

## Unlocking Reading Comprehension: Empowering English Language Learners through Main Idea Identification Strategies

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### ABSTRACT

*English reading can be challenging for language learners, as they often require a high level of comprehension and critical thinking skills. Developing a strategy for identifying the main idea of each paragraph can be a helpful tool for improving reading proficiency. This study investigated the effectiveness of teaching students to identify the main idea of each paragraph in order to empower their English reading skills. The study employed an experiment with a pre and post-test design, with 22 students from St. Paul Minor Seminary participating in the study. The pre and post-test design was used to measure the effectiveness of the intervention. The pre and post test results were analyzed with a dependent sample t-Test to determine if there was a significant improvement or not. The study found that identifying the main idea can be helpful in improving reading comprehension and motivation, as the students are better able to understand the plot. Overall, the study provided valuable insights into the use of specific strategies for enhancing reading skills in language learners.*

*Keywords: Main Idea Identification, Reading Comprehension*

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### ABSTRACT

Membaca dapat menjadi tantangan bagi siswa karena seringkali membutuhkan tingkat pemahaman dan keterampilan berpikir kritis yang tinggi. Mengembangkan strategi untuk mengidentifikasi gagasan utama setiap paragraf dapat menjadi alat yang berguna untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca tersebut. Penelitian ini menyelidiki efektivitas pengajaran siswa untuk mengidentifikasi gagasan utama setiap paragraf untuk memberdayakan keterampilan membaca bahasa Inggris mereka. Studi eksperimen ini menggunakan alat ukur tes, *pretes dan postes*, dengan 22 siswa dari Seminari Menengah St. Paulus sebagai partisipan. Hasil dari tes tersebut dianalisis menggunakan *independent sample t-Test*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mengidentifikasi gagasan utama dapat membantu meningkatkan pemahaman dan motivasi membaca karena siswa lebih mampu memahami plot. Hasil penelitian memberikan wawasan berharga tentang penggunaan strategi tertentu untuk meningkatkan keterampilan membaca pada pembelajar bahasa.

*Kata Kunci: Gagasan Utama Bacaan, Keterampilan Membaca*

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## Introduction

English language learning involves several skills that are essential for language development - listening comprehension, speaking competence, reading comprehension, and writing skills. Reading skills are the most important skill for English language learners as it is emphasized that reading is one of the few ways students can develop their language abilities to a point where they can reach their academic goals and one of the main objectives of learning English in general (Sari et al., 2018).

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that contributes to language development, especially for additional language learners (Balci, 2017). It is emphasized in the literature that reading



is one of the few ways students can develop their language abilities to a point where they can reach their academic goals.

For English as additional language learners, the ability to read academic texts is thought to be one of the most important skills that should be acquired. The importance of reading English for EFL learners cannot be overemphasized (Hamouda, 2021). However, reading in an additional language is considered to be more challenging than it is in a first language as the reader often does not have adequate vocabulary knowledge, cultural background information, and linguistic knowledge.

English reading skills can be challenging for English as a second language (ESL) students as they often require a level of comprehension and critical thinking skills. ESL students may struggle with understanding the author's arguments, text main ideas, and text structures (Nguyen, 2022). Critical reading skills, which involve the ability to understand, evaluate, and develop arguments, are essential for success in English reading tests (Henry & Mohamad, 2021). However, many ESL students lack these skills, which can contribute to difficulties in transitioning from high school to university study. To address this challenge, various pedagogical methods have been proposed to enhance ESL students' reading comprehension skills (Pranoto & Levinli, 2022).

Reading comprehension is a complex skill that involves several component skills and processes that work together in an integrated fashion (Powell-Smith, 2020). According to Powell-Smith, one of the biggest problems that students face in reading comprehension is identifying the main idea of a passage. This can be due to a variety of reasons, including poor basic skills in phonemic awareness and decoding, vocabulary and higher order language skills, and difficulty producing a well-structured and integrated story.

Identifying the main idea is crucial for understanding the overall meaning of a passage. Students who struggle with comprehension tend to have difficulty identifying the main event or main point, as well as correctly sequencing stories (Misunderstood Minds). They may also have difficulty producing a well-structured and integrated story, which can impede their ability to understand and remember what they have read. In addition, students who struggle with comprehension may only get parts of what they are reading, which can make it difficult for them to connect ideas in a passage (Logsdon, 2022). To help students improve their ability to identify the main idea, teachers can provide explicit instruction on how to identify the main idea and supporting details, as well as how to use context clues to understand unfamiliar words.

Teachers can also provide opportunities for students to practice identifying the main idea through guided reading activities and independent reading tasks. Additionally, teachers can help students develop their vocabulary and higher order language skills by providing opportunities for them to engage in discussions about what they have read and to write about their reading experiences (Pranoto, 2020).

Thus this study aims at investigation on the effectiveness of teaching students to identify the main idea of each paragraph to empower their English reading skills. The ability to identify the main idea of a paragraph is a crucial reading comprehension skill that helps readers understand the author's message about the topic. The study also contributes to the existing literature on reading comprehension skills and provides recommendations for further research.

This study is considered novel and innovative as it focuses on a specific strategy that can help students improve their reading skills. In addition, it recognizes that identifying the main idea is a crucial skill for reading comprehension and provides strategies that can help students develop this skill. While there are many articles and resources available on reading comprehension strategies, this study stands out because it specifically targets main idea identification strategies.

## Methods

This study belongs to an experiment research design with one group pretest and posttest. This design includes a pretest measure followed by a treatment and a posttest for a single group (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018). Meanwhile, the population in this study was all students of St. Paul Minor Seminary in Palembang, while the sample was 22 students from the last grade of the seminary, namely Rethorica A and Rethorica B. This kind of experiment is most likely to be conducted in field settings in which random assignment is difficult or impossible. They are often conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of a treatment—perhaps a type of educational interventions.

The study took five meeting sessions, which means that the intervention was implemented over a short period. The pretest-posttest design is much like a within-subjects experiment in which each participant is tested first under the control condition and then under the treatment condition. There is a treatment group that is given a pretest, receives a treatment, and then is given a posttest. The procedure of the study is as figure 1.

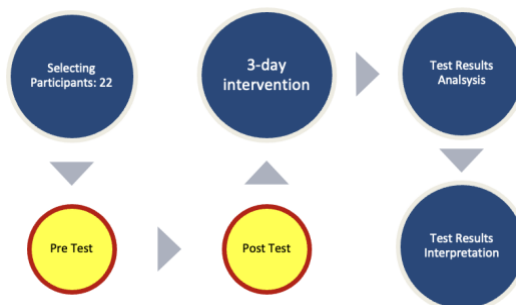


Figure 1 Procedure of the Study

The data were analyzed by using a dependent sample t-Test. The dependent sample t-Test is used to compare the means of two related groups to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between these means (Rosalina et al, 2023). The dependent sample t-Test is used when the two groups being compared are related in some way, such as when the same group of participants is tested twice. In other words, this statistical test was used because the pre and post-test scores were related to each other, as they were measured on the same group of students before and after the intervention.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The participants in this study were given a pre-test and post-test to assess their success in reading comprehension by sharpening their skills in identifying the main idea of each paragraph. The pre-test was distributed and filled out by the participants before the training as a treatment is delivered to them. The post-test with the same questions was distributed to the participants after the training. At the end of the program, the comparison of the pre-test and post-test results provided insights into the effectiveness of teaching students to identify the main idea of each paragraph to empower their English reading skills.

The test was adopted from the book entitled TOEFL Module 1: Reading published by Unversidad Technologica De La Mxteca (2016). Three were two reading passages to test. The first passage was about Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and another was the Great Salt Lake. The total numbers of the questions were 5 – three questions for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and two questions for the Great Salt Lake.

The Table 2 provides outlines the agenda for a reading comprehension activity that aims to improve the participants' skills in identifying the main idea of each paragraph. The activity was divided into three parts: pre-test, skill training, and post-test. The pre-test was given to the participants before the training as a treatment is delivered to them. The purpose of the pre-test was to assess the participants' baseline reading comprehension skills.

Table 1 Research Timeline

Day	Activities
I	Pre-Test
II-IV	Skill 1: Main idea questions Answer main idea questions correctly Skill 2: Main idea and organization Recognize the organization of ideas
V	Post-test

The skill training was divided into two parts: Skill 1 and Skill 2. Skill 1 focused on answering main idea questions correctly, while Skill 2 focused on recognizing the main idea and the organization of ideas. The post-test was given to the participants after the training as a treatment is delivered to them. The purpose of the post-test is to assess the effectiveness of the training in improving the participants' reading comprehension skills. The results of the post-test are presented as Table 2.

Table 2. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PRE-TEST	1.68	22	.94548	.20158
	POST-TEST	3.27	22	1.12045	.23888

The Paired Sample Statistics Table shows the descriptive value of each variable in the paired sample. The Pre-Test showed an average value (mean) of 1.68 from 22 data. The data distribution (Std. Deviation) obtained was 0.94548 with a standard error of 0.20158. Meanwhile, the post-test had an average value (mean) of 3.27 from the same number of data. The data distribution (Std. Deviation) obtained was 1.12045 with a standard error of 0.23888. This shows that the post-test on the data was higher than the pre-test.

Table 3 presents the results of paired samples correlations for a set of data, specifically for pre-test and post-test scores. Paired samples correlations are often used in statistical analysis to examine the relationship or correlation between two sets of data points that are related in some way. In this case, it appears that the data represents a pre-test and post-test administered to a sample of 22 participants.

Table 3. Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	PRE-TEST & POST-TEST	22	.041	.857

The correlation coefficient, denoted as ".041" in this table, quantifies the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores. A correlation coefficient can range from -1 to 1, with -1 indicating a perfect negative correlation, 1 indicating a perfect positive correlation, and 0 indicating no linear correlation. In this case, a correlation coefficient of .041 suggests a very weak positive correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores.

The "Sig." column represents the p-value associated with the correlation coefficient. The p-value tells us whether the observed correlation is statistically significant. In this instance, a p-value of ".857" suggests that the correlation observed (.041) is not statistically significant at a conventional significance level (usually set at 0.05 or 5%). This means that there is no strong evidence to conclude that the correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores is different from zero, given the sample size and data collected.

Moreover, Table 4 is to present the results of the paired samples test to see if the improvement was significant or not. The table appears to be a summary of paired differences and

related statistics for a dataset. It seems to be analyzing the differences between the pre-test and post-test cores for a particular sample.

Table 4. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	PRE TEST - POST TEST	-1.590911	.43623	.30621	-2.228	-.954	-5.196	21	.000

The significance value (p-value) associated with the paired differences was 0.000. This p-value was very close to zero, indicating that the observed differences between the pre-test and post-test cores were highly statistically significant. In other words, there was strong evidence to suggest that the decrease in scores from the pre-test and post-test is not due to random chance.

### Discussion

Main idea identification strategies could be effective in unlocking reading comprehension and empowering English language learners (Stevens et al., 2019). To identify the main idea of a passage, students firstly were taught how to identify the question, where to find the answer, and how to answer the question. One strategy was to have students identify the topic of the text, usually a single word or phrase, and then ask the question "What does the author want me to know about this topic?" Duke and Pearson (2008) also said that this kind of question would usually help them figure out the main idea.

The first step was to teach the participants how to identify the questions. There are several clues that became the key of main idea questions. The questions are such as "What is the topic of the passage?", "What is the subject of the passage?", "What is the main idea of the passage?", "What is the author's main point of the passage?", "With what is the author primarily concerned?", "Which of the following would be the best title?"

After identifying the question, the next step is to locate where to find the answer. One strategy was to have students locate the main idea in a sentence before building up to locating it in a longer paragraph. Students looked at the title of the text, as well as any pictures or headings included, read the first and last sentence of the passage, note any words or phrases that were repeated throughout the text, and summarize the text as best they could in one sentence. By using these strategies, students could effectively locate the answer to the main idea question and improve their reading comprehension (Universidad Tecnológica De La Mxteca, 2016).

The answer to the main idea question could generally be determined by looking at the first sentence of each paragraph (Shelton et al., 2021; Wexler et al., 2018). This was because the first sentence often introduced the main idea of the paragraph, while the rest of the sentences provided supporting details (Hendricks & Fuchs, 2020). By focusing on the first sentence of each paragraph, students could quickly identify the main idea of the passage and then used the supporting details to deepen their understanding of the topic.

### Conclusion

The study presented in this paper aimed to investigate the effectiveness of teaching students to identify the main idea of each paragraph to empower their English reading skills. The results of the study indicated a significant improvement in the students' reading ability to identify the main idea of each paragraph after the intervention. The study found that identifying the main idea can be

helpful in improving reading comprehension and motivation, as the students are better able to understand the plot. The pre-test and post-test were important tools for assessing the effectiveness of the training as a treatment in improving the participants' reading comprehension skills. The study provided valuable insights into the use of specific strategies for enhancing reading skills in language learners.

The study's findings were consistent with the literature on reading comprehension skills and strategies. Effective reading comprehension techniques are essential to enhance the extent of comprehension among students, and language instructors are required to implement adequate reading strategies to improve comprehension and facilitate critical thinking in understanding complex texts. Reading comprehension was comprised of complicated factors, and learning a second language is a complex process. Comprehension was the significant objective that associates with teaching the students to read effectively. Students faced challenges in reading comprehension that associate with several factors like lack of motivation and engagement.

### Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to St. Paul Minor Seminary for providing the opportunity to conduct this study. We would like to thank the seminary administration for their support and cooperation throughout the research process. We would also like to acknowledge the 22 students of Rhetorica class of the seminary who participated in this study. Their willingness to participate and their dedication to the study made this research possible. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the contributions of all those who have supported us in this study. Their encouragement and support had been instrumental in the completion of this study.

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