THE IMPACT OF CHARACTER QUOTES STRATEGY ON EFL LEARNERS' READING COMPREHENSION OF NARRATIVE TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Many students in SMAN 8 Mandau faced difficulties in reading comprehension, particularly in identifying main ideas, locating specific information, and making inferences. Conventional teacher-centered methods, which relied heavily on explanation, limited student engagement and comprehension. To address this issue, this study investigated the effectiveness of the character quotes strategy in enhancing reading comprehension of narrative texts. A true-experimental design was employed with 11th-grade students (n = 395) across 11 classes. The experimental group received instruction using the character quotes strategy, while the control group was taught conventionally. A multiple-choice reading comprehension test served as the research instrument, and non-parametric tests (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank and Mann–Whitney U) were applied due to the data distribution. The findings revealed significant differences between the groups (Sig. [2-tailed] = 0.000 < 0.05), with the experimental group achieving higher post-test scores. These results suggest that integrating the character quotes strategy into reading instruction can significantly improve comprehension and foster greater learner engagement. The study highlights the pedagogical value of interactive strategies in EFL classrooms and provides implications for enhancing reading instruction in similar contexts.

Keyword : *Character quotes strategy, reading comprehension*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a cognitive activity in which readers interact with written text to construct meaning. According to Nunan (2003), reading involves combining textual information with the reader's background knowledge to derive meaning, with comprehension as the primary goal. Similarly, Brassell & Rasinski (2008) define reading comprehension as the ability to extract and convey information from written text based on one's own understanding. A reader

can be said to comprehend when they can accurately interpret and present the ideas in the text. In essence, reading comprehension requires integrating textual input with prior knowledge to form coherent mental representations, as explained in Schema Theory, and actively engaging in meaning-making, as emphasized in Constructivist Learning Theory.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading comprehension is often a challenge due to limited vocabulary, unfamiliar cultural references, and insufficient exposure to authentic texts. Effective reading instruction therefore needs to incorporate strategies that activate prior knowledge, encourage critical engagement, and develop inference-making skills, as found by Al-Ahdal & Alolaywi (2022). Metacognitive approaches, in which learners monitor, evaluate, and adjust their understanding also play a crucial role in improving comprehension, as shown in the study by Brown (2022).

One promising instructional technique is the character quotes strategy. Buehl (2017) describes this strategy as a means of developing insight into characters by examining what they say. Brunner (2011) emphasizes that this approach not only motivates students to read but also helps them analyze and predict character traits. Roberta (2009) further notes that examining quotations from characters before reading can prepare students to anticipate conflicts, identify main messages, and draw inferences, skills aligned with metacognitive theory. By focusing on character statements, learners engage in predictive reading, schema activation, and inferential thinking. Widayanti et al. (2025) found that such literature-based approaches foster active engagement and deeper comprehension. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2023) reported that reader-response activities help students develop critical thinking skills through character and theme analysis.

Despite the proven benefits of interactive and inference-based reading strategies, empirical research on the use of the character quotes strategy particularly in Indonesian EFL classrooms remains scarce. This is an important research gap, considering that previous studies, such as Widayanti et al. (2025) and Hassan et al. (2023), have largely focused on broader reader-response or literature-based methods without isolating the effects of character quotes as a targeted strategy.

A preliminary investigation at SMAN 8 Mandau revealed that many 11th-grade students struggled to identify main ideas, locate specific information, and make inferences from implied meanings. Furthermore, classroom instruction relied heavily on conventional methods centered on teacher explanation, with little emphasis on active engagement or strategic

reading. This situation indicates the need for innovative approaches that integrate interactive, metacognitive, and text-based analysis techniques to address these gaps.

The purpose of this research was to examine the effect of using the character quotes strategy on 11th-grade students' reading comprehension at SMAN 8 Mandau, to compare the performance of students taught using this strategy with those taught through conventional methods, and to determine whether the strategy leads to higher comprehension levels among the experimental group.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design, selected because the participants were intact classroom groups and no random assignment of individual students was possible (Creswell, 2014). Two classes received different treatments: the experimental group was taught using the character quotes strategy, while the control group received conventional instruction without this strategy. Both groups completed a pre-test and a post-test. The participants were 72 eleventh-grade students (age range: 16–17 years) from SMAN 8 Mandau. The experimental group (n = 36) consisted of students from class XI.1b, and the control group (n = 36) from class XI.2b. The classes were selected through cluster sampling and were comparable in English proficiency based on their previous semester English scores.

The experimental group received four weeks of instruction (eight sessions) using the character quotes strategy. In the first week, students were introduced to character analysis and the identification of significant quotations. In the second week, they engaged in guided practice to extract character traits and motivations from selected dialogues. The third week focused on independent application with scaffolding, emphasizing the prediction of conflicts and themes based on quotes. In the final week, students integrated character quotes analysis into reading comprehension tasks, followed by reflection activities. Materials included excerpts from short stories and novels suitable for senior high school EFL learners, teacher-designed worksheets, and guided discussion prompts. Assessment during the intervention was based on the students' ability to identify relevant quotes, infer character traits, and connect these to the text's themes. The control group received the same reading materials but was taught using conventional teacher-centered explanation and question–answer sessions.

Reading comprehension was measured using a 20-item multiple-choice test developed by the researcher based on the principles of Schema Theory and metacognitive reading

strategies (Grabe & Stoller, 2013). The items covered four subskills: main idea identification (5 items), locating specific information (5 items), making inferences (5 items), and vocabulary comprehension in context (5 items). Content validity was established through expert review by three EFL specialists, and a pilot test with a similar group of students (n = 30) yielded a reliability coefficient of α = .87, indicating high internal consistency. The research procedure followed the sequence of administering a pre-test to both groups, implementing the treatment over four weeks, and conducting a post-test with the same test items presented in a different order.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Normality was tested using the Shapiro–Wilk test, and homogeneity of variances was examined using Levene's test. Because the data for both groups were not normally distributed ($p < .05$), non-parametric tests were applied, namely the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test for within-group comparisons and the Mann-Whitney U test for between-group comparisons. Effect sizes were calculated using the formula $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$ (Field, 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings

This section presents the results of the study in a systematic order, beginning with the pre-test results, followed by the post-test outcomes, normality testing, homogeneity testing, and hypothesis testing. Each stage is described in detail to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the data were analyzed and how the conclusions were drawn.

Pre-Test Results of Experimental and Control Classes

Prior to the treatment, a pre-test was administered to both the experimental and control groups to measure students' baseline reading comprehension. The purpose of this stage was to determine whether the two groups were comparable in terms of their initial ability. The raw pre-test scores of both groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Score of Pre-Test of Experimental and Control Class

Students	Pre-test Experimental Class	Pre-test Control Class
1.	25	35
2.	40	40
3.	70	25
4.	35	40
5.	45	30
6.	50	45

7.	35	55
8.	40	40
9.	55	65
10.	50	30
11.	35	40
12.	40	50
13.	55	50
14.	45	25
15.	30	45
16.	30	50
17.	45	40
18.	55	40
19.	40	30
20.	50	35
21.	40	30
22.	45	35
23.	30	35
24.	50	50
25.	60	40
26.	75	50
27.	40	30
28.	30	45
29.	50	50
30.	55	45
31.	35	55
32.	30	35
33.	40	40
34.	30	45
35.	40	45
36.	40	70

To provide a clearer overview, the descriptive statistics of the pre-test scores are presented in Table 2.

Table 2:The Result of Pre-Test of Experimental and Control Class

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Pre-test Experimental	36	25	75	43.33	11.402	130.000
Pre-test Control	36	25	70	41.94	10.231	104.683

Based on Table 2, the mean score of the experimental class was 43.33, while that of the control class was 41.94. Although the experimental class achieved a slightly higher mean score, the difference between the two groups was relatively small. The minimum and maximum scores also indicated that the students in both groups had similar ranges of

performance. The standard deviations (11.402 for experimental and 10.231 for control) suggest that the variability of scores in the two groups was also comparable. These findings indicate that both groups had relatively equal reading comprehension ability before the treatment, thereby meeting the requirement for conducting a fair experimental comparison.

Post-Test Results of Experimental and Control Classes

Following the implementation of the Character Quotes Strategy in the experimental class, a post-test was administered to both groups. The purpose of this test was to evaluate whether the strategy had an impact on students' reading comprehension compared to conventional teaching. Table 3 displays the raw scores of the students.

Table 3: The Score of Post-Test of Experimental and Control Class

Students	Post-test Experimental Class	Post-test Control Class
1.	70	60
2.	75	65
3.	95	55
4.	70	70
5.	80	50
6.	85	65
7.	70	75
8.	80	65
9.	85	80
10.	80	55
11.	85	65
12.	65	70
13.	85	75
14.	70	55
15.	80	70
16.	65	75
17.	75	65
18.	85	70
19.	80	65
20.	80	65
21.	75	60
22.	80	70
23.	65	65
24.	80	75
25.	85	70
26.	80	75
27.	75	60
28.	60	70
29.	75	75
30.	75	65
31.	65	80
32.	80	70

33.	75	70
34.	75	75
35.	70	75
36.	75	85

The descriptive statistics of the post-test results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: The Result of Post-Test of Experimental and Control Class

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Post-test Experimental	36	60	95	76.39	7.427	55.159
Post-test Control	36	50	85	68.19	7.760	60.218

Based on Table 4, the mean score of the experimental class was 76.39, while the mean score of the control class was 68.19. This indicates that the experimental group outperformed the control group after the treatment. The minimum and maximum scores also show that the experimental class achieved a higher range of performance (60–95) compared to the control class (50–85). The standard deviations (7.427 for experimental and 7.760 for control) reveal that both groups had a relatively similar spread of scores, but the experimental class consistently demonstrated better results overall. These findings suggest that the Character Quotes Strategy contributed to improving students' reading comprehension more effectively than conventional teaching methods.

Normality Test

Before proceeding to hypothesis testing, normality tests were conducted to examine whether the pre-test and post-test scores of both classes followed a normal distribution. The results are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Normality Test of Pre-Test Scores

Tests of Normality							
	Class	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Reading Score	1	.171	36	.010	.934	36	.034
	2	.131	36	.123	.950	36	.105

As shown in Table 5, the pre-test scores of the experimental class did not meet the assumption of normality, as the significance value was 0.010 (< 0.05). In contrast, the control class pre-test scores were normally distributed, with a significance value of 0.123 (> 0.05).

Table 6: Normality Test of Post-Test Scores

Tests of Normality

	Class	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Reading Score	1	.159	36	.022	.950	36	.106
	2	.148	36	.046	.957	36	.174

Similarly, Table 6 shows that the post-test scores of both groups were not normally distributed, as the significance values for both the experimental class (0.022) and the control class (0.046) were below the 0.05 threshold. Given these results, non-parametric statistical tests were employed in subsequent analyses.

Homogeneity Test

To further ensure comparability, a homogeneity test was conducted to examine whether the variances between the experimental and control groups were equal. The results for both pre-test and post-test scores are summarized in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7. Homogeneity Test of Pre-Test Scores

Test of Homogeneity of Variance

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Reading Score	Based on Mean	.408	1	70	.525
	Based on Median	.224	1	70	.637
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.224	1	68.063	.637
	Based on trimmed mean	.372	1	70	.544

In the results of the homogeneity test of the pre-test of the experimental and control classes, it was found that the significance value (sig) based on mean is $0.525 > 0.05$, it can be concluded that the variance of the experimental and control class pre-test data is the same.

Table 8: Homogeneity Test of Post-Test Scores

Test of Homogeneity of Variance

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Reading Score	Based on Mean	.062	1	70	.805
	Based on Median	.014	1	70	.906
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.014	1	69.351	.906
	Based on trimmed mean	.057	1	70	.811

Similarly, Table 8 shows that the significance value (0.805) was above 0.05, indicating equal variance between the post-test scores of both groups. These findings confirm that the assumption of homogeneity was met, allowing for a fair comparison between the experimental and control classes.

Hypothesis Testing

Given the results of the normality test, non-parametric tests were employed to test the study's hypotheses.

First Hypothesis (Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test)

The first hypothesis tested whether the Character Quotes Strategy had a significant effect on students' reading comprehension in the experimental class. The results are presented below:

Table 9: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for Experimental Class

Test Statistics[a]	
	Post- Test - Pre- Test
Z	-5.271^{b}
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
b. Based on negative ranks.	

The result shows a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating a statistically significant improvement in the reading comprehension of students in the experimental group. Thus, the null hypothesis (Ho) was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (Ha) was accepted.

Second Hypothesis (Mann-Whitney U Test)

The second hypothesis examined whether there was a significant difference in reading comprehension between the experimental and control groups. The results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Mann-Whitney U Test for Experimental and Control Classes

Test Statistics[a]	
	Reading Score
Mann-Whitney U	292.000
Wilcoxon W	958.000
Z	-4.075
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Based on the results, it was found that the Asymp Sig. (2-tailed) in the second hypothesis test was 0.000 < 0.05, which showed that there was a significant difference between the class that applied the Character Quotes Strategy and the class that did not apply the Character Quotes Strategy in improving reading comprehension. From the data, it can be concluded that Ho is rejected and Ha is accepted.

The third hypothesis is the comprehension of students in reading who were taught by using character quotes strategy better than students who were not taught by using character quotes strategy. Based on the average results of the students' reading comprehension test in the post-test, the score of experimental class is higher than the score of control class, which was (76.39 > 68.19) and the improvement of mean score (33.06 > 26.25). This means that the hypothesis (Ho) is rejected and (Ha) is accepted, it can be concluded that students who were taught using character quotes strategy was better than the control class that was taught using conventional activities.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that the use of the character quotes strategy led to significant improvements in students' reading comprehension. The higher post-test scores of the experimental group compared to both their pre-test scores and the control group suggest that this approach effectively enhanced students' ability to extract, interpret, and connect textual information. This finding is consistent with Podkomorka & Soldner (2011), who emphasize that the character quotes strategy helps guide student comprehension and sustain active engagement during reading. Similarly, Buehl states that focusing on key quotations enables students to anticipate conflicts and themes, explore implied meanings, and strengthen inferential thinking. Roberta (2009) also explains that examining a character's actual words prior to or during reading provides a foundation for deeper text engagement.

The effectiveness of the character quotes strategy in this study likely stems from its activation of multiple cognitive processes. By analyzing character dialogue and motivations, students engaged in inferential reasoning, activated prior knowledge about human behavior, and developed metacognitive awareness of their comprehension processes. This aligns with Kintsch's Construction-Integration Model, which posits that comprehension emerges from integrating textual propositions with the reader's existing knowledge base, resulting in richer mental representations of the text (Islamiah et al., 2017).

These findings also resonate with definitions of reading as a meaning-making process. Hafiza & Syafitri (2024) describe reading as acquiring information and expanding understanding through written material, while Putri & Melani (2022) highlight the constructive nature of building meaning from text. Santi & Reflinda (2022), emphasize the role of idea identification, and Fitri & Eliza (2024) define reading comprehension as the

accurate interpretation of a text's intended meaning. The current results show that the character quotes strategy supports these processes by focusing students' attention on meaningful textual elements that serve as entry points for comprehension. In addition, Septiani & Safitri (2021), reading comprehension is the act of understanding the text increasing the student's ability in reading the text.

In comparing these results to previous research, the present study is consistent with Widayanti et al. (2025), who found that the use of targeted reading strategies significantly enhanced students' ability to make inferences and comprehend narrative texts. Similarly, Hassan et al. (2023) reported that metacognitive approaches, including pre-reading activation of prior knowledge, produced substantial gains in reading comprehension, particularly in EFL contexts. These findings also echo Al-Ahdal & Alolaywi (2022), who emphasized that active engagement with textual details, such as analyzing character dialogue, can facilitate deeper understanding and retention of content. However, unlike Brown (2022), who observed that character-focused approaches were less effective when students lacked adequate contextual knowledge, the present study's participants appeared to benefit from the strategy despite possible variations in prior exposure to the text. This suggests that the character quotes strategy may be adaptable to different classroom contexts, provided that sufficient scaffolding is offered.

While the results are promising, several limitations should be acknowledged. The intervention period was relatively short (four sessions), which raises questions about the sustainability of the gains over time. Moreover, the strategy was implemented with narrative texts, which are inherently character-driven; its applicability to expository or technical texts remains uncertain. The study was also conducted in a single school context, limiting generalizability, and reading comprehension was measured using multiple-choice items, which may not fully capture deeper comprehension skills such as synthesis and evaluation.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that EFL teachers can use the character quotes strategy to foster active engagement and higher-order thinking during reading tasks. This approach can be integrated into pre-reading activities to activate prior knowledge, during-reading tasks to support inference-making, and post-reading discussions to consolidate understanding. Future research could explore its long-term impact, adaptability to different genres, and effectiveness when combined with other reading strategies.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical support for the character quotes strategy as a means of improving reading comprehension in an EFL context. By combining textual

analysis with cognitive and metacognitive engagement, the strategy offers a practical and theoretically grounded approach to deepening students' interaction with texts.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study shows that the character quotes strategy can significantly enhance students' reading comprehension of narrative texts by activating prior knowledge, supporting inference-making, and encouraging deeper engagement with characters. The findings provide both theoretical and practical contributions, confirming the role of schema activation in reading while offering teachers a simple yet effective method to improve classroom instruction. It is recommended that teachers and curriculum developers integrate character-based activities into reading lessons, while future studies should investigate the strategy across different genres, proficiency levels, and longer time frames to better understand its long-term impact and wider applicability.

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