



Improving Students' Reading Comprehension through the RAPQ (Read-Ask-Put-Question) Technique

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Abstract

This classroom action research aimed to improve the reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade EFL students by implementing the Read-Ask-Put-Question (RAPQ) technique at SMP NW Gelanggang during the 2024–2025 academic year. The research followed the standard planning, acting, observing, and reflecting cycle. Seventeen students participated in a one-cycle intervention that integrated the RAPQ technique into regular reading instruction. The technique involved four structured stages: reading the text, identifying and asking about the main idea, paraphrasing the idea using the students' words, and generating and answering comprehension questions. Data were collected using pre-test and post-test assessments, supported by classroom observations and field notes. Quantitative results showed a significant improvement in students' reading performance, with the mean score increasing from 8.18 to 17.29. A paired-sample t-test confirmed that this improvement was statistically significant ($t(16) = -9.877, p < .001$). The results indicate that the RAPQ technique fosters more active, strategic reading by encouraging comprehension monitoring and textual engagement. The study concludes that RAPQ is a practical, student-centered strategy for enhancing reading comprehension in lower secondary EFL contexts, particularly where students have previously relied on teacher-dominated instruction.

Keywords:

reading comprehension, RAPQ technique, classroom action research, EFL learners, active reading strategies

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension constitutes a cornerstone of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education and is indispensable for academic achievement, particularly at the junior secondary level. It extends beyond the mechanical process of decoding linguistic symbols to encompass the active construction of meaning through cognitive engagement with texts (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Proficient reading enables learners to acquire vocabulary, internalize grammatical structures, and engage with content across the curriculum. Despite its centrality, reading comprehension remains a persistent challenge for many Indonesian EFL students. Research has documented that learners frequently struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary, limited grammatical competence, and a lack of metacognitive reading strategies (Rahmat, 2022; Fitrawati & Tanjung, 2019). These challenges are often exacerbated by teacher-centered methodologies emphasizing translation and literal comprehension tasks, offering limited opportunities for learners to develop autonomy or deeper textual understanding.

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The urgency of addressing these pedagogical shortcomings cannot be overstated. In a context where English is taught as a foreign language and exposure to authentic texts is limited, it becomes imperative to adopt instructional strategies that actively engage students in the reading process. Strategic interventions such as the Read–Ask–Put–Question (RAPQ) technique have shown potential to foster meaningful interaction with texts by guiding learners to extract key ideas, paraphrase information, and formulate reflective questions. Unlike traditional approaches, RAPQ is designed to support comprehension monitoring and the development of inferential reasoning. However, empirical studies on its application remain scarce, particularly in Indonesian secondary classrooms. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by implementing RAPQ within an action research framework to explore its effectiveness in improving students' reading comprehension and contributing to the growing discourse on evidence-based reading pedagogy in EFL settings.

Numerous instructional strategies have been introduced to address persistent challenges in reading comprehension among EFL learners. Established approaches such as Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) (Robinson, 1970), and Question-Answer Relationships (QAR) (Raphael, 1986) have shown promise in promoting metacognitive awareness, inference-making, and learner-text interaction. However, these strategies often presuppose learner autonomy and strategic competence that many secondary-level EFL students have yet to develop (Meniado, 2019). More structured and guided approaches are needed in contexts where students struggle with basic comprehension and confidence in navigating English texts. The Read–Ask–Put–Question (RAPQ) technique offers a scaffolded alternative. Schumaker et al. (2006) described that RAPQ helps learners focus on main ideas through four stages: reading, identifying the central idea, restating it in their own words, and generating questions about the text. This structure supports comprehension monitoring and meaning-making in a way accessible to less-proficient readers.

Several studies have documented the effectiveness of RAPQ. For example, Rinjani (2014) found that RAPQ significantly enhanced students' ability to paraphrase and ask relevant comprehension questions, while Pouwerin (2001) demonstrated its utility in supporting learners with reading difficulties. More recent classroom-based inquiries (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2020; Sari & Pranoto, 2021) have also reported improved engagement and comprehension when RAPQ was implemented in secondary EFL settings. Nonetheless, a consistent limitation across these studies is their reliance on one-shot experimental designs, often detached from the realities of everyday classroom practice. Few researchers have explored how RAPQ unfolds over time within the cyclical nature of classroom instruction, nor how teacher reflection and iterative adjustments may shape its effectiveness. There is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding its application within an action research framework that allows for teacher-led innovation, contextual responsiveness, and sustained impact. This study seeks to address that gap by examining the use of RAPQ in a real classroom context through a two-cycle action research design, thus contributing theoretical and practical insights into its pedagogical value.

To address the persistent challenges in EFL reading instruction, this study situates the Read–Ask–Put–Question (RAPQ) technique within a Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework to explore its pedagogical relevance and adaptability in a real-world educational context. While earlier studies have demonstrated RAPQ's effectiveness in controlled experimental designs (e.g., Rinjani, 2014; Pouwerin, 2001), few have examined how this technique operates within the complexities of everyday classroom practice. This study extends the literature by focusing on the

iterative process of instructional implementation—planning, acting, observing, and reflecting—thus allowing a closer examination of how RAPQ responds to learners’ needs and supports teachers’ decision-making. Using RAPQ within an authentic classroom environment provides rich insight into how strategic scaffolding, learner autonomy, and teacher facilitation interact to shape reading outcomes.

The study aims to bridge a significant gap in the literature by evaluating the effectiveness, practicality, and sustainability of RAPQ as an instructional strategy for improving EFL students’ reading comprehension. By embedding RAPQ into a two-cycle CAR design, this research provides a process-oriented understanding of pedagogical adaptation and learner engagement in under-researched educational settings. The novelty lies in integrating a structured comprehension strategy within a reflective instructional model, offering theoretical and practical contributions to developing context-responsive, strategy-based reading instruction in secondary EFL education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which is well-suited for educational settings aiming to improve pedagogical practices through iterative and reflective cycles (Burns, 2010; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). CAR allows teachers to act as researchers in their classrooms, systematically identifying instructional problems, implementing changes, and observing their effects. In this study, the RAPQ technique was applied over two cycles, each following the four key stages of CAR: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This approach supports data-driven instructional improvements and fosters teacher agency and contextual responsiveness (Mertler, 2021). By focusing on both instructional impact and process, the research aimed to assess the feasibility, effectiveness, and adaptability of the RAPQ technique in an EFL classroom.

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were 17 eighth-grade students from a public junior high school during the 2024–2025 academic year. The class was selected purposively in collaboration with the English teacher, based on the students’ consistent difficulties in reading comprehension, as identified through classroom assessments and informal observations. The group represented a typical mixed-ability EFL class, with varied vocabulary knowledge and reading proficiency. The classroom teacher co-facilitated the research, contributing pedagogical insight and ensuring continuity between the intervention and the existing curriculum. This collaborative practitioner-researcher model is consistent with the principles of CAR, which emphasize participatory reflection and context-embedded change (Craig, 2009).

Instruments and Data Collection

Multiple instruments were used to capture both quantitative outcomes and qualitative insights, enabling triangulation and enhancing the study’s credibility (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A pre-test and post-test were administered to measure changes in reading comprehension. These tests consisted of 30 multiple-choice items aligned with the national curriculum and designed to assess key reading skills, including main idea identification, inferencing, and vocabulary understanding. Two English education experts reviewed the instruments for content validity and piloted them with

a comparable group, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .82, indicating good internal consistency (Taber, 2018).

In addition to test data, observational checklists and field notes were employed during each lesson to record students' engagement, responsiveness to the RAPQ stages, and any emergent instructional challenges. A student perception questionnaire, administered at the end of each cycle, provided reflective data on how learners experienced the strategy and what aspects supported or hindered their comprehension development. This combination of instruments ensured that both performance-based and process-oriented evidence was captured.

Procedures

Implementing the RAPQ technique followed the established structure of two CAR cycles, each with four integrated stages. During the planning stage, the researcher and teacher co-designed lesson plans based on the RAPQ model, ensuring alignment with curricular goals and student needs. Instructional materials were selected from the textbook and adapted to allow meaningful application of each RAPQ phase.

In the acting stage, the teacher delivered the lessons using the RAPQ framework: students first read the text, then identified the main idea, paraphrased it in their own words, and generated comprehension questions. This scaffolded process was supported through guided modeling, peer discussions, and vocabulary assistance where necessary.

The observing stage systematically documented classroom dynamics, student participation, and comprehension indicators. Observations were recorded using both structured checklists and open-ended field notes. Meanwhile, the students' reading performances were formally evaluated through the post-tests at the end of each cycle.

Finally, in the reflecting stage, the teacher and researcher analyzed all collected data to evaluate instructional effectiveness and identify necessary adjustments. Based on this reflection, task scaffolding, pacing, or questioning techniques were modified to optimize student engagement and reading gains in the subsequent cycle. This iterative refinement process is CAR's hallmark, promoting sustainable and context-responsive instructional improvement (Altrichter et al., 2013).

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using SPSS 17.0. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to illustrate performance changes across the two cycles. A paired-samples t-test was conducted to examine the statistical significance of the observed improvements. Before hypothesis testing, assumptions of normality were verified using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was adopted. Qualitative data from observations, field notes, and student responses were analyzed thematically. Codes were developed inductively, focusing on patterns in student engagement, comprehension challenges, and perceived benefits of the RAPQ strategy. This analysis enabled a nuanced understanding of the measurable learning outcomes and the instructional dynamics that shaped them (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020). By integrating multiple data sources, the study ensured both depth and rigor in evaluating the impact of RAPQ on students' reading comprehension.

This Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted in two cycles, each comprising four systematic stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The aim was to examine how the Read-Ask-Put-Question (RAPQ) technique could improve students' reading comprehension in an

EFL classroom setting. Across both cycles, quantitative scores were supported by qualitative classroom insights that captured students' evolving engagement and the instructional adjustments made.

Cycle I

The RAPQ technique was introduced to the class in the first cycle through a series of scaffolded reading activities. Students responded positively to the structured nature of the technique, especially during the “Put” stage, where they paraphrased main ideas, and the “Question” stage, where they formulated comprehension questions. It was evident from classroom observations that many students were more attentive and participatory than in previous lessons. However, challenges soon emerged. Many of the class struggled to move beyond basic, literal comprehension questions. Their attempts at inferential questioning lacked clarity and depth, suggesting a need for further modeling and cognitive support.

The quantitative data reflected this partial success. As shown in Table 1, the average pre-test score of 8.18 rose to 13.65 in the post-test for Cycle I, indicating an encouraging yet incomplete improvement. Reflections revealed that while students were beginning to internalize the RAPQ strategy, they needed more explicit guidance, particularly in crafting meaningful questions and identifying nuanced ideas in the texts.

Cycle II

In response to these observations, the instructional approach was revised for Cycle II. The teacher included more intentional modeling of reading strategies through think-alouds, promoted peer collaboration during reading activities, and offered sentence starters to help students formulate questions of increasing complexity. These changes fostered a more supportive learning environment, allowing students to engage with texts confidently and critically.

The impact of these changes was significant. Students enhanced their ability to identify main ideas and started paraphrasing with greater accuracy and independence. They demonstrated more willingness to challenge their interpretations and to engage with peers in discussing multiple layers of meaning. The quality of their questions improved, shifting from simple recall to those involving cause-and-effect reasoning and inference.

Quantitatively, this progress was reflected in the Cycle II post-test, which recorded a mean score of 17.29, marking a significant improvement from the initial diagnostic test. This upward trend in student performance demonstrates the effectiveness of the Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) technique and the cumulative effect of iterative, scaffolded instruction delivered through successive teaching cycles. Each cycle is built on the previous one, enabling learners to internalize strategies such as predicting, clarifying, questioning, and summarizing, contributing to deeper engagement with the text and improved comprehension. The sustained gains indicate that students acquired individual reading skills and gained greater confidence and independence in applying those skills across different texts. This progress confirms the pedagogical value of reflective, strategy-focused interventions in promoting long-term reading development among EFL learners.

Table 1. Progression of Students' Mean Reading Comprehension Scores

Test Phase	Mean Score	Improvement
Pre-Test (Cycle I)	8.18	—
Post-Test (Cycle I)	13.65	+5.47

Test Phase	Mean Score	Improvement
Post-Test (Cycle II)	17.29	+3.64

The findings demonstrate that the RAPQ technique can significantly enhance students' reading comprehension in EFL contexts when implemented through reflective cycles of action and refinement. Beyond test scores, students' confidence, enthusiasm for reading tasks, and ability to articulate their understanding signal meaningful pedagogical progress. This suggests that RAPQ is not only an effective method for boosting academic performance but also a tool for cultivating more engaged, thoughtful, and self-regulated readers.

DISCUSSION

This classroom action research results indicate that the RAPQ (Read-Ask-Put-Question) technique significantly enhanced students' reading comprehension over two instructional cycles. The improvement from a mean score of 8.18 in the diagnostic test to 17.29 in the second cycle post-test suggests the technique's effectiveness and the impact of iterative instructional refinement. These findings support the notion that effective reading instruction must go beyond content delivery to actively involve students in structured and reflective engagement with texts (Yang, 2021; Sun & Wang, 2023).

In the first cycle, although students showed increased interest and some improvement in their reading comprehension, their ongoing difficulty in creating higher-order questions highlighted a clear need for better scaffolding, especially during the "Ask" and "Question" phases of the RAPQ model. This aligns with Liu and Zhang's (2020) findings that secondary EFL learners often struggle with inferential comprehension because of underdeveloped metacognitive awareness and questioning skills. To close this gap, Cycle II introduced teacher-led think-alouds and peer modeling, giving learners concrete examples of formulating more complex, inferential questions and monitoring their understanding more actively. These changes follow recent teaching recommendations that promote visible thinking strategies to encourage cognitive engagement and help learners move from literal to analytical comprehension (Alharbi, 2022; Han, 2019). The shift enhanced the quality of student-generated questions and encouraged more learner independence and reflective reading habits.

By the second cycle, students demonstrated better comprehension outcomes and greater autonomy in paraphrasing and formulating comprehension questions. These outcomes reflect the principles of cognitive apprenticeship (Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991) and the gradual release of responsibility model (Fisher & Frey, 2014), wherein the teacher transitions from direct instruction to shared and independent student work. The RAPQ technique, when paired with reflective and scaffolded instruction, thus helps students internalize reading strategies critical for EFL success.

This study's findings also support the sociocognitive view of reading, highlighting the active interaction among the text, the reader, and the surrounding context (Grabe, 2020). In addition to the numerical improvement in comprehension scores, classroom observations showed significant qualitative gains, such as increased peer collaboration, more meaningful student discussions, and greater engagement during reading activities. These behaviors indicate that the RAPQ technique aids cognitive processing and fosters an emotional connection to the reading experience. This emotional engagement—shown in students' willingness to participate, share interpretations, and work together to build meaning—has become increasingly recognized as a key factor in promoting

reading motivation and comprehension (Zheng, 2022; Karimi & Amiri, 2021). Therefore, the value of RAPQ in teaching is not only in its structured cognitive approach but also in its ability to create an emotionally supportive and socially interactive learning environment.

Unlike earlier studies that predominantly relied on controlled experimental comparisons to evaluate the impact of reading strategies (e.g., Rinjani, 2014; Schumaker et al., 2006), this study offers a more dynamic and contextually grounded contribution by adopting a cyclical, adaptive classroom-based action research design. Rather than measuring outcomes through fixed treatments, the action research framework enabled the teacher to participate actively in the instructional process, observing student responses, diagnosing challenges, and making real-time pedagogical adjustments. This iterative model facilitated a deeper understanding of how learners internalize and apply reading strategies over time, allowing for targeted scaffolding and differentiated support across instructional cycles. The approach also resonates with the increasing emphasis on teacher agency in EFL contexts, where educators are viewed not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as reflective practitioners capable of shaping instruction to meet local learner needs (Banegas & Gerlach, 2021; Widodo, 2018). The study highlights how teacher-led innovations can yield sustainable improvements in reading engagement and comprehension by embedding strategy instruction within a responsive, evolving classroom ecosystem.

Thus, the demonstrated success of the RAPQ (Read, Ask, Predict, Question) technique in this study reinforces the importance of process-oriented, strategic instruction for developing reading proficiency among adolescent EFL learners. The results suggest that when students are given structured yet flexible opportunities to interact with texts through guided prediction, inferencing, questioning, and reflective dialogue, they actively construct meaning, monitor their comprehension processes, and apply learned strategies across new reading contexts. Teacher mediation and peer collaboration support this development, helping students shift from passive readers to strategic learners capable of engaging with texts at deeper cognitive levels. These findings align with current educational priorities that promote strategic literacy development, metacognitive awareness, and deeper learning across subject areas (OECD, 2023; Nation & Yamamoto, 2022). More broadly, this study shows that effective reading instruction in EFL classrooms must go beyond isolated skill drills to incorporate sustained, reflective, and context-sensitive approaches that empower learners to participate actively in meaning-making.

CONCLUSION

This Classroom Action Research demonstrated the effectiveness of the Read-Ask-Put-Question (RAPQ) technique in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of junior secondary EFL learners. Implemented across two iterative cycles, the RAPQ technique improved students' test scores and fostered greater engagement, deeper textual understanding, and more active classroom participation. The integration of scaffolding strategies, such as think-aloud modeling and peer support, proved crucial in helping students internalize the steps of the RAPQ process, especially in formulating meaningful questions and paraphrasing main ideas.

The success of the intervention highlights the value of process-based, student-centered approaches in addressing persistent challenges in reading instruction. Beyond immediate comprehension gains, this study illustrates how reflective instructional design and cyclical refinement, core to action research, can support the practical implementation of reading strategies in under-resourced

EFL classrooms. Educators can cultivate cognitive skill development, learner autonomy, and confidence by anchoring reading comprehension in a structured yet adaptive method like RAPQ.

Future research may explore how the RAPQ technique can be integrated with digital tools, adapted for diverse text genres, or sustained over extended periods. Nonetheless, this study contributes meaningful insights into how strategic reading instruction, grounded in scaffolded practice and reflective teaching, can bridge the gap between students' current abilities and their potential for academic success in English language learning.

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