

FOSTERING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION WITH COMIC STRIPS

By:

Alimin¹, Bilqis Shofiyah², Happy Kusuma Wardani³

University of Qomaruddin Gresik, East Java, Indonesia^{1,2,3}

Aliminjaya956@gmail.com¹, shofiyah.bilqis@yahoo.com²,
happywardani864@gmail.com³

Abstract: This research investigates the role of comic strips in improving the ninth-grade students of MTs Al Karimi Gresik. By utilizing collaborative action research conducted in two cycles, 25 ninth-graders became the subject of this research. The data were collected through multiple instruments, including reading assignments, observation sheets, and field notes. The collected data were analyzed using quantitative methods to assess improvements in students' reading abilities and qualitative methods to describe the students' engagement in each meeting. The findings indicate that comic strips significantly improved students' reading comprehension, although some common barriers were identified, including vocabulary challenges, lack of motivation, and difficulties with narrative structure. The test results revealed a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension, from a mean score of 73 by the end of Cycle 1 to 84 by Cycle 2. These findings suggest that teachers can effectively utilize comic strips to foster student engagement in language learning and academic performance. Thus, using comic strips promotes the broader educational objective of fostering student-centered learning environments, supports long-term student engagement, and provides a creative solution to common instructional challenges in language learning.

Keywords: comic strips, narrative texts, reading comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill essential for students' academic success, as it facilitates learning across all disciplines and supports achieving educational goals (Capodieci et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2021). It enables individuals to derive

meaning from written material, making it particularly crucial for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. For them, reading provides access to information, fosters critical thinking, and enhances language proficiency (Wardani & Faizah, 2024). In addition, reading is a key skill for students to use to reach their academic purposes (Saptarina et al., 2024) because interacting with various texts enables them to expand their knowledge, enrich their vocabulary, and strengthen their communication abilities (Septia et al., 2022). Therefore, strong reading comprehension contributes to developing various academic and linguistic abilities, enhances multiple skills, and improves student capacity.

The ability to read effectively goes beyond simply identifying words on a page. It involves incorporating linguistic recognition and background knowledge to comprehend the text (Damanik & Harianja, 2022). Engaging in regular reading not only makes students develop a stronger focus but also results in their academic outcomes (Alimin et al., 2023). Hence, reading is a foundational skill that contributes to students' cognitive development.

EFL students frequently encounter unique challenges in reading comprehension, including limited vocabulary and inadequate grammar (Aminah & Supriadi, 2023; Khan et al., 2020). Indonesian students also face those challenges as they often struggle to comprehend English texts due to

their limited vocabulary and insufficient grammar (Wardani et al., 2024). These challenges make Indonesian students unable to fully grasp and infer the meaning of the English texts, which makes them struggle to answer related questions effectively and hinders their academic achievement. Thus, teacher guidance is essential for helping students comprehend English texts (Fitriana & Wardani, 2024).

Students at MTs Al Karimi Gresik also encounter reading challenges due to their inability to fully comprehend English texts. They cannot engage with the English materials and the learning process, which leads to boredom because the teacher relies on ineffective strategies, highlighting the need for targeted instructional

strategies to support their reading development. Using outdated and conventional teaching materials has contributed to students' difficulties comprehending reading texts. The teaching instruction often relied exclusively on the handbook for teaching reading narrative texts, with little to no interactive or engaging media integration. As a result, students tended to feel disengaged and lacked motivation, negatively affecting their reading comprehension and overall interest in the subject.

Given these challenges, it is essential to explore innovative and engaging teaching strategies that can address students' reading difficulties and improve their motivation. Engaging media is vital for student learning and

motivation (Alimin, 2021). When reading activities lack such engaging elements, students can find connecting with the texts and materials complex. To foster effective learning, reading should be an enjoyable experience that helps students readily grasp the messages and ideas conveyed within the text (Mayaneta et al., 2024). Among various media to teach reading, comic strips have proven particularly effective in assisting ninth-grade students with understanding narrative texts.

Comic strips, with their visual storytelling and textual elements, offer compelling media for improving reading comprehension. The visual context aids in decoding unfamiliar vocabulary, understanding story structure, and making inferences,

which are crucial skills in narrative text comprehension (Wijaya et al., 2021). Comic strips promote active engagement, enabling students to interpret the reading texts in their ways and develop a connection with the content of the reading texts. As a result, comic strips serve as effective media to enhance students' reading comprehension, especially when working with narrative texts.

Prior research has highlighted the potential of comic strips as a valuable tool for enhancing reading comprehension. These studies suggest that comics' visual and narrative elements can make texts more accessible and engaging for students, leading to improved comprehension and motivation. Rahayu (2023) confirmed that using comic strips

is effective for eighth-grade students of SMPN 245 Jakarta, especially when the content presents new reading comprehension materials, making it a valuable learning medium. Azizah and Hamid (2022) also concluded that Comic strips can serve as an alternative medium to boost the motivation of the tenth-grade students of SMK Lab Business School Kota Tangerang in improving their reading comprehension. Susanto & Kardenia (2021) further highlighted that the reading ability of the seventh-grade students improved when comic strips were used compared to when they were not. This suggests that comic strips can effectively enhance students' reading skills and be useful teaching media for teachers.

While previous studies have highlighted the comic strip's effectiveness in improving reading comprehension in younger and older students through experimental design, limited research has specifically examined its impact on ninth graders, particularly through classroom action research. Students must engage with more complex narrative texts in this crucial transitional stage. This research aims to bridge this gap by investigating how comic strips can be used to foster the reading comprehension of ninth-grade students at MTs Al Karimi Gresik through classroom action research.

METHODOLOGY

This research aimed to foster the reading comprehension of narrative texts among ninth-grade students by incorporating comic strips

into the learning process. To achieve this, the researchers employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2014), which consists of four stages: planning, action (implementation), observation, and reflection. The research was conducted at 9A of MTs Al Karimi Gresik, which comprises 25 students (9 males and 16 females) selected due to their difficulties in reading. By collaborating with the English teacher, the researchers integrated comic strips into the classroom activities, making this a form of Collaborative Classroom Action Research. This approach involves a qualitative and interpretive inquiry where teachers and researchers work together to improve instructional practices and student outcomes (Wardani & Ummah,

2023). Following the Classroom Action Research framework, the study proceeded through four stages: Planning, Implementing, Observing, and Reflecting. The following section outlines each phase in detail.

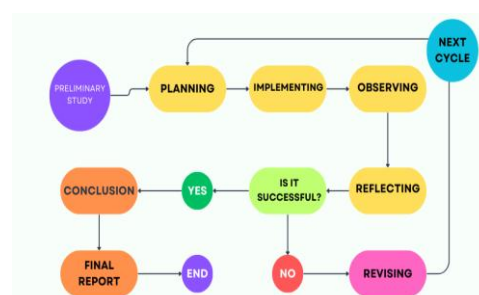


Figure 1. Diagram of the Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on the model from Kemmis and McTaggart (2014)

Based on the flowchart described above, the process began with a preliminary investigation to identify and analyze the reading challenges experienced by ninth-grade students. This initial study found that many students faced difficulties with vocabulary and showed little interest in reading English texts. These issues were largely attributed to the use of conventional teaching methods,

which did not introduce new vocabulary or utilize engaging instructional materials. The findings from this preliminary phase informed the development of the lesson plan during the planning stage. The researchers and the English teacher designed comic strips as instructional media for teaching narrative texts, created detailed lesson plans, prepared student worksheets, and established clear criteria for success. These criteria included ensuring that at least 75% of students actively participated during lessons and that students achieved a minimum score of 75 on reading comprehension assessments.

During the implementation phase, comic strips were integrated into classroom instruction across two sessions in the first cycle. If the established success criteria were not

achieved, the instructional approach was revised and refined for the subsequent cycle. Throughout this stage, the researchers, in collaboration with the teacher, closely observed the teaching process, tracked student participation, and gathered data using observation sheets. Additionally, field notes were maintained to document observations that were not captured through formal assessment tools. These qualitative notes provided deeper insights into classroom dynamics and helped assess the effectiveness of the instructional activities in enhancing students' reading comprehension. Data analysis was conducted using both qualitative methods-such as thematic analysis of observation sheets and field notes-and quantitative methods, specifically by determining the percentage of

students who met the defined success criteria.

During the reflection stage, the data collected from the action phase were thoroughly analyzed to assess whether the learning objectives had been achieved. If the analysis indicated that the success criteria were not met, adjustments were implemented, and the cycle was repeated until the desired outcomes were reached. The result was concluded when the success criteria were consistently met, enabling the researchers to report the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are based on data collected from students' reading assignment scores, observation checklists, and field notes. In the first cycle, comic strips did not enable all students to meet the

predetermined success criteria.

This outcome mirrors findings from similar studies, where initial implementation often reveals areas needing improvement, such as students' unfamiliarity with the new media or insufficient engagement with key reading strategies (Anida, 2020). Consequently, researchers and collaborators proceeded to the second cycle, making necessary adjustments to the instructional approach. Presenting the results from both cycles separately allows for a clear description of student progress.

The Results of Cycle 1

The study began with a preliminary investigation to identify the specific reading difficulties faced by ninth-grade students. The initial findings highlighted the importance

of creativity and thoughtful planning in developing engaging instructional media to foster a more effective learning environment. In response, the planning stage involved several targeted actions: (1) developing a lesson plan to structure the teaching process, (2) preparing comic strips as instructional media for teaching narrative texts in the second meeting to help students better grasp the material, and (3) setting clear criteria for success.

Following these preparations, the implementation phase was carried out over two meetings. In the first session, the teacher distributed worksheets and introduced the concept of narrative texts, covering definitions, generic structures, and language features. Some students exhibited confusion, particularly regarding the use of the past tense,

which is essential for understanding narrative texts. To clarify these concepts, the teacher provided examples of narrative texts such as "The Ugly Duckling" and "Tangkuban Perahu." They were completed with five multiple-choice questions for each narrative text to assess comprehension.

In the second session, the teacher began by revisiting the material covered in the previous meeting and once again provided illustrative examples to reinforce understanding. New worksheets were distributed, each featuring comic strips titled "Timun Mas" and "The Hare and the Tortoise." These worksheets included five multiple-choice questions for each comic strip, designed to assess students' comprehension of the narrative content. The comic strips used in the

first cycle activities are displayed in the figures below.

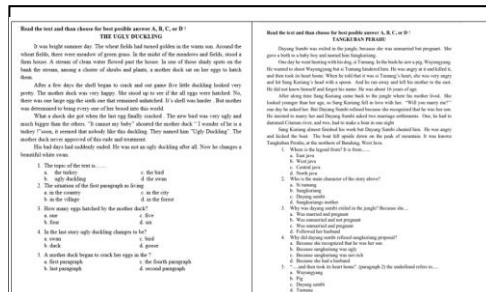


Figure 2a. First Session Worksheet

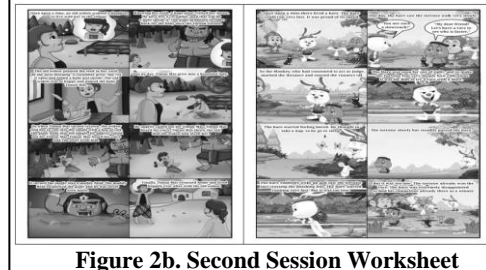


Figure 2b. Second Session Worksheet

Throughout both sessions, observations revealed that although some students were attentive, a significant number continued to face challenges with vocabulary. In the first meeting, only six out of twenty-five students achieved a passing score, resulting in an average score of 62. By the second meeting, the number of students meeting the passing mark increased to sixteen, with the mean score rising to 73. While this shows noticeable progress

between the two meetings, overall student performance still fell short of the expected standards.

Feedback from observers indicated that initial student engagement was relatively low; however, interest and participation improved considerably when comic strips were introduced in the second session. Despite these gains, many students still did not reach the required passing rate of 75%, suggesting that the first cycle did not fully achieve its objectives. Consequently, it was determined that revisions to the lesson plans and instructional strategies would be necessary in Cycle 2 to provide better support for student learning and comprehension.

The Results of Cycle 2

After completing Cycle 1, the researchers and the English teacher

reflected on the challenges encountered and collaboratively discussed strategies to address them. During the planning phase for Cycle 2, they revised the lesson plan for teaching narrative texts, aiming to provide more thorough explanations and support. One key adjustment was the inclusion of vocabulary lists within the comic strips, intended to help students better understand unfamiliar words and improve overall comprehension.

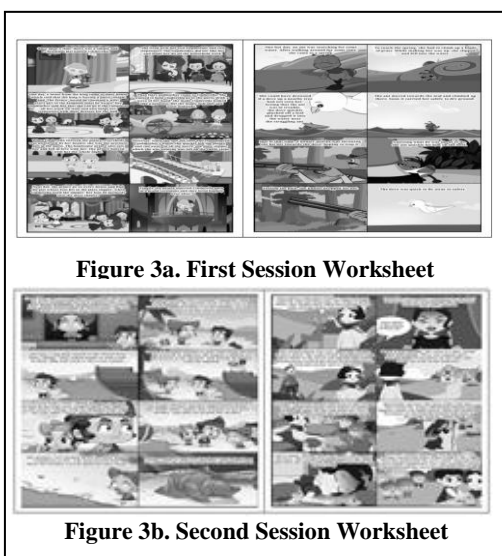
At the start of Cycle 2, the teacher began the first meeting by reviewing previously covered material on narrative texts. Students then received new worksheets featuring comic strips titled "Cinderella" and "The Ant and the Dove." As students worked together on these assignments, they appeared more engaged and enthusiastic. They

completed and submitted their answers before the teacher concluded the lesson, indicating increased participation and enjoyment in the learning process.

In the second session of Cycle 2, the teacher began by encouraging students and reviewing the material covered previously. Several students took the initiative to ask questions about the lesson, reflecting a higher level of engagement and interest. The students also demonstrated improved comprehension by correctly answering the inquiry questions posed during the review.

Following this, the teacher distributed new worksheets featuring comic strips titled "Malin Kundang" and "Snow White," each accompanied by five multiple-choice questions. During this lesson, students worked more quietly and efficiently than in

earlier sessions, indicating increased focus and familiarity with the activity. The worksheet used in the second Cycle is presented below.



Observations from both sessions in Cycle 2 revealed notable progress in student engagement and reading comprehension. During the first meeting, many students demonstrated their recall of the generic structures of narrative texts, actively participating in class activities. This heightened engagement continued into the second meeting, where students were even more involved during the review

session. The improvement was also reflected in their reading assessment scores: the average score increased to 71 in the first meeting and rose to 84 in the second meeting. These results indicate that the adjustments made in Cycle 2, such as integrating vocabulary lists and using comic strips, effectively enhanced student participation and understanding of narrative texts.

Given these positive outcomes, the researchers categorized this cycle as successful and decided to conclude the intervention. The progression in students' scores from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 is illustrated in Figure 4.

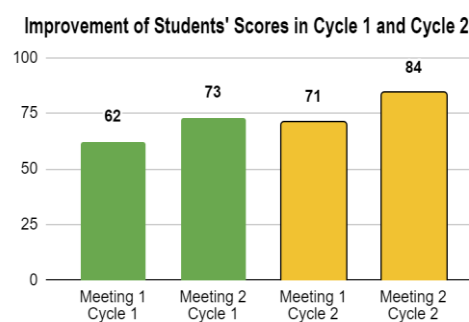


Figure 4. Students' Improvement

Figure 4 highlights the positive impact of comic strips on students' reading comprehension. Following the introduction of comic strips, the percentage of students meeting the success criteria increased significantly across cycles. These findings are supported by previous research demonstrating the effectiveness of comic strips in enhancing reading comprehension (Nispa et al., 2023), primarily in narrative texts (Losi et al., 2023). Comic strips have also been shown to raise students' reading scores (Purnama et al., 2023) and improve test performance by helping them answer more questions correctly than relying solely on traditional text-based materials (Mekuo & Budiarta, 2023; Nafisah & Pratama, 2020). Furthermore, the use of comic strips boosts student motivation and

engagement (Nopiarti et al., 2024). Additionally, students responded positively, describing the lessons as enjoyable and interactive, indicating that comic strips can become highly engaging and effective teaching media.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that comic strips are effective instructional media for enhancing students' reading comprehension, as shown through the two-cycle collaborative action research process. Incorporating comic strips into reading instruction creates a more engaging and interactive classroom atmosphere, and accommodates student learning needs. However, the successful integration of comic strips requires thoughtful planning and adaptability. Teachers must select or design comic strips relevant to the lesson objectives

and anticipate challenges such as topic suitability and varying student abilities. Addressing these factors is crucial for maximizing the positive impact of comic strips in language classrooms.

REFERENCES

- Ali, A., Gul, N., & Sabih-Ul-Hassan, S. (2022). An investigation into the reading comprehension problems faced by the Pakistani students at university level. *City University Research ...*, 5(1), 134–148.
<http://cusitjournals.com/index.php/CURJLL/article/view/751>
- Alimin, A. (2021). Developing a mobile apps as media for learning vocabulary. *Proceeding of the 6th National Conference of Language and Language Teaching*, 61–77.
- Alimin, A., Khabibillah, S., & Wardani, H. K. (2023). Exploring the EFL students' interest on academic reading. *JEELL (Journal of English Education, Linguistics and Literature) English Departement of STKIP PGRI Jombang*, 10(1), 22.
<https://doi.org/10.32682/jeell.v10i1.3054>
- Anida, N. (2020). *The use of comic strips to improve the students' reading comprehension of narrative text (An action research at the seventh grade students of MTsN 3 Medan in academic year 2019/2020)* [Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara].
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1120700020921110%0Ahttps://doi.org/10.1016/j.reuma.2018.06.001%0Ahttps://doi.org/10.1016/j.arth.2018.03.044%0Ahttps://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S1063458420300078?token=C039B8B13922A2079230DC9AF11A333E295FCD8>
- Azizah, R., & Hamid, S. F. (2022). The effectiveness of comic strip in improving students' vocabulary and reading comprehension. *Journal of English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature Studies*, 2(1).
<https://doi.org/10.30984/jeltis.v2i1.1941>
- Capodieci, A., Cornoldi, C., Doerr, E., Bertolo, L., & Carretti, B. (2020). The use of new technologies for improving reading comprehension. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 751.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00751>
- Damanik, I. J., & Harianja, G. S. (2022). The effect of comic books to improve reading comprehension ability at grade VIII at SMP N 12 Pematangsiantar. *Bilingual : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*, 4(1), 49–53.

- <https://doi.org/10.36985/jbl.v4i1.380>.
- Fikri, A. (2024). Pictorial representation of ideology found in “English for change” EFL textbook. *International Journal of English Education and Linguistics (IJoEEL)*, 6(2), 221–229.
<https://doi.org/10.33650/ijoeel.v6i2.9432>
- Fitriana, Y., & Wardani, H. K. (2024). Observing teacher’s strategies in teaching reading narrative text for the tenth graders. *Language and Education Journal*, 9(1), 100–115.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.52237/lej.v9i1.698>
- Hassan, I. J., & Dweik, B. S. (2021). Factors and challenges in English reading. *Academic Research International*, 12(March), 18–30.
www.journals.savap.org.pk
- Hezam, T. A., Ali, J. K. M., Imtiaz, S., Saifi, M. A., & Rezaul Islam, M. (2022). Challenges and problems of reading comprehension experienced by EFL learners. *Journal of English Studies in Arabia Felix*, 1(2), 11–21.
<https://doi.org/10.56540/jesaf.v1i2.28>
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2014). *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research*. Springer.
- Klimova, B., & Zamborova, K. (2020). Use of mobile applications in developing reading comprehension in second language acquisition —A review study. *Education Sciences*, 10(12), 1–11.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10120391>
- Masykuri, E. S., Alekseevna, K. E., & Nugraeni, I. I. (2025). Designing asynchronous digital media for teaching reading comprehension by implementing task-based learning. *Journal of Education and Teaching (JET)*, 6(1), 109–125.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.51454/jet.v6i1.485>
- Mayaneta, K. T., Alimin, A., & Wardani, H. K. (2024). Developing a poster as media in teaching reading. *Jo-ELT (Journal of English Language Teaching)*, 11(1), 96–107.
<https://doi.org/10.33394/jo-elt.v11i1.11173>
- Nanda, D. W., & Azmy, K. (2020). Poor reading comprehension issue in EFL classroom among Indonesian secondary school students: Scrutinizing the causes, impacts and possible solutions. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 8(1), 12.
<https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v8i1.6771>
- Nispa, Muhammad Ihsan, & Mohammad Syafri. (2023). The use of comic strips to improve students’ reading

- comprehension. *Datokarama English Education Journal*, 4(1), 39–50.
<https://doi.org/10.24239/dee.v4i1.66>
- Purba, B., & Rini, M. (2021). Improving the students' reading comprehension by using comic strips at SMA Muhammadiyah-7 Serbelawan grade XI. *Bilingual : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*, 3(2), 64–74.
<https://doi.org/10.36985/jbl.v3i2.267>
- Rahayu, S. (2023). The effectiveness of comic strips and text in teaching narrative to improve students' reading comprehension. *Secondary: Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Menengah*, 3(1), 54–63.
<https://doi.org/10.51878/secondary.v3i1.1972>
- Riance, A., Iswanto, Y., & Andika, A. (2024). Improving students reading by using comic at SMP Negeri 6 Lubuklinggau. *Juwara: Jurnal Wawasan dan Aksara*, 4(1), 33–42.
<https://doi.org/10.58740/juwara.v4i1.84>
- Saptarina, E., Sartika, D., & Amelia, K. R. (2024). The effect of bumper stickers strategy to improve students' reading comprehension viewed from students' reading interest. *Journal of English Education Program*, 5(1), 34–47.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.26418/jeep.v5i1.71190>
- Septia, N. W., Indrawati, I., Juriana, J., & Rudini, R. (2022). An analysis of students' difficulties in reading comprehension. *EEdJ: English Education Journal*, 2(1), 11–22.
<https://doi.org/10.32923/eedj.v2i1.2519>
- Septiyana, L., Safitri, A., & Aminatun, D. (2021). The correlation between EFL learners cohesion and their reading comprehension. *Journal of Research on Language Education*, 2(2), 68.
<https://doi.org/10.33365/jorle.v2i2.1154>
- Smith, R., Snow, P., Serry, T., & Hammond, L. (2021). The role of background knowledge in reading comprehension: A critical review. *Reading Psychology*, 42(3), 214–240.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2021.1888348>
- Susanto, A., & Kardenia, A. (2021). The effect of comic strips as an English teaching media toward students' reading ability in descriptive text. *EDUTEC : Journal of Education And Technology*, 4(3), 334–342.
<https://doi.org/10.29062/edu.v4i3.148>
- Wardani, H. K., & Faizah, L. (2024). EFL undergraduate students' perspectives on lecturers' teaching styles in academic reading. *IJSET PEDAGOGIC: Indonesian Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 4(2), 80–94.

<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.54373/ijset.v4i2.2322>

Wardani, H. K., Syukriyah, F. M., & Hidayah, B. (2024). Identifying students' difficulties in reading comprehension tests. *EJI (English Journal of Indragiri): Studies in Education, Literature, and Linguistics*, 8(1), 15–30. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.61672/eji.v8i1.2626>

Wardani, H. K., & Ummah, S. M. (2023). Elevating young learners' vocabulary mastery through KIM's memory game. *EJI (English Journal of Indragiri): Studies in Education, Literature, and Linguistics*, 7(2), 410–427. <https://doi.org/10.61672/eji.v7i2.2565>

Wijaya, E. A., Suwastini, N. K. A., Adnyani, N. L. P. S., & Adnyani, K. E. K. (2021). Comic strips for language teaching: the benefits and challenges according to recent research. *ETERNAL (English, Teaching, Learning, and Research Journal)*, 7(1), 230. <https://doi.org/10.24252/eternal.v7i1.2021.a16>