

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension was a complex cognitive process in which readers constructed meaning from a text by integrating explicit information, implicit messages, and their prior knowledge (Snow, 2010; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). It required readers to decode words, understand sentence structures, and connect ideas across the text in order to form a coherent understanding. According to Kendeou et al. (2020), reading comprehension was not only about recognizing words but also about actively building mental representations of the text's meaning.

In language learning, reading comprehension played a vital role because it supported vocabulary acquisition, grammar mastery, and the development of critical thinking skills (Cain & Oakhill, 2018; Nation, 2020). Students who had strong reading comprehension skills were more capable of understanding academic materials and engaging in discussions based on what they read. Research by Alyousef (2020) showed that effective reading comprehension was essential for achieving overall proficiency in English, especially in academic contexts.

Recent studies showed that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) significantly improved students' reading comprehension by engaging them in authentic and contextual problem-solving activities (Hmelo-Silver, 2019; Guo et al., 2024). PBL encouraged active learning, collaboration, and critical thinking, which helped students process reading materials more effectively. In the case of SMPN 07 Bengkulu City, where teacher-centered methods still dominated, PBL provided an alternative that enhanced students' engagement and improved their comprehension outcomes (Bell, 2019; Guo et al., 2024).

2.2 The Purpose of The Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) on students' reading comprehension at SMPN 07 Bengkulu City. According to Creswell (2018), defining the purpose of a study provided a clear direction for the research process and guided the selection of methods. Therefore, this research aimed to determine whether the application of PBL significantly improved students' reading comprehension skills.

Specifically, the study sought to: (1) measure the students' reading comprehension achievement before and after being taught using PBL, (2) compare the improvement between students taught through PBL and those taught using conventional methods, and (3) explore the potential benefits of PBL for classroom engagement. As suggested by Fraenkel and Wallen (2019), formulating specific research purposes allowed the researcher to focus on measurable outcomes that aligned with the research questions.

By achieving these purposes, the study intended to provide empirical evidence to support the implementation of PBL in reading comprehension instruction. Previous studies (Bell, 2019; Guo et al., 2024) highlighted that PBL not only improved academic achievement but also encouraged collaborative learning and problem-solving abilities. Therefore, the findings from this study were expected to contribute to both theoretical and practical advancements in English language teaching.

The primary purpose of reading in the context of foreign language learning was to build a coherent mental representation of the information in the text, which involved integrating explicit and implicit information with prior knowledge and experience (Guo et al., 2024). This process enabled readers to understand, interpret, and evaluate the information contained in the text, which was essential for the development of comprehensive language skills. In English language learning, metacognitive reading strategies played an important role in helping students understand the meaning of texts in depth (Moradi et al., 2023). Thus, the application of methods such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL) improved

students' reading comprehension by providing a real-world context that encouraged them to actively engage in the learning process, thereby enhancing their reading comprehension.

2.3 Strategies of Reading Comprehension

In the process of reading comprehension, students benefit greatly from using effective strategies that help them to extract, process, and retain information from texts. These strategies are especially important for second language learners who often face difficulties with vocabulary, text structure, and making inferences. Various strategies have been identified to support students in understanding reading materials. According(Gao, 2024) effective reading comprehension strategies involve the integration of background knowledge, vocabulary, and active processing skills. The following are commonly used strategies:

- a) Skimming :Reading quickly to get a general overview or main idea of the text (Gao, 2024).
- b) Scanning :Searching for specific information in a text, such as numbers, names, or specific keywords (Gao, 2024)
- c) Predicting : Predicting the content or continuation of a text based on clues from the title, images, or previous sentences (Gao, 2024)
- d) Inferring : Drawing conclusions from information that is not explicitly stated in the text (Moradi et al., 2023)
- e) Summarizing : Rewriting important information from the text into a shorter and more concise form (Gao, 2024)
- f) Questioning : Forming and answering questions about the content of the text to enhance understanding (Moradi et al., 2023).
- g) Visualizing : Forming mental images of the content of the text to aid in understanding concepts or events (Moradi et al., 2023).
- h) Clarifying : Overcoming difficulties in understanding certain parts by rereading or seeking other sources (Gao, 2024).
- i) Making Connections : Connecting the text content to personal experiences, prior knowledge, or other texts that have been read (Moradi et al., 2023).

In addition to the types of reading mentioned above, Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is also a reading strategy. PBL is a learning approach that places students in real-life problem-solving situations that require them to actively and contextually use their reading skills. According to Guo et al. (2024), PBL effectively improves reading skills by encouraging students to collaborate, think critically, and apply language knowledge in meaningful contexts. PBL not only enhances text comprehension but also motivates students to learn independently and reflectively, making this strategy considered efficient in teaching reading in the classroom.

2.2 Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as a Reading Strategy

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This study focuses on the implementation of PBL because its integration into classroom instruction not only enhances reading comprehension but also fosters students' ability to solve problems.

2.1 Definition of Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Project Based Learning (PBL) is a student-centered approach that engages learners in real-world projects to improve English language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Bell, 2019). Studies show that PBL enhances communicative competence and critical thinking by providing meaningful contexts for language use (Thomas, 2020; Lee & Hannafin, 2021). Despite its benefits, challenges like limited teacher training and resources affect PBL's effectiveness (Chen & Tsai, 2022). Therefore, investigating PBL's role in developing English skills is important for optimizing language education

2.2 Characteristics of PBL

According to Barrows and Tamblyn (2021), PBL is characterized by the following elements:

- a) Student-centered learning: Students take responsibility for their own learning.
- b) Problem as a starting point: Learning begins with a real or relevant problem.
- c) Collaborative work: Students work in small groups to find solutions.
- d) Facilitator guidance: The teacher guides the learning process without directly providing answers.
- e) Self-directed learning: Students identify what they need to learn and seek out resources independently.

2.3 PBL in Reading Comprehension

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) was a student-centered instructional method that engaged learners in solving real-life problems, promoted active learning, and developed critical thinking. In the context of reading comprehension, PBL encouraged students to interact deeply with texts by identifying problems within the content, researching relevant information, and collaboratively constructing meaning (Bell, 2019). This approach contrasted with traditional lecture-based methods, which often caused passive reading and superficial understanding.

PBL improved reading comprehension by providing authentic, contextualized tasks that required students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information from various reading materials. Studies showed that students learned to make inferences, identify main ideas, and connect text information with prior knowledge through problem-solving activities (Guo et al., 2024). Collaborative group work in PBL also fostered discussion, which enhanced students' ability to clarify misunderstandings and develop critical perspectives on texts (Sari & Wahyuni, 2021).

At SMPN 07 Bengkulu City, where conventional teaching methods predominated, the application of PBL offered an innovative alternative that increased students' motivation and engagement in reading tasks. Classroom action research conducted in similar Indonesian junior high schools reported significant improvements in students' reading comprehension after PBL implementation, as measured by higher post-test scores and more positive attitudes toward reading (Fitriani et al., 2020; Yuliana et al., 2024).

Therefore, PBL served not only as a method to improve academic performance in reading comprehension but also as a strategy to develop learners' autonomy and critical thinking skills, which were essential for lifelong learning and effective language use.

2.4 Benefits of PBL in EFL Classrooms

Research has shown that PBL brings various benefits to EFL learners. As noted by Suwastini et al. (2021) and Uzma et al. (2024), PBL:

- a) Enhances student engagement and motivation
- b) Develops critical thinking and collaboration skills
- c) Encourages the use of English in meaningful contexts
- d) Supports better understanding and retention of content

In relation to reading, PBL provides a purposeful context that helps students develop comprehension strategies such as skimming, scanning, analyzing, and synthesizing information

2.5 Previous Studies

In order to support research on the influence of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) on students' reading abilities, several previous studies have been conducted in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). The following table presents a summary of several relevant studies, including the research focus and key findings that can serve as a theoretical foundation and comparison for this study. By understanding the results of previous studies, it is hoped that this study can provide new contributions and strengthen the validity of findings related to the effectiveness of PBL in improving students' reading skills at SMPN 07 Bengkulu City.

Author/Year	Purpose / Focus	Key Findings
Guo et al. (2024)	To analyze the effect of PBL on EFL students' reading skills	PBL improved reading comprehension, critical thinking, collaboration, motivation, and learning autonomy.
Alek (2023)	To explore digital technology integration in PBL for EFL reading	Digital tools enhanced PBL effectiveness by enabling interactive, authentic problem-solving tasks.
Siliwangi et al. (2024)	To evaluate PBL's effect on narrative text reading comprehension	PBL significantly improved students' reading comprehension of English narrative texts.
Saeidi et al. (2021)	To examine PBL's impact on cognitive engagement in EFL reading	PBL increased students' cognitive involvement and critical thinking during reading activities.
Alek (2023)	To study students' perceptions of PBL in reading instruction	Students reported higher engagement and motivation when learning reading through PBL.

Based on a review of previous studies, it appears that the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method consistently shows positive effects in improving students' reading skills, especially in the context of learning English as a foreign language. These studies emphasize the benefits of PBL in improving text comprehension, active engagement, critical thinking, and learning motivation. This study shares

similarities with previous studies in terms of using PBL to improve reading skills, but its focus is more specific on the implementation of PBL at SMPN 07 Bengkulu City as a local context. Thus, this study is expected to provide new contributions by adapting the PBL method to the characteristics of students and the learning environment at the school, while strengthening empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of PBL in reading instruction.

2.6 Framework of Thinking

This study's theoretical framework served as the basis for exploring how Problem-Based Learning (PBL) influenced students' mastery of the simple past tense at SMPN 7 Kota Bengkulu. Recent research suggested that PBL had strong potential to enhance critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and student collaboration, which contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of grammar structures and rules (Orhan, 2024; Guo et al., 2024).

Grammar proficiency played a vital role in enabling effective communication, allowing students to express their ideas accurately and clearly. Specifically, the ability to identify, use, and construct grammatically correct sentences in the simple past tense was considered a key indicator of language competence (Al Khresheh & Ahmad, 2023). PBL offered students meaningful learning experiences through real-world problems that required them to apply the simple past tense, encouraging functional and contextual language use (Bell, 2019).

This research was grounded in Constructivist Learning Theory, which viewed learning as an active process where knowledge was constructed through experience, social interaction, and reflection (Vygotsky, as cited in Hikmah, Permatasari, & Suhainah, 2024). PBL aligned with this theory by emphasizing learner-centered approaches, where students were actively involved in exploring problems, conducting research, working collaboratively, and engaging in higher-order thinking (Lee & Hannafin, 2021). Through such involvement, learners were expected to develop a deeper understanding of the simple past tense and how to use it effectively.

Additionally, acknowledging the socio-cultural context of SMPN 7 Kota Bengkulu was essential for a fuller understanding of how students learned language. Classroom dynamics, instructional strategies, resource availability, and students' prior knowledge and attitudes toward grammar influenced their engagement and learning outcomes in a PBL environment (Chen & Tsai, 2022). Recognizing these factors helped in assessing the true effectiveness of PBL in improving students' grammar skills.

In conclusion, this framework highlighted the potential of Problem-Based Learning to enhance students' understanding of the simple past tense. By integrating Constructivist Learning Theory, the Zone of Proximal Development, and socio-cultural considerations, this study aimed to offer meaningful insights into the use of PBL as an instructional strategy. Ultimately, the findings were expected to support improvements in language teaching practices and strengthen students' grammar proficiency.

2.7 Hypothesis

Based on the problem formulation and theoretical review explained earlier, the hypotheses in this study are formulated as follows:

- a. Alternative Hypothesis (H_a): There is a significant effect of using the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method on students' learning outcomes in English at SMP Negeri 07 Bengkulu City.
- b. Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant effect of using the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method on students' learning outcomes in English at SMP Negeri 07 Bengkulu City.