

ECOLA-Based Strategy to Improve Reading Comprehension: Evidence from an Indonesian Senior High School

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of the ECOLA (Extending Concept through Language Activities) method in improving reading comprehension among Indonesian senior high school students. The research was conducted through classroom action research at SMA Perguruan Islam Makassar, involving 30 second-grade students over two cycles, each consisting of four meetings. The primary goal was to enhance students' ability to understand both literal and interpretative aspects of reading texts. Quantitative data were gathered using reading comprehension tests, while qualitative data came from classroom observations. The students' average score increased from 36.65 on the diagnostic test to 51.87 in the first cycle and reached 77.08 in the second cycle, indicating significant improvement. Additionally, student engagement improved from 65.83% to 78.76% by the end of the research, reflecting a more active and motivated classroom environment. The ECOLA method encouraged students to connect reading with writing, speaking, and listening, resulting in deeper comprehension and increased participation. The findings demonstrate that ECOLA is an effective instructional strategy for enhancing reading comprehension and student involvement. It is recommended for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in similar educational settings.

Keywords: *ECOLA, reading comprehension, classroom action research, English teaching*

Introduction

Reading is one of the fundamental language skills, particularly vital for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It not only supports vocabulary acquisition and grammar awareness but also contributes to broader academic success. However, reading comprehension remains a significant challenge for many Indonesian senior high school students. While they can often pronounce and recognize words, their ability to extract meaning, identify key points, or infer information from a text is limited. This issue was evident during the author's teaching experience at SMA Perguruan Islam Makassar, where students demonstrated low comprehension and passive classroom behavior during reading lessons.

Traditional teaching methods, such as grammar translation or rote memorization, often dominate English classrooms and may fail to stimulate students' active involvement or critical thinking. To overcome these issues, educators must explore student-centered approaches that integrate various language skills. One promising method is ECOLA (Extending Concept through Language Activities), which combines reading, writing, speaking, and listening to reinforce understanding and encourage engagement.

Previous studies, such as Zuchdi (2007), have highlighted the ECOLA method's positive influence on students' comprehension and classroom interaction. Nevertheless, research on ECOLA in Indonesian senior high schools remains limited, particularly in the context of action-based classroom intervention. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of ECOLA in improving reading comprehension—both literal and interpretative—among second-grade students. It also seeks to observe how ECOLA impacts student engagement during the reading process..

Metode

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach to examine the effectiveness of the ECOLA method in improving reading comprehension. The research was conducted over two cycles, each consisting of four meetings. The four-step CAR procedure included planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, which allowed for ongoing refinement of the teaching strategy throughout the study.

The participants were 30 second-grade students from class XI IPS at SMA Perguruan Islam Makassar. The school was chosen based on the preliminary findings that indicated students' low reading comprehension and limited engagement during reading activities.

Data were collected using two main instruments: reading comprehension tests and observation checklists. The tests assessed students' understanding of both literal and interpretative elements of reading texts, while the observation checklists captured their levels of engagement and classroom participation.

Quantitative data from the reading tests were analyzed by calculating average scores across the diagnostic test, Cycle I, and Cycle II. Qualitative data from classroom observations were interpreted descriptively to assess behavioral changes, such as participation in discussions and attention to reading tasks. This mixed-method approach provided a comprehensive view of the impact of the ECOLA method on student learning and engagement.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the average student scores in reading comprehension across the diagnostic test, Cycle I, and Cycle II, along with class participation rates.

Component	Diagnostic Test	Cycle I	Cycle II
Reading Comprehension Score	36.65	51.87	77.08
Class Participation (%)	—	65.83%	78.76%

Students' reading comprehension improved significantly after implementing the ECOLA method. The average score rose from 36.65 in the diagnostic test to 51.87 in the first cycle, and further increased to 77.08 in the second cycle. This improvement was evident in both literal and interpretative comprehension. Students became more adept at identifying main ideas, understanding supporting details, and drawing conclusions from texts.

In addition to academic improvement, classroom participation increased notably. Initially, only 65.83% of students actively participated in reading sessions, but by the end of the second cycle, participation rose to 78.76%. Activities such as group discussions, reflective writing, and integrated language tasks helped foster a more dynamic learning environment. The collaborative structure of ECOLA encouraged peer support and critical thinking, which likely contributed to higher engagement levels.

These findings support earlier research by Zuchdi (2007), who noted that ECOLA improves student comprehension and motivation. Similarly, Priyango et al. (2022) reported significant gains in students' reading comprehension through ECOLA implementation in Indonesian high schools. The results also align with Smith-Burke's (1982) foundational work, which emphasized ECOLA's ability to integrate language skills for deeper learning. In line with this, Lutviana et al. (2024) found that students positively perceived ECOLA's impact on engagement and comprehension. The significant improvement in both comprehension and engagement in this study reinforces ECOLA's relevance in the context of Indonesian EFL classrooms.

Despite the success, the study faced several limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to one class in a single school, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the research was conducted over a short period (two cycles), restricting the observation of long-term impacts. Future studies could explore ECOLA's effectiveness across different contexts and durations to build on these findings.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the ECOLA method is an effective instructional strategy for improving reading comprehension among senior high school students, particularly in the areas of literal and interpretative understanding. In addition to academic gains, ECOLA also enhanced student engagement and participation during the learning process. By integrating multiple language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—ECOLA created a more interactive and supportive classroom environment.

Given these positive outcomes, ECOLA can be recommended for English language teachers seeking innovative ways to improve reading instruction in EFL settings. However, due to limitations in scope—such as the short duration of the intervention and the limited sample size—further research is needed to examine the long-term effects and applicability of ECOLA across diverse contexts and student populations. Future studies may also explore comparisons with other interactive teaching methods to determine ECOLA's relative effectiveness.

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