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Enhancing Reading Comprehension in Junior High School Through the QAR Strategy

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Article History	ABSTRACT
Received 11-09-2025	Background: Reading comprehension represents a crucial aspect of learning English effectively, yet many junior high school students struggle to interpret and engage meaningfully with texts. Purpose: This study examines the impact of the Question Answer Relationships (QAR) strategy on enhancing students' performance in reading comprehension. Method: This study employed a quantitative one-group pretest-posttest design involving 30 students from an Islamic Public Junior High School (JHS) in Karanganyar, selected through simple random sampling. Pre- and post-tests based on descriptive texts aligned with the national English curriculum were administered, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a paired-sample t-test to assess changes in students' reading comprehension. Results and Discussion: The analysis showed that employing the QAR strategy resulted in a notable enhancement of students' reading comprehension abilities. The average score improved from 22.67 on the pre-test to 32.53 on the post-test. Statistical results from the paired-sample t-test verified a significant improvement ($t = -26.191, p < .001$), indicating the effectiveness of the intervention. These results suggest that QAR supports students' understanding of text by helping them differentiate between information derived directly from the text and knowledge constructed from prior understanding, thereby strengthening metacognitive engagement and filling the gap in strategies for fostering comprehension at the junior high level. Conclusions and Implications: The implementation of the QAR strategy provides a learning experience that guides students to think critically, understand the relationship between questions and the text, and gradually enhance their reading comprehension skills. QAR can serve as an innovative instructional approach for English teachers to foster students' deeper understanding of reading comprehension.
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Keywords:	<i>Question Answer Relationships (QAR), Reading Comprehension, Reading Strategy, Quantitative Research</i>
	ABSTRAK

Latar Belakang: Pemahaman bacaan merupakan keterampilan inti dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, namun banyak siswa SMP masih kesulitan menafsirkan dan memahami makna teks secara mendalam.

Tujuan: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji efektivitas strategi Hubungan Pertanyaan–Jawaban (QAR) dalam meningkatkan kemampuan pemahaman bacaan siswa.

Metode: Pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain One-Group Pretest-Posttest digunakan pada 30 siswa MTsN 1 Karanganyar yang dipilih melalui simple random sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan tes awal dan tes akhir yang memuat teks deskriptif sesuai kurikulum SMP. Analisis dilakukan dengan statistik deskriptif dan uji t berpasangan untuk mengidentifikasi perbedaan signifikan sebelum dan sesudah perlakuan.

Hasil dan Pembahasan: Temuan menunjukkan penerapan strategi QAR secara signifikan meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan siswa. Skor rata-rata meningkat dari 22,67 pada pretest menjadi 32,53 pada posttest. Uji t berpasangan mengonfirmasi perbedaan signifikan secara statistik ($t = -26,191$, $p < 0,001$). Strategi QAR membantu siswa membedakan informasi yang bersumber langsung dari teks dan pengetahuan sebelumnya, sehingga memperkuat keterampilan metakognitif dan mengisi celah kurangnya strategi pembelajaran pemahaman bacaan di tingkat SMP.

Kesimpulan dan Implikasi: Penerapan strategi QAR memberikan pengalaman belajar yang menuntun siswa untuk berpikir kritis, memahami hubungan antara pertanyaan dan teks, serta meningkatkan kemampuan memahami bacaan secara bertahap. QAR dapat dijadikan pendekatan inovatif bagi guru bahasa Inggris untuk mengembangkan pemahaman membaca siswa secara lebih mendalam.

Kata Kunci

SMP Negeri, Hubungan Pertanyaan-Jawaban (QAR), Strategi Membaca, Penelitian Kuantitatif



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INTRODUCTION

The process of reading comprehension represents a multifaceted cognitive activity that integrates linguistic, cognitive, and metacognitive abilities to interpret written symbols and construct meaning.[1] For Indonesian junior high school students, developing reading proficiency involves more than recognizing words; it requires making inferences, understanding text structures, and linking new information with prior knowledge.[2] According to Brown emphasizes reading as an interactive process, combining bottom-up strategies, such as word decoding, and top-down strategies, such as activating background knowledge. Successful comprehension therefore demands active engagement, including predicting meaning, testing hypotheses, and monitoring understanding throughout the reading process.[3]

Reading comprehension is essential for academic success and lifelong learning.[4] states that comprehension fosters knowledge acquisition, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. Wallace views reading as a socio-cognitive process influenced by culture and purpose. In the global era, English serves as an international medium of communication, making comprehension skills critical for accessing knowledge.[5] Further links reading comprehension with the development of other language skills, underscoring its role in EFL learners' academic achievement.[6]

Prior studies define reading comprehension as the ability to understand, analyze, and interpret written texts, a skill required across disciplines such as science and social studies.[7] Students with higher comprehension skills typically outperform peers who struggle to interpret texts. Research highlights that many comprehension difficulties arise not only from limited vocabulary but also from the absence of strategic approaches to reading.[8] Strategy-based instruction covering pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading stages helps students predict, question, and summarize, thereby constructing meaning more effectively.[9]

One well-established approach is the Question Answer Relationships (QAR) strategy, introduced by Raphael [10]. QAR trains learners to classify questions as Right There, Think and Search, Author and You, or On My Own, enabling them to determine whether answers are explicitly in the text or require inference [11], [12]. Empirical evidence supports its effectiveness: [13]-[16] report significant gains in comprehension, while [17] found QAR-trained students outperform those using conventional methods.

Preliminary observations at one of Islamic Public JHS in Karanganyar indicate persistent comprehension difficulties; in a diagnostic test on descriptive texts, only 10 of 30 students answered more than half the questions correctly. These challenges, common among EFL learners, stem from linguistic barriers and the lack of strategic reading approaches. Given the importance of English as a global language, addressing these issues is urgent. Unlike previous studies that focused on narrative texts or senior high school, this study applies QAR to descriptive texts at the junior high level, a genre highlighted in the Indonesian national curriculum. This study investigates the effect of QAR on junior high school students' reading comprehension, aiming to provide insights for educators in selecting effective strategies and contributing to the literature on English language teaching in Indonesia.

Based on the stated objective, the research question of this study can be formulated as follows: To what extent does the Question Answer Relationships (QAR) strategy affect junior high school students' reading comprehension, and how can its implementation provide insights for teachers in selecting effective strategies for English language instruction in Indonesia?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Reading Comprehension in EFL Contexts

Reading comprehension is widely recognized as a multifaceted cognitive process requiring simultaneous activation of linguistic decoding, background knowledge, and higher-order reasoning.[1], [2] According to W. P. Grabe & Stoller, reading comprehension is a complex and interactive process that involves multiple dimensions, primarily centered on the interaction between the text and the reader. The reader actively constructs meaning by integrating information from the text with prior knowledge, linguistic competence, and contextual understanding. This process requires several cognitive and metacognitive skills, including inference-making (drawing meaning beyond explicit statements), monitoring comprehension (evaluating one's understanding while reading), and integrating new information with existing mental representations.[15] These dimensions highlight that reading is not a passive decoding activity but an active meaning-making process in which readers continuously engage with, evaluate, and reconstruct textual information to achieve coherent understanding. Grabe & Stoller describe it as constructing meaning through interaction between text and reader, involving inference, monitoring, and integration of new information.[18] In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, comprehension is further complicated by limited vocabulary, grammatical challenges, and insufficient exposure to authentic texts. Numerous studies confirm that inadequate comprehension restricts academic performance across subjects, emphasizing the need for explicit instruction in reading strategies.[19]

B. Reading Strategies and Metacognition

Strategy instruction is essential for improving EFL learners' comprehension. categorizes reading as an interactive process requiring both bottom-up (decoding) and top-down (background knowledge) skills. Research highlights that students benefit from pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities such as prediction, questioning, and summarization.[20] Suharni found that strategic approaches foster learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness, enabling students to monitor understanding and repair breakdowns in meaning.[21] Xuanqi Wang reported that pre-reading tasks like vocabulary building and pre-questioning activate schemata and significantly improve comprehension outcomes.[22]

C. Question Answer Relationships (QAR) Strategy

The QAR framework, introduced by Raphael, classifies comprehension questions into four types: (1) Right There, (2) Think and Search, (3) Author and You, and (4) On My Own. This categorization guides learners to identify whether answers are explicitly in the text or require inference and personal knowledge. By explicitly linking question types with information sources, QAR cultivates both literal and higher-order comprehension, encouraging students to interact actively with text.

D. Empirical Evidence on QAR Effectiveness

Table I.1 Previous Studies Related to QAR

Authors	Focus	Findings	Limitations
(Tiara et al., 2025) [37]	The implementation of the QAR strategy among junior high school students to enhance <i>deep reading processes</i> and reading comprehension.	The QAR strategy proved effective in improving students' reading comprehension skills by training them to understand the relationship between the text and the questions in a deeper manner.	The study was conducted only in one school with a limited number of participants, which restricts the generalizability of the findings.
(Hasanah, 2021) [18]	The use of the QAR strategy to improve students' reading ability at the junior high school level.	QAR helps students recognize the types of questions and locate answers more systematically, leading to improved scores on reading comprehension tests.	The absence of a control group makes it difficult to isolate the direct effect of the QAR strategy on learning outcomes.
(O. B. Indah et al., 2022) [20]	The implementation of the QAR strategy in teaching narrative texts at the secondary school level.	Consistent application of QAR improves students' ability to comprehend narrative texts and to think critically about implicit meanings.	The study was short-term and focused only on narrative texts, which limits the exploration of QAR effectiveness across different text types.

Source: author's work

A growing body of research affirms the efficacy of QAR. Hasanah reported that QAR improved both literal and inferential comprehension among junior high students.[23] Tiara et al observed significant gains in eighth-graders' reading scores following QAR training.[13] O. Indah et al demonstrated enhanced engagement and comprehension when QAR was applied to narrative texts in vocational schools, while Daflizar & Roza found positive effects on critical thinking and literacy.[10] Wirda & hamid revealed that QAR-trained learners outperformed peers taught through conventional methods, underscoring its potential as a robust comprehension strategy.[24]

The selection of descriptive texts in this study is based on their alignment with the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, both of which designate *descriptive text* as one of the primary text types in English language learning at the junior high school level.[25] This text type functions to develop students' ability to understand text structure, enrich vocabulary, and identify both factual and inferential information. Moreover, the content of descriptive texts, which is closely related to students' everyday experiences, facilitates the application of the Question–Answer Relationships (QAR) strategy, as it allows students to connect questions with the text content both directly and reflectively. Therefore, the use of descriptive texts is not only pedagogically relevant but also supports the contextual and meaningful development of reading comprehension skills.[26]

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design. This design is selected to measure the difference in students' reading comprehension before and after the implementation of the Question Answer Relationships (QAR) strategy. According to Creswell (2014), this design is suitable for evaluating the effectiveness of an instructional treatment in a single group over time.[27]

The sample of this study consisted of eighth-grade students (Class VIII H) from an Islamic Public JHS in Karanganyar Regency, Central Jawa, selected through a simple random sampling technique to ensure representativeness and strengthen the validity of the finding.[28] The total number of participants was 30 students, comprising 14 males and 16 females, aged between 13 and 14 years old. The study obtained formal consent from the school management prior to its implementation. The study was conducted from August 12 to October 28, 2025.

The research employed a reading comprehension test as its primary instrument, administered in both pre-test and post-test formats. The test items were developed according to the QAR framework, encompassing four categories of questions: Right There, Think and Search, Author and You, and On My Own. The test materials are in the form of descriptive texts selected from the junior high school English curriculum.

This study employed a short-term intervention. The intervention was conducted over four sessions to provide sufficient time for students to be introduced to, practice, and apply the QAR strategy systematically. This duration aligns with recommendations from instructional design theory [31], which emphasizes repeated exposure and gradual skill development to ensure meaningful learning outcomes while maintaining classroom feasibility within the school's academic schedule. In each session, students are taught how to apply the QAR strategy to comprehend descriptive texts. The teacher explains the four types of QAR questions, provides guided practice, and facilitates group discussion to apply the strategy to different texts.

The research procedure is conducted in the following steps:

1. Pre-test: Students are given a reading comprehension test to assess their initial ability.
2. Treatment: The QAR strategy is implemented in class during four learning sessions.
3. Post-test: Students take the same reading comprehension test to evaluate their improvement.

The data were examined through both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics summarized the mean, minimum and maximum values, as well as the standard deviation. For the inferential analysis, a paired-sample t-test was employed to identify any significant differences between the pre-test and post-test outcomes, with the significance threshold set at $p < 0.05$. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to ensure internal consistency of the items. The result showed an alpha value of 0.87, indicating that the instrument had high reliability.

To measure students' reading comprehension performance, the test is designed to cover several aspects of reading based on [29], as outlined in the table below:

Table I.2 Aspects of Reading Comprehension

Category of Questions	Characteristics of Question	Indicators	Definitions
Right There	Explicit answers that are directly stated in the text	Detail Information	Students are required to identify specific information or facts from the text, in accordance with the indicator "locate specific facts using text clues and discussion"
Think and search	Answers distributed across several parts of the text, requiring information integration	Main Idea dan Inference	This type of question requires students to infer the main idea or draw logical conclusions based on several sentences or paragraphs
Author and You	Answers that are not directly stated in the text, requiring background knowledge and personal context	Inference dan Vocabulary Context	Students use textual information and personal experience to understand implied meanings or unfamiliar words
On My Own	Answers derived entirely from students' own experiences and knowledge, rather than from the text itself	Reference dan Overall Comprehension	Students connect the ideas in the text with their own experiences or identify relationships between ideas, such as pronouns and referents.

Source: author's work

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Descriptive Statistics

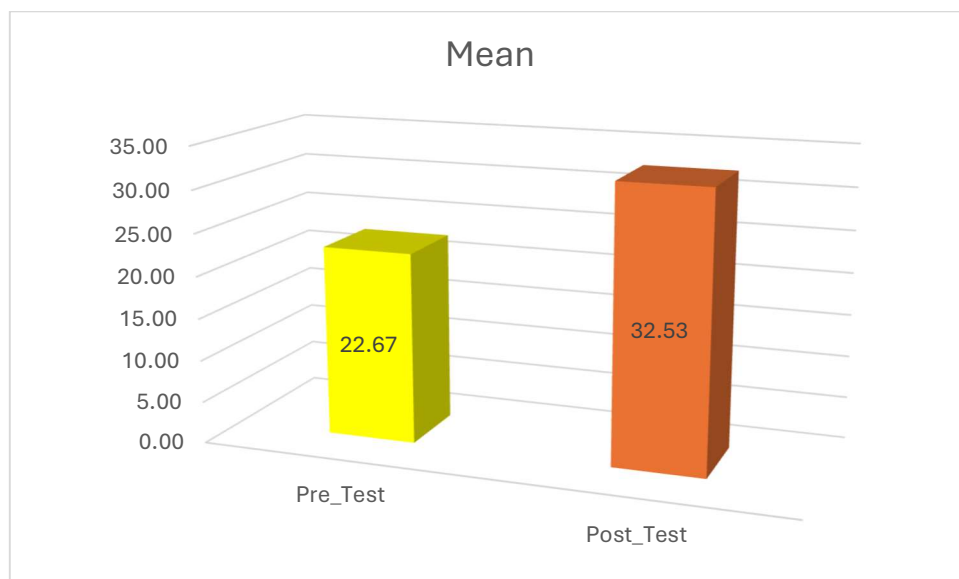
Before conducting the inferential analysis, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to outline the overall distribution of students' reading comprehension scores before and after the application of the Question-Answer Relationships (QAR) strategy. The descriptive analysis encompassed the number of respondents, the lowest and highest scores, the mean, and the standard deviation.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre_Test	30	15	27	22.67	2.869
Post_Test	30	25	38	32.53	3.530
Valid N (listwise)	30				

Based on the descriptive statistics presented above, the students' pre-test scores ranged from 15 to 27 with a mean of 22.67. After the treatment using the QAR strategy, the post-test scores increased, ranging from 25 to 38 with a mean of 32.53. This indicates an improvement of approximately 9.86 points in the mean score from the pre-test to the post-test. The results suggest that the application of the QAR strategy had a positive effect on enhancing students' reading comprehension achievement.

To better visualize the improvement in students' reading comprehension performance before and after the intervention, the average pre-test and post-test scores are illustrated in the chart below.



Picture 1. Mean Score

Figure 1 illustrates that the average score in the pre-test was 22.67, which increased to 32.53 in the post-test. This visualization clearly demonstrates the enhancement in students' reading comprehension following the application of the QAR strategy, reinforcing the findings obtained from the descriptive analysis.

Tests of Normality

Before conducting the inferential test, a normality assessment was conducted to verify whether the dataset followed a normal distribution. The outcomes of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Pre_Test	.112	30	.200*	.955	30	.236
Post_Test	.161	30	.045	.952	30	.189

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Based on the data in Table 2, the Shapiro–Wilk normality test yielded significance values of 0.236 for the pre-test and 0.189 for the post-test. Since both exceed the 0.05 threshold, the dataset can be considered normally distributed. Although results from both the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests are presented, this study relies on the Shapiro–Wilk results, as it is regarded as more suitable for small to moderate sample sizes ($n < 50$) according to statistical recommendations. Consequently, the normality assumption is satisfied, allowing further analysis using a parametric approach through the paired-samples t-test.

Sampe Paired T-Test

After verifying that the data met the assumption of normality, a paired-samples t-test was performed to assess the significance of the difference between the pre-test and post-test results, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Sampe Paired T-Test

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
					Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	Pre_Test - Post_Test	-9.867	2.063	.377	10.637	9.096	26.191	.00

As illustrated in Table 3, the mean score difference between the pre-test and post-test was -9.867, showing a higher mean value in the post-test. The calculated t-statistic of -26.191 with 29 degrees of freedom and a significance level of $p < .001$ ($p < 0.05$) indicates a statistically significant variation between the two tests. These findings suggest that the implementation of the Question–Answer Relationships (QAR) strategy contributed meaningfully to the improvement of students' reading comprehension performance.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the QAR strategy exerts a significant positive influence on students' reading comprehension at the junior high school level. The descriptive analysis revealed clear improvement, with mean scores increasing from 22.67 on the pre-test to 32.53 on the post-test, reflecting substantial progress after four instructional sessions. The ShapiroWilk normality test ($p > 0.05$) confirmed the suitability of parametric analysis, and the paired-sample t-test yielded a mean difference of -9.867 with a highly significant value ($t = -26.191$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a statistically meaningful gain in reading performance. These findings align with previous research reporting that QAR enhances comprehension by structuring students' interaction with text and fostering systematic engagement during reading.[30]

The improvement observed can be attributed to QAR's scaffolding mechanism, which helps learners navigate different levels of text comprehension. By classifying questions into Right There, Think and Search, Author and You, and On My Own, QAR provides a framework for distinguishing between information that is explicitly stated and that which requires inferential reasoning. This guided process fosters both strategic and critical engagement with the text. Furthermore, the metacognitive dimension of QAR enables students to monitor their own understanding and transfer these skills to independent reading situations.[31]

The findings can also be interpreted through the lens of Schema Activation Theory and Cognitive Load Theory, which together illuminate the cognitive mechanisms supporting QAR's effectiveness. In line with 2 Schema Activation Theory, the categories "Author and You" and "On My Own" encourage students to connect textual information with their existing knowledge frameworks.[32] This activation of prior knowledge facilitates deeper meaning construction and improves comprehension of descriptive texts. From the perspective of Cognitive Load Theory, the structured categorization of questions within QAR assists in managing students' cognitive resources by breaking down complex comprehension tasks into smaller, more manageable segments.[33] This organization reduces extraneous cognitive load while promoting germane load, thereby allowing learners to focus on integrating information and constructing coherent mental representations of the text.

Theoretically, these results reinforce the view that structured reading frameworks enhance cognitive processing during comprehension. Prior studies have suggested that QAR provides teachers with an evaluative lens to assess the depth of learners' understanding, reflecting their ability to engage with different question types and interpret text meaningfully. Moreover, the adaptability of QAR across diverse EFL contexts underscores its broader pedagogical relevance.

From an educational standpoint, the findings advocate for incorporating QAR into reading instruction and curriculum design. Beyond measurable gains in test performance, QAR fosters metacognitive awareness, enabling students to reflect on how they process information and construct meaning skills that are essential for lifelong learning.[34] In conclusion, the significant post-test gains demonstrate that QAR functions not only as an effective comprehension strategy but also as a cognitive and pedagogical catalyst for developing critical thinking and strategic reading.[35] This study thus contributes to the growing body of literature on strategic reading instruction by offering empirical evidence that structured questioning frameworks can effectively enhance reading outcomes and learner autonomy in the Indonesian EFL classroom context.

CONCLUSION

The research explored how the Question–Answer Relationships (QAR) strategy influences students' reading comprehension at the junior high school level. A one-group pretest–posttest design was utilized to assess the effect of the intervention. After applying the QAR strategy, students demonstrated a marked improvement in comprehension outcomes. Based on descriptive analysis, their average score increased from 22.67 before the treatment to 32.53 afterward. The data met the normality assumption, allowing for the use of a paired-sample t-test, which revealed a significant difference in mean scores (-9.867 ; $t = -26.191$; $p < .001$). These results provide strong evidence that the QAR strategy effectively enhances students' reading comprehension. It is recommended that the QAR strategy be incorporated into junior high school English teacher training modules by the Educational Quality Assurance Agency (LPMP) through practical workshops and instructional guides to support its classroom implementation.

However, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted with a relatively small sample of 30 students from a single Islamic Public JHS, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or educational levels. Furthermore, the study only employed a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, so the observed improvements in reading comprehension cannot be fully attributed to the QAR intervention alone.

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