading motivation and limited vocabulary. These gaps indicate the need for further investigation to determine how RCRR can address broader classroom challenges and support holistic comprehension development.

The present study attempts to fill these gaps by implementing the RCRR technique in a context where students exhibit both low interest in reading and inadequate vocabulary mastery. Observations conducted prior to the study revealed that students often read passively, relied heavily on the text without attempting to recall information, and struggled to articulate the main ideas using their own words (Dahler et al., 2019; Maryansyah & Ramadhani, 2021). These challenges hindered their ability to engage meaningfully with reading tasks and reduced their overall comprehension performance. The RCRR technique offers a structured yet flexible approach that can directly address these issues. By guiding students to read in smaller segments, cover the text to prevent overdependence on written cues, and retell the information, RCRR encourages deeper processing of vocabulary and content, strengthens memory, and transforms reading into an interactive activity rather than a passive one.

The suitability of RCRR for this educational context lies in its ability to promote

active engagement and scaffold students' cognitive processes. Each step of the technique fosters a particular aspect of comprehension: focused attention during reading, cognitive reinforcement during the cover-and-remember stages, and expressive capability during retelling. Because students must reconstruct ideas using their own words, the strategy naturally increases motivation, builds confidence, and enhances vocabulary retention. These features make RCRR especially valuable for learners who struggle with traditional reading exercises and benefit from structured guidance and active learning experiences.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive approach: unlike many previous studies that examined only specific aspects of reading, this research investigates how RCRR simultaneously influences comprehension, vocabulary reinforcement, motivation, and active participation in Indonesian secondary education. By addressing multiple dimensions of learning, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how RCRR functions as an integrated instructional tool rather than a technique limited to improving recall.

Based on the background above, the purpose of this research is to determine the effectiveness of the Read-Cover-Remember-Retell (RCRR) technique in improving students' reading comprehension, enhancing their motivation, and supporting vocabulary development within the framework of the Curriculum 2013. The study also aims to offer pedagogical insights for teachers seeking strategies to address low reading interest and limited vocabulary among learners.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research employed a quasi-experimental design to investigate the causal effect of the Read-Cover-Remember-Retell (RCRR) technique on students' reading comprehension. The quasi-experimental model was chosen because the researcher could not randomly assign students to different groups due to the fixed class structure in the school, a condition commonly encountered in educational settings. Despite this limitation, the design still allowed for systematic comparison between groups. The experimental group received instruction using the RCRR technique, while the control group was taught through conventional reading methods. The treatment followed the four structured stages of RCRR—reading, covering, remembering, and retelling—and was implemented consistently across several meetings to ensure procedural reliability. To maintain control over external variables, both groups were taught by the same teacher, used materials of comparable difficulty, and received equal instructional time. Pre-test and post-test assessments were administered to measure changes in students' reading comprehension and to determine the extent to which the RCRR technique contributed to the improvement. These control mechanisms strengthened the internal validity of this research and supported the accuracy of the causal conclusions drawn from the quasi-experimental design.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were ninth-grade students of SMP Negeri 15 Palu, comprising 120 students distributed across four intact classes of approximately 30 students each. The students ranged in age from 14 to 15 years old and represented a balanced distribution of both male and female learners, making the population suitable for comparative instructional research. A purposive sampling technique was used to select two classes as the research sample, chosen based on comparable academic performance, teacher assessments, and classroom stability to ensure that both groups had similar initial characteristics. This selection rationale strengthens the internal validity of the study by minimizing pre-existing differences between groups. Furthermore, this sampling procedure aligns with Arikunto's (2006) view that a sample must serve as a representative subset of the population under study, allowing the findings to be meaningfully generalized within the school context.

Instruments and Data Collection Technique

The instrument used to measure students' reading comprehension was a standardized reading test composed of multiple-choice items designed to assess comprehension skills such as identifying main ideas, supporting details, vocabulary meaning, and inference-making. Each item was scored dichotomously (1 for correct, 0 for incorrect), and the overall reliability of the instrument was verified through statistical procedures to ensure its validity for instructional evaluation. Data collection was conducted in three stages: a pre-test administered to both groups to measure baseline performance, followed by several sessions of treatment in which the experimental group received instruction using the RCRR technique while the control group received conventional teaching, and finally a post-test administered under the same conditions as the pre-test. This timeline ensured methodological rigor and allowed for accurate measurement of the effect of the RCRR technique on students' reading comprehension.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Read–Cover–Remember–Retell (RCRR) technique on students' reading comprehension by comparing the performance of the experimental and control groups before and after treatment. Two main statistical procedures were employed: descriptive statistics to summarize students' scores and inferential statistics to test the significance of differences between pre-test and post-test results. The first stage of analysis involved scoring the students' responses on the reading comprehension tests. Each test consisted of multiple-choice items designed to measure comprehension of narrative texts, including main ideas, supporting details, vocabulary inference, and sequence of events. Correct responses were assigned a score of 1 and incorrect responses a score of 0. The total scores were converted into percentages to facilitate comparison with the school's minimum competency standard (75). These scores were then tabulated to determine the minimum, maximum, and mean scores for each group in both the pre-test and post-test phases.

Descriptive statistics revealed that the experimental and control groups had comparable baseline performance. The mean pre-test score of the experimental group was 55.27, indicating that most students demonstrated low to moderate comprehension prior to the intervention. Similarly, the control group's mean pre-test score also fell below the minimum mastery threshold. Only a small number of students from either class achieved scores above 75, confirming that both groups started with relatively similar comprehension levels. This similarity in initial performance established the equivalence of groups and justified comparisons after treatment.

To determine whether the improvement in the experimental group was statistically significant, an independent samples *t*-test was used to compare the post-test scores of both groups. Prior to conducting the *t*-test, normality and homogeneity assumptions were examined. The distribution of scores for both groups was approximately normal, and variance homogeneity tests indicated that the two groups had statistically comparable variance. These results validated the use of the parametric *t*-test for further analysis.

The *t*-test revealed that the calculated *t* value (*t*test) exceeded the critical value (*t*table) at the 0.05 significance level. Because *t*test > *t*table, the null hypothesis (H_0)—which stated that there would be no significant difference between the groups—was rejected. Instead, the alternative hypothesis (H_a), stating that students taught through the RCRR technique would perform significantly better than those taught through conventional methods, was accepted. This statistical evidence strongly supports the conclusion that the RCRR technique had a measurable and significant impact on improving students' reading comprehension.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

In this research, there are two kinds of result of the test: the results of pre-test and the result of post-test. The result of the pre-test was used to find out the basic knowledge of the students' reading comprehension before treatment. The result post-test was used to find out the students' reading comprehension after the treatment. The researcher then analyzed the results to find out a significant difference of the students' reading comprehension on narrative text.

After computing the mean score, the research computed the deviation and square deviation of students score in pre-test and post-test. The result of deviation pre-test and post-test of control group.

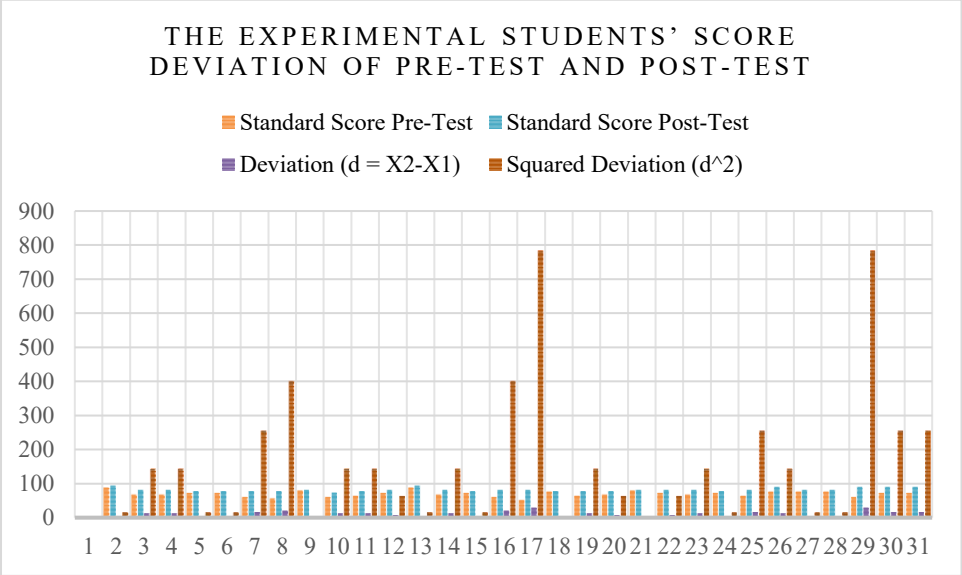

Figure 1. EFL Students' Scores in Pre-test and Post-test in the Experimental Class

The results presented in the graph of the experimental students' score deviation between the pre-test and post-test indicate a substantial improvement after the application of the Read-Cover-Remember-Retell (RCRR) technique. In the pre-test, only a few students reached the minimum standard score of 75, while most students performed at low to moderate levels, with scores ranging from 31 to 87. The mean pre-test score of the experimental group was 55.27, which clearly shows that students initially struggled with comprehending narrative texts. This baseline aligns with earlier findings in reading comprehension research, which commonly report that students tend to depend heavily on surface-level reading without effectively recalling, interpreting, or reconstructing text meaning. Following the treatment using the RCRR technique, the deviation and squared deviation values in the graph show consistent upward trends across nearly all students, indicating meaningful score increases.

The pattern of the data reflects the cognitive advantages of RCRR, which requires students to (1) read attentively, (2) hide the text, (3) recall the main ideas, and (4) retell the content using their own words. Overall, based on the graphical results and the consistent improvements observed between the pre-test and post-test, it can be concluded that the RCRR technique effectively enhances students' reading comprehension. Students not only demonstrated higher scores after treatment, but also showed increased engagement, confidence in retelling texts, and improved ability to reconstruct narrative structures. This suggests that RCRR is a suitable strategy for promoting deeper understanding, strengthening vocabulary retention, and building critical reading skills in EFL settings.

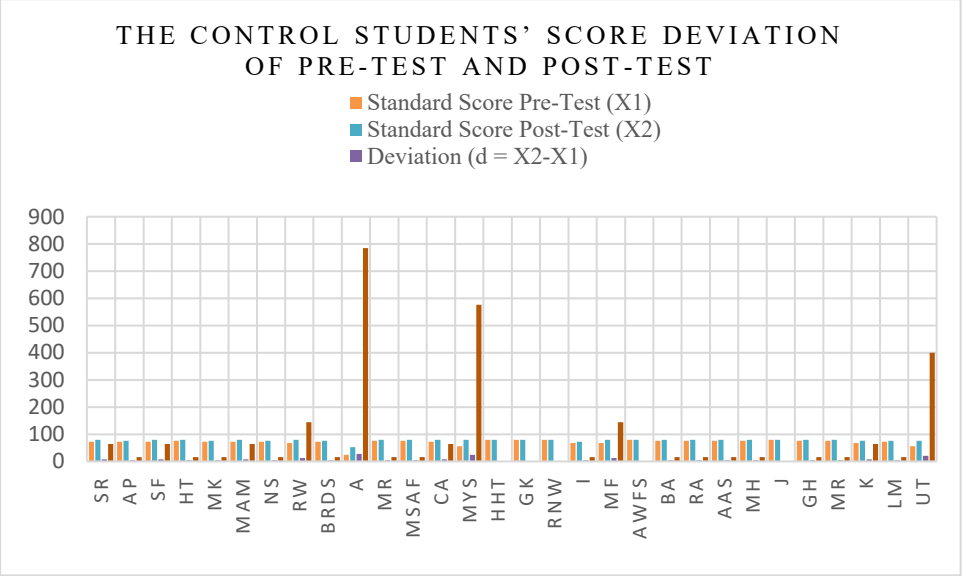

Figure 2. EFL Students' Scores in Pre-test and Post-test in the Control Class

The control students' score deviation graph presents a notably different pattern compared to the experimental group. The pre-test scores show that most students in the control class also began with low–to–moderate reading comprehension levels, with many students failing to reach the minimum mastery criteria. Their pre-test performance demonstrates similar variability, indicating that the group initially struggled with understanding and retaining the content of the reading materials. However, after analyzing the post-test results, the deviations between the pre-test and post-test scores appear relatively small. The limited increase in deviation (d = X2 – X1) suggests that the control group's improvement was modest and inconsistent across students.

Unlike the experimental class that received systematic RCRR-based instruction, the control group continued learning through conventional reading activities. Without the structured support of Read-Cover-Remember-Retell, students interacted with the reading texts in a more passive manner, which likely contributed to the minimal improvement shown in the graph. Although a few students experienced slight increases in their scores, the majority showed only marginal gains or remained relatively stagnant. The absence of significant positive deviation—and the very low squared deviation values—indicates that the instructional approach used in the control group did not effectively enhance deep comprehension, memory retention, or active engagement with the text.

Overall, the graphical results reinforce the conclusion that students who were not taught using the RCRR technique demonstrated weaker progress in reading comprehension. The limited improvement in the control group highlights the importance of structured reading strategies in supporting students' cognitive processing. Compared to the experimental class, which showed substantial score deviations after applying RCRR, the control group's outcomes serve as compelling evidence that traditional methods alone are insufficient for achieving meaningful gains in reading comprehension. These findings strengthen the argument that RCRR is a more effective and pedagogically sound technique for improving students' reading performance.

Discussion

The findings of the present study reveal a clear and substantial improvement in students' reading comprehension after being taught through the Read–Cover–Remember–Retell (RCRR) technique. The experimental group demonstrated notably higher post-test scores compared to the control group, whose progress remained modest despite receiving conventional instruction. The graphical data further reinforce this difference, showing that

nearly all students in the experimental class experienced meaningful positive score deviations, while the control class showed minimal variation. These findings affirm the effectiveness of the RCRR technique and echo the conclusions drawn by previous scholars who have highlighted the strategy's capacity to enhance engagement, memory, and comprehension in EFL contexts .

The improvement observed in the experimental group aligns with the conceptual premise of RCRR as a cognitively supportive technique that encourages deep processing of textual information. The strategy requires learners to read a segment of text attentively, cover it to prevent visual dependence, recall the essential content, and retell it using their own words. This structured cycle encourages active retrieval and strengthens retention—two core processes in comprehension development. Dahler et al. (2019) emphasize that the technique helps students "read slowly and for meaning," pushing them beyond surface-level decoding toward constructing mental representations of the text. The present study provides further empirical support for this claim, as students demonstrated stronger narrative recall and better identification of main ideas after engaging in the RCRR process.

Comparative analysis with earlier research shows strong consistency. Studies by Maryansyah and Ramadhani (2021) and Regita (2021) reported that RCRR significantly increases students' ability to analyze and reconstruct narrative content—an outcome mirrored in the current study. These scholars note that the retelling phase plays a crucial role in pushing learners toward meaningful reinterpretation rather than passive reading. Likewise, the present findings show that students became increasingly confident in expressing story elements and summarizing key points. This suggests that the metacognitive dimension of RCRR—encouraging learners to monitor their understanding and self-evaluate their recall—may contribute meaningfully to the observed improvement.

Similar patterns are noted in broader reading research, where strategies that integrate retrieval practice, summarization, and oral retelling consistently enhance comprehension outcomes (Savage, 2022). The improvement in the experimental group thus situates RCRR within a well-established theoretical tradition. According to schema theory, comprehension improves when learners actively connect new textual information with prior knowledge. By encouraging students to remember and retell information, RCRR helps them activate and reorganize their cognitive schemata, potentially explaining the substantial gains documented in this study.

The findings also contrast sharply with the results from the control group. Students taught using traditional methods showed only limited improvement, reflecting previous findings that conventional reading instruction often leads to passive engagement and weak retention. Abidin (2020) and Asmawati (2015) argue that strategies that rely heavily on explanation and translation do little to promote independent meaning-making. This may explain why students in the control class continued to struggle, as they had fewer opportunities to practice retrieval, reinterpret content, or actively reconstruct narrative structures. In contrast, students exposed to the RCRR technique engaged more actively with the text, which translated into higher comprehension scores and improved reading behaviors.

In comparing the present findings with those from similar quasi-experimental studies, consistency emerges not only in statistical patterns but also in reported classroom dynamics. Askurny, Eliza, and Suryadi (2019) found that RCRR promoted collaboration and increased students' willingness to participate—two classroom behaviors that were also observed qualitatively in the current research. Students in the experimental group became more confident in sharing retellings, asking questions, and reflecting on textual meaning. These behavioral changes indicate that the success of RCRR is not merely cognitive; it also relates to affective engagement. This supports the argument made by Suyadi and Septiana (2020), who maintained that RCRR enhances motivation by making the reading process more interactive and less intimidating.

Theoretically, the results contribute to a deeper understanding of RCRR's mechanisms. The technique appears to operate at the intersection of cognitive and sociocultural learning theories. Cognitively, it reinforces working memory, encourages chunking of information, and strengthens long-term retention through repeated recall. Socioculturally, it fosters a learning environment where students negotiate meaning collaboratively and construct knowledge through interaction. This dual influence may explain why RCRR produces stronger outcomes than strategies limited to either cognitive or social domains alone. The present study thus extends the theoretical understanding of RCRR by highlighting how its structured steps support both mental processing and classroom discourse.

Practically, these findings have important implications for English language teaching, especially in contexts where students demonstrate low reading interest and limited vocabulary. The study illustrates that RCRR can help students regulate their reading pace, focus their attention, and build comprehension skills incrementally—an advantage particularly relevant for EFL learners who often struggle with processing dense English texts. Teachers may find the technique beneficial because it integrates easily into existing curricula and requires minimal resources. Additionally, the RCRR cycle supports differentiated instruction, as students can adapt the amount of text they read or the depth of their retellings according to their proficiency levels. This flexibility makes RCRR a practical tool for inclusive classrooms where learners have diverse reading abilities.

Furthermore, the motivational benefits observed in this study suggest that RCRR could counteract one of the persistent challenges in EFL reading: the lack of student engagement. When students retell stories in their own words, they experience a stronger sense of ownership over the content, which can translate into increased reading confidence and curiosity. Over time, this may cultivate more positive attitudes toward reading, potentially leading to long-term improvements in literacy habits. Such implications extend beyond the classroom, as improved reading comprehension contributes to academic success across subjects.

The novelty of this study lies in its application of the RCRR technique within a new institutional and cultural context and in its attempt to address multiple learning problems simultaneously—comprehension difficulties, low motivation, and limited vocabulary. While earlier studies often examined only isolated aspects of reading performance, the present study integrated cognitive, motivational, and linguistic dimensions, offering a more holistic understanding of RCRR's impact. The consistent improvement across all experimental students, as shown in the post-test deviations, suggests that RCRR's benefits may extend across proficiency levels, making it a widely applicable technique.

The present study reinforces the growing body of evidence supporting the Read–Cover–Remember–Retell strategy as an effective, student-centered approach for enhancing reading comprehension in EFL environments. By comparing the findings with previous literature, situating them within established theoretical frameworks, and considering their practical implications, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on how structured reading strategies can transform passive reading tendencies into active, meaningful engagement. The results underscore the importance of implementing pedagogical approaches that promote both cognitive depth and learner motivation, offering valuable insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and researchers seeking to improve literacy outcomes in similar contexts.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that the Read–Cover–Remember–Retell (RCRR) technique is an effective instructional strategy for improving EFL learners' reading comprehension, particularly in the context of narrative texts at the junior high school level. Students who received RCRR-based instruction showed substantial gains from pre-test to post-test, both in terms of mean scores and individual score deviations,

while those taught through conventional methods demonstrated only modest and inconsistent improvement. These outcomes indicate that the structured stages of RCRR—reading a portion of the text, covering it, recalling key information, and retelling it in one's own words—successfully promote deeper processing of textual content, better vocabulary retention, and more accurate reconstruction of narrative meaning. The technique also transformed reading from a predominantly passive activity into an active, reflective process, as evidenced by students' increased confidence in retelling stories, greater participation in classroom discussions, and more observable engagement with the texts. Overall, the study confirms that RCRR is not only statistically effective in enhancing reading comprehension but also pedagogically relevant for addressing common classroom problems such as low reading interest, limited vocabulary, and overreliance on surface-level reading strategies.

Beyond confirming its effectiveness, this study underscores the broader educational significance of integrating RCRR into EFL reading instruction. The technique offers a practical, low-cost, and adaptable approach that can be readily embedded in existing curricula, aligned with the demands of the Curriculum 2013, and applied across different levels of learner proficiency. Theoretically, the success of RCRR supports the view that comprehension develops most effectively when learners are guided to regulate their reading pace, actively retrieve information, connect new ideas with prior knowledge, and articulate their understanding through spoken or written retelling. Practically, the technique encourages a more student-centered learning environment where learners are positioned as active constructors of meaning rather than passive recipients of information. While this study provides strong evidence in favor of RCRR, it also opens avenues for future research, such as investigating its impact on other text genres, exploring long-term retention of comprehension gains, or combining RCRR with digital media and collaborative tasks. Taken together, the results and implications of this research suggest that the RCRR technique can serve as a powerful component of comprehensive literacy programs, supporting the development of more strategic, motivated, and confident readers in EFL classrooms.

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