

MODIFYING READING MATERIALS ABOUT ENREKANG TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is a fundamental component of English learning at the junior high school level, yet many Indonesian students continue to struggle because available reading materials are often unfamiliar and disconnected from their daily lives. This research aimed to determine the effect of modifying reading materials about Enrekang on students' reading comprehension and to explore students' perceptions of the use of the modified materials. A quantitative approach using a one-group pre-test and post-test design was applied, involving 26 seventh-grade students of UPT SMP Negeri 2 Enrekang selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a reading comprehension test and a questionnaire, and were analyzed through descriptive statistics, normality and homogeneity tests, and a paired-samples t-test. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension after the implementation of the modified reading materials, with the mean score increasing from 55.69 in the pre-test to 89.81 in the post-test, and the paired-samples t-test showing a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). The questionnaire results further indicated that students perceived the modified materials as attractive, easy to understand, relevant to their local context, and helpful for improving their reading comprehension. In conclusion, modifying reading materials about Enrekang effectively improved students' reading comprehension and created a more meaningful learning experience, as the integration of simplified language and local content enhanced both students' reading achievement and their motivation, confidence, and engagement in reading English texts.

Keywords: *Modified Reading Materials, Reading Comprehension, Local Content, Enrekang, Students' Perceptions*

ABSTRAK

Kemampuan membaca pemahaman merupakan salah satu komponen mendasar dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris di tingkat Sekolah Menengah Pertama, namun banyak siswa di Indonesia masih mengalami kesulitan karena materi bacaan yang tersedia sering kali tidak familiar dan kurang terhubung dengan kehidupan sehari-hari mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh modifikasi materi bacaan tentang Enrekang terhadap kemampuan membaca pemahaman siswa serta untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi siswa terhadap penggunaan materi bacaan yang telah dimodifikasi tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain one-group pre-test dan post-test, yang melibatkan 26 siswa kelas VII UPT SMP Negeri 2 Enrekang yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan tes kemampuan membaca pemahaman dan angket, kemudian dianalisis melalui statistik deskriptif, uji normalitas, uji

homogenitas, serta uji paired-sample t-test. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan pada kemampuan membaca pemahaman siswa setelah penerapan materi bacaan yang dimodifikasi, dengan nilai rata-rata meningkat dari 55,69 pada pre-test menjadi 89,81 pada post-test, dan uji paired-sample t-test menunjukkan nilai signifikansi 0,000 ($p < 0,05$). Hasil angket juga menunjukkan bahwa siswa mempersepsikan materi yang dimodifikasi sebagai menarik, mudah dipahami, relevan dengan konteks lokal mereka, dan membantu meningkatkan kemampuan membaca pemahaman mereka. Dengan demikian, modifikasi materi bacaan tentang Enrekang efektif meningkatkan kemampuan membaca pemahaman siswa serta menciptakan pengalaman belajar yang lebih bermakna, karena integrasi bahasa yang disederhanakan dan konten lokal tidak hanya meningkatkan capaian membaca siswa tetapi juga motivasi, kepercayaan diri, dan keterlibatan mereka dalam membaca teks Bahasa Inggris.

Kata Kunci: Materi Bacaan yang Dimodifikasi, Kemampuan Membaca Pemahaman, Konten Lokal, Enrekang, Persepsi Siswa

A. Introduction

Reading ability constitutes one of the fundamental competencies in English language learning at the junior high school level, encompassing not only the recognition of words and grammatical structures but also the capacity to comprehend information, interpret content, and draw conclusions from written texts (Anderson, 2018). In the Indonesian context, reading comprehension in English remains a persistent challenge for many students, largely because of cultural differences, limited vocabulary, and insufficient exposure to texts relevant to their everyday lives (Sari & Putra, 2020). This condition highlights the need for innovation in the development of instructional materials to strengthen the effectiveness of reading instruction.

At the national level, junior high school reading instruction frequently relies on generic materials that fail to account for students' local needs, proficiency levels, or cultural backgrounds (Rahman, F., 2021). When learners lack prior knowledge of a reading topic, comprehension becomes considerably more difficult, which in turn makes it harder for them to respond accurately to comprehension questions. Previous studies indicate that reading materials connected to students' social environment can enhance their motivation, interest, and comprehension ability (Hapsari & Utami, 2019); when a text relates to familiar places, cultures, or experiences, students are better able to activate their existing schemata, a process consistent with information processing theory, which holds that

connections between a text and a reader's experiences accelerate understanding and strengthen information retention (Tomlinson, 2017).

Modifying reading materials, namely simplifying sentence structures, adjusting vocabulary, adding visual context, or selecting topics relevant to students' lives, has been shown to significantly improve learning outcomes (Wulandari & Kurniawan, 2020). Reading material modification is therefore not merely a matter of reducing textual complexity but also of designing engaging and contextually appropriate texts. Region-themed materials in particular have been found to enhance instructional effectiveness (Hamka & Yusuf, 2021b), and Enrekang, a region rich in culture, history, and tourism potential, offers numerous topics, such as local customs, traditional cuisine, tourist attractions, and historical figures, that can be incorporated into reading texts to provide students with reading experiences closely connected to their own world.

Initial observations at UPT SMP Negeri 2 Enrekang revealed that students' average reading comprehension score was

approximately 70, which, based on the achievement classification of the Independent Curriculum stipulated in Permendikbudristek Number 21 of 2022 (Very Good 81–100, Good 71–80, Enough 61–70, Need Guidance 0–60), falls into the "Enough" category, indicating that students' reading comprehension had not yet reached the "Good" or "Very Good" level and therefore required improvement. English teachers at the school further reported that students often struggled to understand textbook materials because the topics were considered too distant from their daily experiences (Jamaluddin, 2022), reinforcing the need for reading materials that are more contextual and rooted in local culture.

Although several studies have examined the use of local reading materials in English instruction, research specifically addressing the modification of Enrekang-themed reading texts at the junior high school level remains scarce. Nugrahani (2021) developed local-culture-based reading materials for junior high school students through a Research and Development approach, demonstrating that culture-based texts can enhance reading interest and comprehension, although the trial was limited to a single class.

Rahman, A. (2020), using classroom action research, found that locally contextualized texts help students connect new information with prior knowledge, but did not elaborate on the process of material modification itself. Hamka and Yusuf (2021a), employing a quasi-experimental design with two comparison groups, reported that local-wisdom-based texts increase students' motivation and active participation, yet did not analyze the difficulty level of the texts used. Similarly, Lestari and Gunawan (2021) developed supplementary local-culture-based materials through an R&D approach but did not provide quantitative evidence of students' reading improvement, while Sari and Putra (2020) identified the difficulty of connecting texts with students' daily experiences as a primary cause of low comprehension without offering an experimental solution. Most previous studies therefore employed qualitative, R&D, or classroom-action approaches and focused on developing new materials or analyzing reading difficulties rather than empirically testing the effect of modifying existing texts with a specific local theme through an experimental method (Lestari & Gunawan, 2021). This gap, namely the limited number of quantitative

experimental studies on local-text modification, the scarcity of research on Enrekang-specific content, and the lack of studies examining how the modification process itself affects reading comprehension, motivated the present research.

Reading is widely understood as a complex cognitive and linguistic process in which readers interpret written symbols and construct meaning from them, requiring interaction between the reader, the text, and the context (Farrukh & Bilal, 2019). Kim (2020) explains that reading integrates vocabulary knowledge, grammatical understanding, and background knowledge, while Gómez and King (2020) describe it as an interactive, dynamic meaning-construction activity. Reading comprehension itself represents the ultimate goal of the reading process; Kim (2020) defines it as the integration of textual information with prior knowledge to form coherent understanding, while Mahdi (2020) identifies four levels of comprehension, namely literal, inferential, critical, and creative comprehension, shaped by factors such as background knowledge, vocabulary mastery, text difficulty, motivation, and reading strategies (Gómez & King, 2020). Junior high

school students in particular require engaging and contextually relevant texts that reflect their environment (Kurniawan & Mulyadi, 2023; Suherman & Arsyad, 2021).

Teaching materials, defined by Ali and Ibrahim (2021) as any instructional resource that facilitates student learning, are most effective when relevant, authentic, and adaptable to learners' needs (Hermawan & Yusuf, 2022). Material modification, or text adaptation, involves adjusting reading materials to learners' proficiency and cognitive needs without compromising their essential meaning (Aghajani & Gholamrezapour, 2021), and can take the form of simplification, elaboration, or a combination of both (Cai & Zhu, 2022), applied through techniques such as replacing difficult vocabulary, shortening complex sentences, adding background knowledge, explaining cultural references, and reorganizing paragraphs (Harun & Wahyudi, 2023). Local content, meanwhile, refers to instructional materials designed around the cultural, geographical, and social characteristics of a particular region (Asnawi et al., 2023), and has been shown to increase motivation, activate background knowledge, support cultural identity, and enhance comprehension

(Adlis et al., 2022). Integrating Enrekang-based local content into reading materials is therefore expected to help students connect texts with real-life contexts, strengthen motivation, build cultural awareness, and improve comprehension, in line with Indonesia's contextual learning principles and current curriculum requirements.

Based on this background, the present research investigates the effect of modifying reading materials about Enrekang on students' reading comprehension at junior high school, addressing the following research questions: (1) does modifying reading materials about Enrekang improve students' reading comprehension, and (2) how do students perceive the use of modified reading materials about Enrekang in improving their reading comprehension? Accordingly, this research aims to determine the effect of modifying reading materials about Enrekang on students' reading comprehension at junior high school and to explore students' perceptions of the use of the modified reading materials.

B. Method

This research employed a quantitative approach using a one-

group pre-test and post-test experimental design to examine the effectiveness of modified reading materials about Enrekang in improving students' reading comprehension, without involving a control group; the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores served as a direct indicator of the effect of the intervention. To minimize the influence of external variables, participants were drawn from a relatively homogeneous population in terms of initial reading ability, and the intervention was implemented under uniform learning conditions, including the same instructional duration, teaching media, and teacher guidance for all participants. The modified reading materials were also adjusted to match students' proficiency levels to avoid cognitive overload from materials that were either too difficult or too easy.

The research involved two variables: the independent variable (X), namely the modification of reading materials with an Enrekang theme, and the dependent variable (Y), namely students' reading comprehension ability. The research was conducted at UPT SMP Negeri 2 Enrekang, located in Juppandang Village, Enrekang District, Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi, a location selected because

initial observations indicated that students' average reading ability was still at the "fair" level. The population consisted of the seventh-grade students of UPT SMP Negeri 2 Enrekang, totaling 52 students across two classes (Class VII-A: 14 male and 12 female students; Class VII-B: 16 male and 10 female students). Using purposive sampling, Class VII-A, comprising 26 students (14 male and 12 female), was selected as the research sample.

Two instruments were employed. The first was a multiple-choice reading comprehension test administered as the pre-test and post-test to measure students' reading comprehension before and after the implementation of the modified materials. The second was a questionnaire consisting of 20 statements measured on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5 to Strongly Disagree = 1), designed to assess four indicators: the attractiveness of the materials (items 1–5), the ease of understanding the materials (items 6–10), the relevance of the Enrekang local content (items 11–15), and the contribution of the modified materials to students' reading comprehension (items 16–20).

Data collection was carried out over eight meetings through four stages: the

pre-test, the implementation of the modified reading materials across six meetings, the post-test, and the administration of the questionnaire. The validity and reliability of the research instruments were examined using SPSS Version 25. Data analysis followed the stages proposed by Mawaddah (2023), beginning with descriptive statistical analysis of the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores, as well as frequencies and percentages for the questionnaire data. This was followed by a normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk test and a homogeneity test using Levene's Test, both at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, before hypothesis testing was conducted using a paired-samples t-test with a two-tailed significance level to determine whether the null hypothesis (H_0) should be accepted or rejected.

C. Results and Discussion

1. The Effect of Modified Reading Materials on Students' Reading Comprehension

Descriptive statistical analysis showed a marked difference between students' reading comprehension before and after the implementation of

the modified reading materials. In the pre-test, none of the students reached the "Very Good" or "Good" categories, only 3 students (12%) reached the "Enough" category, and the majority, 23 students (88%), remained in the "Need Guidance" category. After the treatment, 25 students (96%) reached the "Very Good" category and 1 student (4%) reached the "Good" category, while no students remained in the "Enough" or "Need Guidance" categories, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Score	Class.	Pre n(%)	Post n(%)
81–100	V. Good	0 (0%)	25 (96%)
71–80	Good	0 (0%)	1 (4%)
61–70	Enough	3 (12%)	0 (0%)
0–60	Need Guid.	23 (88%)	0 (0%)
Total		26 (100%)	26 (100%)

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Statistic	Pre	Post
Mean	55.69	89.81
Median	57.00	91.50
Std. Deviation	7.698	5.246
Minimum	30	77
Maximum	63	97
Range	33	20
Skewness	-2.184	-0.792
Kurtosis	4.833	0.090

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 further confirm this improvement. The pre-test mean was 55.69 (SD = 7.698, range 30–63), while the post-test mean increased to 89.81 (SD = 5.246, range 77–97), an increase of 34.12 points. The reduction in standard deviation

from the pre-test to the post-test also indicates that students' scores became more consistent after the treatment, and the post-test skewness (-0.792) and kurtosis (0.090) values were closer to normal distribution than those of the pre-test (skewness -2.184; kurtosis 4.833).

Table 3. Summary of Normality, Homogeneity, and Paired-Samples T-Test Results

Test	Stat.	Sig.	Result
Shapiro-Wilk (Pre)	.710	.453	Normal
Shapiro-Wilk (Post)	.901	.251	Normal
Levene (Mean)	.429	.516	Homog.
Paired t-Test	-25.597	.000	H1 acc.

Prior to hypothesis testing, normality and homogeneity assumptions were examined. The Shapiro-Wilk test produced significance values of .453 for the pre-test and .251 for the post-test, both greater than .05, confirming that the data were normally distributed. Levene's Test for homogeneity of variance produced a significance value of .516 based on the mean, also greater than .05, confirming that the variances were homogeneous. As both assumptions were satisfied, a paired-samples t-test was conducted, yielding a mean difference of -34.115, $t(25) = -25.597$, and a significance (2-tailed) value of .000 ($p < .05$). Because the absolute t-count of 25.597 exceeds the t-table value of approximately 2.060,

H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted, confirming that modifying reading materials about Enrekang has a statistically significant effect on students' reading comprehension.

This significant improvement may be attributed to the use of familiar local content, which activates students' prior knowledge and reduces cognitive load during reading. According to Schema Theory, students find it easier to process new linguistic information when the topic, in this case Enrekang's local landmarks and culture, is already familiar to them, allowing them to focus on the language rather than the unfamiliar content. This is consistent with Novita et al. (2023), who argued that culturally familiar texts bridge the gap between students' experiences and the English language, making the reading process more intuitive and less intimidating.

The success of the intervention is also attributable to the modification process itself, which involved simplifying vocabulary and adjusting sentence structures. Before the treatment, the pre-test mean was relatively low, likely because the original textbook materials were too complex or disconnected from students' daily lives, consistent with Ali et al. (2022), who

noted that conventional EFL materials often fail to meet students' specific needs. In this research, the tailored materials functioned as a scaffolding tool that provided a more accessible level of difficulty and maintained students' focus during the six implementation meetings.

Despite the notable improvement, several factors beyond the materials themselves may have contributed to the results. The increased attention students received during the six meetings may have boosted motivation and engagement compared to their usual routine, and repeated exposure to reading strategies may have sharpened test-taking skills. It should also be acknowledged that the absence of a control group limits the strength of causal claims, and the use of identical pre-test and post-test items may have introduced a testing effect, a common limitation of one-group experimental designs. Nevertheless, these findings reinforce the idea that relevant and engaging materials are key to enhancing literacy, aligning with Siregar et al. (2025), who found that validated, contextually developed materials led to a significant increase in students' mastery of reading comprehension. The primary contribution of this research is

to highlight that, for students in regions such as Enrekang, localizing reading materials is not merely an elective strategy but a necessity for fostering stronger reading engagement.

2. Students' Perceptions of the Modified Reading Materials

Table 4. Summary of Students' Perceptions of the Modified Reading Materials

Indicator	SA%	A%	N%	D%	SD%
Attractiveness	49.2	48.6	2.2	0	0
Ease of Understand.	45.4	54.6	0	0	0
Relevance of Content	40.0	59.2	0.6	0	0
Contribution	33.8	62.2	3.0	0.8	0

Note. $N = 26$; SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

The questionnaire results, completed by all 26 students, produced scores ranging from 28 to 34 ($M = 31.52$, $SD = 1.855$), indicating consistently positive perceptions of the modified reading materials. As shown in Table 4, students responded most positively to the ease of understanding indicator (45.4% Strongly Agree, 54.6% Agree, with no neutral or negative responses), followed by the relevance of Enrekang local content (40.0% Strongly Agree, 59.2% Agree) and the attractiveness of the materials (49.2% Strongly Agree, 48.6% Agree). The contribution of the modified materials to reading comprehension also received predominantly positive responses

(33.8% Strongly Agree, 62.2% Agree), although this indicator recorded the highest proportion of neutral (3.0%) and disagree (0.8%) responses among the four indicators.

The positive perception of the materials' attractiveness is consistent with Tomlinson (2017), who states that effective teaching materials should be engaging, meaningful, and relevant to learners' needs and experiences. The familiarity of the Enrekang topics, combined with the use of pictures and illustrations, appears to have created a more enjoyable learning experience, in line with Adlis et al. (2022), who argue that integrating local content into instructional materials enhances motivation and activates background knowledge. These findings are also consistent with Hamka and Yusuf (2021a), who found that local-wisdom-based reading materials increase students' motivation and participation in English learning.

Students' perception that the materials were easy to understand supports the concept of text modification, which emphasizes adapting reading texts to learners' language proficiency while preserving the original meaning of the text. This finding is consistent with Aghajani and

Gholamrezapour (2021), who reported that modified reading materials significantly improve comprehension by making texts more accessible without reducing the quality of the content. Similarly, students' positive perception of the relevance of Enrekang local content reflects the concept of background-knowledge activation described by Adlis et al. (2022): because the modified materials were developed around topics students already recognized, they were able to relate new information to existing knowledge, which in turn strengthened both comprehension and their sense of connection to the reading materials.

Finally, students' perception that the modified materials contributed to their reading comprehension, together with the objective improvement demonstrated by the paired-samples t-test, provides convergent evidence from both objective and subjective perspectives. This consistency, supported by Aghajani and Gholamrezapour (2021) and Adlis et al. (2022), indicates that integrating locally relevant and linguistically appropriate reading materials into English instruction is an effective strategy for enhancing reading comprehension while simultaneously increasing

students' motivation, confidence, and engagement in reading English texts.

D. Conclusion

This research concludes that the implementation of modified reading materials about Enrekang significantly improved the reading comprehension of seventh-grade students at UPT SMP Negeri 2 Enrekang, as evidenced by the increase in mean scores from 55.69 in the pre-test to 89.81 in the post-test and confirmed by the paired-samples t-test ($t = -25.597$, $p = .000$). The questionnaire findings further revealed that students held positive perceptions of the modified reading materials, viewing them as attractive, easy to understand, relevant to their local context, and helpful for improving their reading comprehension. Taken together, these findings indicate that modifying reading materials by adapting language to students' proficiency level and incorporating local content is an effective strategy for enhancing both students' reading achievement and their motivation, confidence, and engagement in learning English.

Based on these conclusions, students are encouraged to actively engage with reading materials relevant to their daily lives and local

environment, while teachers are recommended to develop and use modified reading materials that suit students' proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds, applying techniques such as language simplification and the addition of contextual explanations. Schools are suggested to support the integration of contextual, locally based teaching materials into the curriculum and to provide training and resources for teachers to develop such materials. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct further studies using larger sample sizes, longer research durations, and a control group to strengthen the generalizability of the findings, as well as to explore the integration of digital tools or interactive media to further enhance the effectiveness of modified reading materials in improving students' reading comprehension.

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