

Improving EFL Students' Reading Comprehension and Critical Thinking Skill through Directed Reading Thinking Activity

Karolis Anaktototy¹, Inggrid Lesnussa²

Universitas Pattimura, Indonesia^{1,2}

Email: wakwyoya@gmail.com

Submitted: 22/12/2021

Revised: 16/02/2022

Accepted: 13/03/2022

E-ISSN : 2579-4574

P-ISSN : 2549-7359

Abstract. Reading comprehension and critical thinking skills are pivotal skills which can trigger academic achievements of students in the English Foreign Language Learning. This study was conducted to improve those students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills by implementing Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA). The researcher conducted the study by following the classroom action research approach that consists of four steps in each of its cycles consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The researcher used pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire to collect the data. The data from the result of tests were analyzed quantitatively while the observation results were analyzed qualitatively. The study results show that the implementation of DRTA can improve students' reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. DRTA can improve students reading skills and critical thinking because the DRTA strategy focuses on student engagement with the text. Hence, students have to predict and prove when the students read, and it makes the learning process more interactive and the students more active. Thus, the researcher recommends DRTA for those teachers who find similar problems in improving students' reading comprehension and critical thinking.

Keywords: *Critical Thinking, Directed Reading Thinking Activity, Reading Comprehension*

<https://ojs.unm.ac.id/eralingua>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension skill is essential in English as a foreign language learning. Through reading, students can improve vocabulary, fluency, speaking and writing skills, and ultimately help them master the target language (Hung & Ngan, 2015; Azizifar, Roshani, Gowhary, & Jamalinesari, 2015; Ghanbaria & Marzban, 2014). Reading comprehension can help learners improve their English language proficiency and improve their knowledge from the information that they get from the reading text (Habók & Magyar, 2018). Therefore, students who have a high reading comprehension strategy will possess a higher-level language proficiency.

Furthermore, reading comprehension is related to critical thinking (Aloqaili, 2012). It means that the ones who have good reading comprehension skills will have good critical thinking skills (Akkaya, 2012). Besides, it also works on the other way around. Critical thinking is also believed to have a significant role in reading comprehension (Heidari, 2020; Kamgara & Jadidi, 2016). Critical thinking is a metacognitive process through a reflective assessment to generate logical conclusions in determining solutions to a problem (Dwyer, Hogan, & Stewart, 2014; Dekker, 2020). Thus, teachers need to improve students' critical thinking because it will help them get the root of problems and find a reasonable solution (Živković, 2016). Moreover, it is essential to develop critical thinking because critical thinking is the basis of innovation (Wechsler, et al., 2018). From that explanation, it can be understood that reading comprehension and critical thinking skills are essential for students who learn English as a foreign language. However, some of the problems usually experienced by students in EFL reading classes are the lack of vocabulary they understand, linguistic complexity including lexical and syntactic knowledge, and lack of prior-knowledge (Kasim & Raisha, 2017; Küçükoğlu, 2013; Satriani, 2018).

Pre-observations conducted by researchers also found that students of SMP Negeri 4 Ambon, especially students in grade 7, experienced problems in reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. Most students have problems identifying the main idea, understanding new vocabulary, determining the purpose of the text, and understanding the text's information in detail. Because the teacher only told them to translate words they didn't understand by looking at the dictionary, their ability to guess and relate the meaning of unknown words to words that they knew based on context did not develop. Their inability to understand the meaning of the text they read makes them unable to answer questions in their language. This shows that students still have problems understanding the information in the text. Furthermore, teachers also do not allow students to question, examine, create, solve, interpret, and evaluate material in the teaching and learning process. So it can be concluded that the teacher did not train students' critical thinking during the reading class.

During the teaching and learning process, the teacher immediately asks students to open their books, read the available text, and consult a dictionary if there are problems with vocabulary that they don't understand. Then, students are asked to answer the questions provided. After the allocated time for reading and answering questions runs out, the teacher asks students to answer questions in turn. The teaching strategy applied by the teacher is not suitable for reading

comprehension learning. Harmer (2007) explains that reading skills are not passive skills. It is because in reading, a person must carry out an active process, namely understanding the meaning of the words that compose the text, understanding the existing arguments, and seeking agreement on the statement. In other words, someone who is reading will be involved with what they are reading.

Furthermore, Harmer (2007) explained that students would read better if they are interested in the text they are reading. In the reading process, students need to be allowed to discuss the text's contents, not only discuss the questions and answers. Students must be actively involved in discussions about the text's content so that they can conclude the content of the text they read. They must be taught to predict the content of the text. Besides, before reading, students should be ready and have an initial knowledge about the text's topic to be read. From the task side, the teacher must also ensure that the questions given can make students more challenged.

Considering the students' problems in reading comprehension and critical thinking and the English teacher's inappropriate teaching strategy, the researcher proposed the Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy to solve that problem. According to Odwan (2016), DRTA is a learning strategy that creates independent learners and readers. In its application, students are involved in an active thinking process that requires them to use their abilities to give reasons and use their ideas. Besides, Agustiani (2016) explains that the DRTA is a reading learning strategy that can foster the ability to read students' understanding by guiding students through a reading process that implements cognitive procedures such as tapping prior knowledge and predicting, visualizing, and making connections. DRTA involves students in a process that guides students through thinking and understanding a text.

Some studies conducted reading comprehension and critical thinking skill of EFL students by various media, methods, and strategies. One of learning method which can be implemented to foster critical thinking skill of EFL students is directed reading thinking activity. This current study focuses on to portray the improvement of reading comprehension and critical thinking skill of EFL students using directed reading thinking activity through classroom action research design. One of the advantages using the design that researchers will not only focus on the intervention process, however it will cover some aspects starting from diagnose problems, search for solutions, take action on promising possibilities, and monitor whether and how well the action worked.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research design

This study is classroom-based action research that was conducted at State Junior High School - 4 Ambon. The students in class 7 with 20 students consist of 12 females, and 8 males were taken as the study's subject. This study followed the classroom-based action research procedure proposed by Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon (2014). Based on that procedure, four steps are conducted in each cycle: planning, action, observation, and reflection.

Research instruments

There were three research instruments used in this research namely; reading comprehension scoring rubric, critical thinking scoring rubric, and questionnaire. There were 4 categories in the reading comprehension rubric. The first category is excellent which is scored 4. Students got 4 or excellent if they independently asks and answers complex inferential questions, makes connections to background knowledge, other texts and theme. The second category is good which is scored 3. In this category students independently asks and answers who, what, where, when, why and how questions concerning key details in a literary or informational text. The third category is adequate which is scored 2. In this category, students require teacher prompting and support to ask or answer questions concerning key details in a literary or informational text. May be able to ask/answer literal (who, what, where) and need support for more inferential questions/answers concerning why and how. The last category is poor which is scored 1. In this category, students only have little no understanding of what has been read. Unable to ask or answer who, what, where, when, why and how questions concerning key details in a text.

For critical thinking scoring rubric, the researchers adopted the critical thinking skills rubric to solve problems, make informed decisions, and interpret events from Mid-South Community College (2009). There were five components in the rubric. The components are:

1. Identifies and summarizes the problem/question at issue
2. Identifies and assesses the quality of supporting data/evidence
3. Identifies and considers the influence of the context on the issue
4. Demonstrates higher level thinking by interpreting the author's meaning Or the potential bias
5. Identifies and evaluates conclusions, implications, and consequences

Each component was divided into category 1 - 4. Category 1 is the lowest while category 4 is the highest. Besides, each category was also described in details in order that the researchers can easily score the students critical thinking ability.

Data collection and analysis

The researcher collected the data using pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire. The pre-test and post-test aimed at collecting the students' reading comprehension and critical thinking before and after the implementation of the DRTA strategy. While the questionnaire was used to collect the students' responses during the implementation of the DRTA strategy to confirm the things that make DRTA help the students solve their problems in reading comprehension and critical thinking. Data from the test and questionnaire were analysed quantitatively. The study cycle was ended after all of the students got a higher score than the Minimum Passing Grade (MPG).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The result of students pre-test and post-test score in cycle 1

In measuring the student's prior knowledge about their reading comprehension and critical thinking skill, the pre-test was conducted at the first meeting before applying the DRTA as a teaching strategy. In the reading comprehension test, the students finding out the topic of a text, predicting and answers some questions. Whereas to measure their critical thinking skill, the students have to solve problems, make informed decisions also answers some questions. The result of students' pre-test for reading and critical thinking tests can be seen in figure 1.

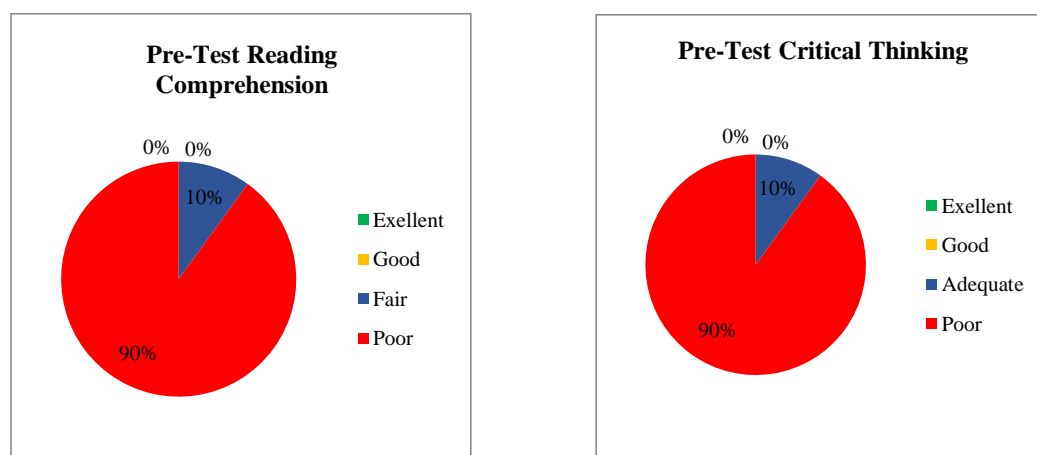


Figure 1. Students' Pre-Test Score in Cycle 1

Prior to the implementation of DRTA strategy in the classroom, a pre-test was conducted. The pre-test result in figure 1 above indicated that almost all of the seventh grade students of SMP Negeri 4 Ambon's reading comprehension and critical thinking skills were at a poor category, only 2 students or 10% of the students were at an adequate category. From this finding, the researchers interviewed the students to know more about their reading and critical thinking skills. The result of the interview showed that the students were having difficulty in comprehending an English text. They lack vocabulary and grammatical knowledge to understand the text. Consequently, they often find it challenging to understand the text. They got difficulties in finding the main idea, meaning of new words, recognizing references, determining text purpose, and determining detailed information.

On the other hand, an effort to challenge students to pose question, examine, create, solve, interpret, and evaluate the material in their learning process is low. In other words, the teacher did not intend to explore the students' critical thinking in teaching. Moreover, some students responded that the teacher rarely used varied teaching strategies, as a result they have low reading comprehension and critical thinking skill.

After analysing the result of the pre-test and studying the students' problem, the researcher decided to give a treatment and started to apply the DRTA strategy to help the students improving their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. Prior to the learning process in the classroom, the researchers had designed six lesson plans for 6 meetings in the first cycle. In the lesson plan, narrative texts were used as reading materials following the steps of DRTA strategy. In implementing the lesson plans in the classroom, classroom observation was conducted to observe the interaction of the students and the way the teacher taught the students. After the sixth meeting, the post-test was conducted to measure students reading comprehension and critical thinking ability. The result of the students' post-test scores in the first cycle can be seen in Figure 2 as follows:

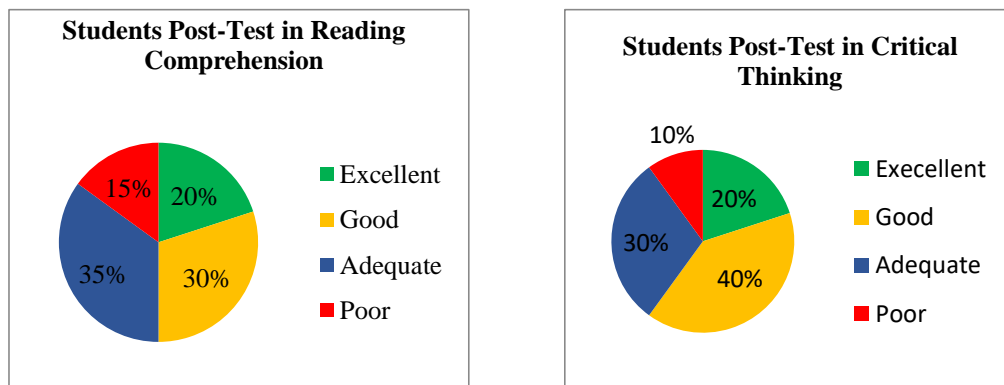


Figure 2. Students' Post-Test Score in Cycle 1

Data in figure 2 above shows that for reading comprehension skill there has been an improvement. 20% of the students were in the excellent category, 30% of the students in good category, 35% of the students were in the adequate category, and only 15% of them were in poor category. Meanwhile, for critical thinking skill 20% of the students were in excellent category, 40% of the students were in good category, 30% of them were in adequate category, and only 10% of them were in poor category.

Based on the table above described the improvement of each student in cycle one into cycle two. In this part, the researcher did not display the students' results in the pre-test of reading comprehension and critical thinking skills because all the students were at a poor level, which meant they lack comprehension and critical thinking skills. From the data in the figure above, it showed that the students reading comprehension and critical thinking were improved. The improvement of reading comprehension and critical thinking skills could be seen from their progress in percentages starting with 2% to 30%.

The result of students post-test score in cycle 2

In second cycle students' reading comprehension, especially in finding the main idea and the detail information of the text improved. In this cycle students were actively participating in the teaching and learning practice. It was supported with the positive environment between the teacher and the students. The picture

and key words during the lesson helped the students a lot in activating their background knowledge. The vocabulary guessing also helped the students to overcome their difficulties in comprehending.

The students' critical thinking skill was also improved. The strategy made them feel comfortable to learn. They did not feel afraid to make mistakes. This of course became a good chance to motivate passive students to be more active during the lesson. The result of students' reading comprehension and Critical Thinking can be presented in the following chart.

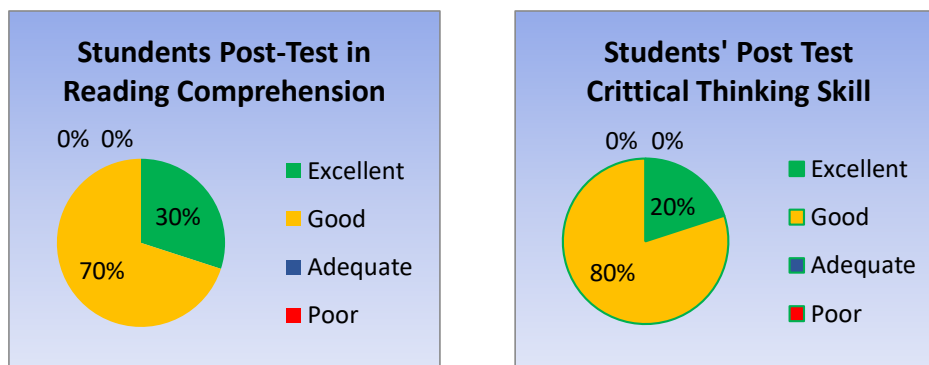


Figure 3. Students' Post-Test Score in Cycle 2

The post-test results in the second cycle showed that all students could pass the minimal passing grade. These data indicate that the students already have good reading comprehension skills. In other words, the DRTA strategy application is proven to improve students' reading comprehension and critical thinking. This increase can be seen from the increase in student scores on the post-test in the second cycle compared to the first cycle.

Besides, questionnaire was given to see the DRTA strategy's effectiveness by asking students' responses at the end of the last cycle. The result of the questionnaire can be seen in Figure 4.

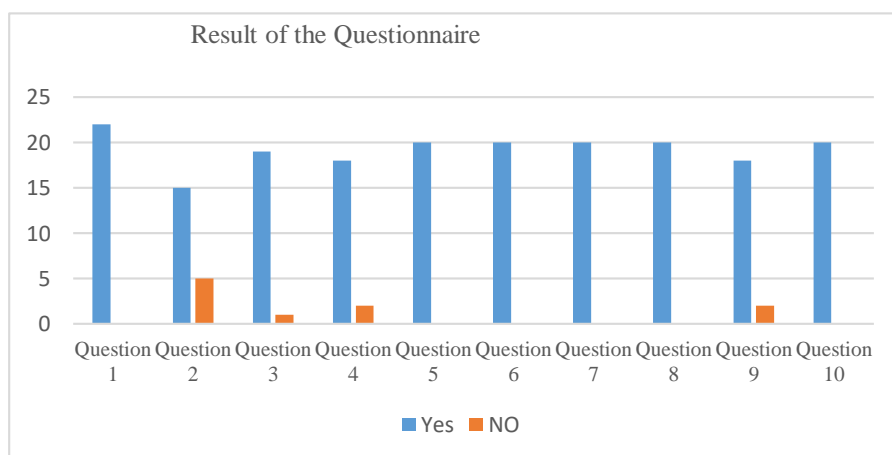


Figure 4. The Result of the Questionnaire

From the data distribution above, it can show that there were 22(100%) students agreed that the narrative it is easy to read, 15 students (68%) able to understand the narrative text, and 5 (23%) did not know, 19 students (90%) answered yes. Only one (10%) answered no, 18 students (91%) say it was easy to answer the question based on the text when the teacher explained how to use the DRTA strategy. Two students could not answer the question easily. Twenty students, or 100% of the students, answered the DRTA strategy was easy and helped comprehend the narrative text. The DRTA strategy also helps to build their critical thinking to find and answer the question. All of the students agreed that the DRTA strategy could help their study in learning English.

Based on the data analysis results that have been carried out, several findings are deemed necessary to be discussed. First, the findings regarding the improvement of students' reading comprehension after the application of DRTA. Second, the results regarding the improvement of students' critical thinking skills after the application of DRTA.

DRTA strategy improve students' reading comprehension skill

The result of the study shows that DRTA can improve students' reading comprehension. This study also found that DRTA successfully enhances students' reading comprehension because it provides prior knowledge-building activity for the students and teachers to guide them during the reading activities. Building prior knowledge and brainstorming has a significant and positive effect on the students' critical thinking and reading comprehension abilities (Chabanchi & Behrooznia, 2014; Akkaya, 2012). Besides, effective scaffolding can also help students improve their reading skills (Wilson, 2016). Furthermore, the DRTA strategy implementation has proven successful in improving students' reading comprehension because DRTA makes the reading process more interactive and, consequently, can make students develop new concepts, ideas, suggestions, and thinking styles. Besides, to optimize the results of the application of DRTA, teachers must emphasize efforts to help students use DRTA strategies more effectively in reading texts in English. Indirectly, these findings also prove that if students are taught the right reading strategies, they will become good readers.

This result of the study is supported by some previous studies that were conducted by other researchers. For instance, the study conducted by Utami & Sugirin (2019) found that DRTA effectively improves students' reading comprehension. A similar result was also found by (Nerim, 2020) who conducted an experimental study at the state junior high school number 1 Jonggat. Stahl (2003) tested the effectiveness of three teaching strategies, DRTA, KWL, and picture walks (PW). Based on his research, it was found that DRTA was one of the strategies that could significantly improve students' reading comprehension. El-Koumy (2006) also researched the effect of DRTA on students' referential and inferential reading comprehension. The research results found that DRTA proved to have a positive and significant effect on both referential and inferential reading comprehension.

Furthermore, Megawati (2018) compared the effectiveness of integrated reading learning and DRTA in reading stories. The results of his research found that DRTA had a more significant positive effect than Guided Reading. Odwan (2016)

also conducted a study to examine the impact of DRTA strategies on English high school students in Jordan. The results are also in line with the research results from previous researchers, namely that DRTA is effective in improving students' reading skills and involves students in an active process where they must use critical thinking and relate it to previous knowledge.

Yazdani & Mohammadi (2015) also revealed that DRTA and Guided Reading (GR) also impacted reading comprehension for Sixty-three Iranian students. Furthermore, Rukminingsih (2014) investigated the implementation of DRTA strategies in extensive reading classes. This research was conducted on students. The results of the observations show that this strategy makes students active readers; help students increase knowledge, information, new expressions, and the new vocabulary of texts; help students easily understand the text or story; make students more confident to read; encourages silent reading; make students understand the main topic of the text and explore their ideas in their language. From the above explanation, it can be concluded that the results of this study are supported by the results of previous studies, which also found that DRTA is effective for use in reading classes, especially to improve students' reading comprehension.

DRTA can improve students' critical thinking skills

This study's findings suggest that the DRTA strategy is an effective one for critical thinking skills. Other researchers also found a similar result who studied the implementation of DRTA to improve critical thinking. Novendiana, Tasnim, & Wijaputra (2016) found that the implementation of DRTA for the tenth-grade students at MA Unggulan Nuris Jember can improve both their reading comprehension and critical thinking. A similar finding was also found by Sefrianah, Suyono, & Andajani (2018) that DRTA significantly affects students' critical thinking in junior high school and senior high school levels.

DRTA strategy can improve students' critical thinking because it consists of understanding and practice. According to Mehta & Al-Mahrouqi (2014), critical thinking can be taught through drills, exercises, and problem-solving. This is confirmed by Abrami, et al. (2015), who found that critical thinking improvement can be obtained with appropriate instructional strategies. A similar finding was also found by Walker (2003) that some teaching strategies that activate students can train students' critical thinking. Thus, the DRTA strategy can improve students' critical thinking because it engages students to be active and interactive during the teaching and learning process. Besides, the DRTA strategy can make students build their critical thinking because, at the time of implementing this strategy, students will be invited to predict and confirm the predictions they have previously made.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the DRTA strategy can improve students' reading comprehension and critical thinking. This study's results can be seen from the increase in the value of students' reading comprehension and critical thinking from before the implementation of DRTA until the last cycle of this study. From these results, to improve the quality of the English teaching and learning process,

especially in improving reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, the researcher suggests 1) English teachers should always prepare texts that can attract students' attention and are suitable for teaching reading and critical thinking skills, 2) Teachers must implement appropriate learning strategies that can improve students' reading and critical thinking skills, 3) If the teacher uses DRTA, the teacher must prepare himself and all the supporting materials needed to achieve maximum results, 4) The DRTA strategy can be an alternative strategy for teaching reading and critical thinking skills because it has been proven to be empirically effective.

REFERENCES

- Abrami, P. C., Bernard, R. M., Borokhovski, E., Waddington, D. I., Wade, C. A., & Persson, T. (2015). Strategies for teaching students to think critically: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 85(2), 275–314.
- Agustiani, M. (2016). The effects of DRTA and Lc strategies on students' reading comprehension achievement of narrative texts based on english score levels. *Journal of English Literacy Education*, 3(2), 111-124.
- Akkaya, N. (2012). The relationship between teachers candidates' critical thinking skills and their use of reading strategies. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 47, 797-801.
- Aloqaili, A. S. (2012). The relationship between reading comprehension and critical thinking: A theoretical study. *Journal of King Saud University - Languages and Translation*, 24(1), 35-41.
- Azizifar, A., Roshani, S., Gowhary, H., & Jamalinesari, A. (2015). The effect of pre-reading activities on the reading comprehension performance of ilami high school students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192, 188-194.
- Dekker, T. J. (2020). Teaching critical thinking through engagement with multiplicity. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 37, 100701.
- Dwyer, C. P., Hogan, M. J., & Stewart, I. (2014). An integrated critical thinking framework for the 21st century. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 12, 43-52.
- El-Koumy, A. S. (2006). The Effects of the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity on EFL Students' Referential and Inferential Comprehension. *Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)*.
- Ghabanchi, Z., & Behrooznia, S. (2014). The impact of brainstorming on reading comprehension and critical thinking ability of EFL learners. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98, 513-521.
- Ghanbaria, M., & Marzban, A. (2014). Effect of extensive reading on incidental vocabulary retention. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 3854-3858.
- Habók, A., & Magyar, A. (2018). The effects of EFL reading comprehension and certain learning-related factors on EFL learners' reading strategy use. *Cogent Education*, 6(1), 1616522.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *How to teach English*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Heidari, K. (2020). Critical thinking and EFL learners' performance on textually-explicit, textually-implicit, and script-based reading items. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 37, 100703.

- Hung, D. M., & Ngan, V. P. (2015). Investigating reading strategies used by EFL students at Dong Thap University. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*, 3(4), 10-20.
- Kamgara, N., & Jadidi, E. (2016). Exploring the relationship of Iranian EFL learners' critical thinking and self-regulation with their reading comprehension ability. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232, 776-783.
- Kasim, U., & Raisha, S. (2017). EFL students' reading comprehension problems: Linguistic and non-linguistic complexities. *English Education Journal*, 8(3), 308-321.
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2014). *The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*. London: Springer.
- Küçüköğlu, H. (2013). Improving Reading Skills Through Effective Reading Strategies. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 709-714.
- Megawati, I. (2018). *The effect of using directed reading-thinking activity on the students' reading comprehension viewed from the students' motivation*. Surakarta: Muhamadyah University of Surakarta.
- Mehta, S. R., & Al-Mahrouqi, R. (2014). Can thinking be taught? Linking critical thinking and writing in an EFL context. *RELC Journal*, 1-14.
- Nerim, N. (2020). Scrutinizing Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) strategy on students' reading comprehension. *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 8(2), 128-138.
- Novendiana, F. H., Tasnim, Z., & Wijaputra, B. A. (2016). The effect of using directed reading thinking activity (drta) strategy on the tenth grade students' reading comprehension achievement at MA Unggulan Nuris Jember. *Jurnal Edukasi*, 3(3), 43-46.
- Odwan, T. A.-H. (2016). The effect of the directed reading thinking activity through cooperative learning on English secondary stage students' reading comprehension in Jordan. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(16), 138-151.
- Rukminingsih. (2014). Incorporating directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) technique into extensive reading class. *Cendekia*, 12(2), 261-178.
- Satriani, E. (2018). Reading comprehension difficulties encountered by English students of Islamic University of Riau. *Journal of English for Academic*, 5(2), 15-26.
- Sefrianah, N. A., Suyono, S., & Andajani, K. (2018). Pengaruh strategi DRTA terhadap kemampuan berpikir kritis siswa jenjang SD, SMP, dan SMA. *Jurnal Pendidikan: Teori, Penelitian, & Pengembangan*, 3(2), 229-237.
- Stahl, K. A. D. (2003). *The effects of three instructional methods on the reading comprehension and content acquisition of novice readers* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia).
- Utami, Y. P., & Sugirin. (2019). Fostering students' reading comprehension ability through Directed Reading Thinking Activities (DRTA) strategy. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 4(2), 129-141.
- Walker, S. E. (2003). Active learning strategies to promote critical thinking. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 38(3), 263-267.

- Wechsler, S. M., Saiz, C., Rivas, S. F., Vendramini, C. M., Almeida, L. S., Mundim, M. C., et al. (2018). Creative and critical thinking: Independent or overlapping components? *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 27, 114-122.
- Wilson, K. (2016). Critical reading, critical thinking: Delicate scaffolding in English for Academic Purposes (EAP). *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 256-265.
- Yazdani, M. M., & Mohammadi, M. (2015). The Explicit Instruction of Reading Strategies: Directed Reading Thinking Activity vs. Guided Reading Strategies. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 4(3), 53-60.
- Živković, S. (2016). A model of critical thinking as an important attribute for success in the 21st century. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 232, 102-108.