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Deep Learning Activities for Improving Tenth-Grade Students' Reading Performance

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to improve students' reading performance and learning engagement through deep learning-based activities in English classes. The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR), which was conducted in two cycles consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The participants were 27 tenth-grade students of SMAS Taman Siswa Teluk Betung in the 2025/2026 academic year. Data were collected through reading tests and classroom observations. The results showed positive changes across the two cycles. In Cycle 1, 6 students (22%) achieved the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC), while 21 students (78%) were below the criterion. The observation results showed that students' learning activity was categorised as less active. In Cycle 2, the number of students who achieved the MCC increased to 19 students (70%), while 8 students (30%) remained below the criterion, with the students were categorised as active and very active. In other words, the strategy resulted in positive changes in the teaching and learning process, as students showed greater engagement in analysing texts, interpreting information, and connecting reading materials to real-life contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Many EFL classrooms continue to face difficulties in fostering active student participation due to the dominance of teacher-centred learning practices. In such classrooms, students often participate only when directed by the teacher and show limited involvement in discussions and learning activities (Feri et al., 2025; Mallipa et al., 2024). Classroom interaction may become less active, with students participating occasionally during the lessons time only. Such condition may influence their reading performance, especially in interpreting texts. Since reading is a cognitive and interactive activity in which readers build meaning from written texts

(Kurniawati, 2023; Nunan, 2020). For EFL learners, reading should provide opportunities to analyze written texts, through which students acquire new vocabulary, become more aware of language use, and improve academic performance.

According to Kurniawati (2023), reading serves various purposes depending on the reader's goals and is not limited to a single skill. Readers may read to learn new information, search for specific details through skimming and scanning, understanding current or past events through the situation conceived, or simply read for enjoyment as most people do (Kurniawati, 2023). Reading comprehension requires different reading strategies and levels of comprehension, as learners use vocabulary to construct meaning presented in a text. On the other hand, students with stronger vocabulary knowledge tend to have better reading comprehension than those with limited vocabulary mastery (Cleverisa et al., 2022).

Reading occurs through several stages, namely decoding, comprehending, interpreting, and responding (Anderson, 2020). Decoding focuses on recognising words, phrases, and sentence structures. Comprehending refers to understanding information in a text and relating it to previous knowledge. Interpreting focuses on identifying implied meanings and recognizing the message conveyed by the writer. Responding refers to readers' reactions, opinions, or evaluations of the text. These stages guide readers from recognising written language to achieving a clearer understanding of the text (Anderson, 2020; Harmer, 2015).

Although students become familiar with the content of a text through these activities, opportunities to grasp the meaning and relate information to everyday experiences are often limited. This issue deserves attention because English reading in the twenty-first century varies a wide range of reading materials, including printed texts and multimedia sources (Kurniawati, 2023; Cleverisa et al., 2022). Considering these conditions, the writer found several issues in English reading instruction at SMAS Taman Siswa Teluk Betung. Many tenth-grade students experienced difficulties in reading comprehension and vocabulary mastery, accompanied by low motivation and engagement in reading activities.

At the same time, the problems identified among the students were as follows: (1) difficulties in comprehending and interpreting reading texts; (2) limited vocabulary mastery when dealing with unfamiliar words and expressions; (3) low motivation to participate in reading activities; and (4) passive involvement during classroom discussions and learning tasks.

In response to these issues, deep learning strategy offers several advantages that are relevant to students' reading development. Deep learning is a learning approach that promotes higher-order thinking, rather than merely acquiring information by memorization, students are expected to analyse and relate to the content (Brown, 1984). In this study, the approach was implemented through (1) reflective questioning, (2) problem-based discussions, (3) collaborative analysis, and

(4) text mapping. These activities were designed to engage students in analysing information, exchanging ideas, constructing understanding, and organising information from texts, allowing them to interact with reading materials more actively and meaningfully (Anggraini, 2025; Qiu, 2025; Feri et al., 2025; Utami et al., 2025).

One challenge in implementing deep learning is helping students relate textual information to real-world contexts. In this regard, recount texts are particularly relevant because they focus on experiences and events that students may have encountered in their daily lives (Feri et al., 2025; Qiu, 2025).

The present study is related to previous research that addressed the use of deep learning in reading and classroom learning activities. One previous study cited is from Roberts (2008) found that deep learning requires a shift in learners' perspectives, similar to the process of deep reading. Roberts (2008) conducted a study involving sociology students and found that reading comprehension improved when learners engaged in deep learning practices that required them to analyse ideas, meanings, and relate textual information to existing knowledge (Roberts, 2008). This study corresponds with the writer's study, due to the approach applied to students.

Another related study was conducted by Weng et al. (2023) in their research entitled *A Pedagogical Study on Promoting Students' Deep Learning through Design-Based Learning*. The study addressed the need to promote deeper learning and improve students' learning outcomes through the implementation of the Design-Based Learning (DBL) model. The findings revealed that the application of DBL was associated with improvements in students' initiative while thinking critically and academic score (Weng et al., 2023). The study also reported that students achieved better learning outcomes, as they grand critical thinking in searching the supported answers through Design-Based Learning (DBL) model.

Further related study, conducted by Anggraini (2025) in *Effectiveness of Deep Learning-Based Reading Platforms on EFL Reading Comprehension: A Quasi-Experimental Study*. Conducted with 60 university students, the study found that the experimental group's mean score improved from 56.13 to 74.87, whereas the control group's score increased from 55.60 to 63.37 (Anggraini, 2025). This finding is relevant to the present study because both focus on improving students' reading performance through deep learning-based activities.

Although previous studies (Roberts, 2008; Weng et al., 2023; Anggraini, 2025) have shown that deep learning strategy positively influences students' engagement, motivation, and general learning outcomes, most of the studies focus on higher education contexts, general academic subjects, or theoretical discussions of deep learning. Limited attention has been given to the application of deep learning specifically in English reading instruction at the senior high school level, particularly in improving students' reading performance in classroom action research settings.

Additionally, previous research rarely provides direct evidence of how deep learning–based activities are implemented in reading classes to address students' difficulties in reading comprehension.

METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) using a mixed-method approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative data. According to Tomal (2003), action research is a reflective process that integrates qualitative and quantitative characteristics to identify classroom problems and improve teaching practices. The study was conducted with tenth-grade students of SMAS Taman Siswa Teluk Betung in the academic year 2025/2026, consisting of 27 students (11 males and 16 females). CAR was chosen because it allows the writer to identify learning problems directly in the classroom and apply actions to improve students' reading performance through Deep Learning-Based Activities.

The qualitative data in this study were used to describe students' learning process, classroom interaction, and responses during the implementation of the strategy (Ary et al., 2010). These data were collected through classroom observation and field notes. Meanwhile, the quantitative data were used to measure students' reading performance improvement through pre-test and post-test scores (Ary et al., 2010). The test assessed students' ability to identify main ideas, supporting details, infer meanings, and understand vocabulary in context. The CAR model used in this study follows McTaggart et al. (2014), which consists of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. This process was carried out in two cycles to allow continuous improvement in teaching and learning practices.

In Cycle I, the process began with planning, where lesson plans, learning materials, reading texts, worksheets, and instruments were prepared. The action stage involved the implementation of Deep Learning-Based Activities, such as reflective questioning, group discussion, problem-based learning, and text mapping (McTaggart et al., 2014). During the observation stage, the writer and collaborator recorded students' participation, responses, and classroom interaction using observation sheets and field notes. The reflection stage was used to evaluate the implementation and identify areas for improvement in the next cycle (Kurniawati, 2023). In Cycle II, the same stages were applied with revisions based on the reflection from Cycle I, particularly by improving lesson plans, clarifying instructions, and providing more structured scaffolding to support students' learning process (Cleverisa et al., 2022; Utami et al., 2025).

In addition, data collection was conducted using both test and non-test techniques. The test consisted of 40 multiple-choice questions based on recount texts to measure students' reading performance. The non-test techniques included observation sheets and field notes to record students' classroom activities, participation, and behavior during learning. Observation sheets were used to monitor students' activity levels in class, while field notes were used to document important events and learning difficulties

that occurred during the teaching process (Ary et al., 2010).

Students' reading performance was evaluated through the reading test to measure their achievement after participating in the learning activities. The results were assessed using the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) to determine whether students had achieved the expected level of reading performance. The study was considered successful if at least 60% of students achieved a reading score of 75 based on the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC), while those who scored below 75 required further improvement through subsequent actions and instructional revisions.

Table 1. Criteria Result of Students' Reading Performance

Minimum Completeness Criteria	Qualification
≥ 75	Passed
< 75	Failed

In addition to the reading test, observation sheets were used to assess students' learning activities during the implementation of Deep Learning-Based Activities. The results were eventually used to determine students' activity levels in each cycle and to provide supporting data for the discussion of classroom learning activities (Irpira et al., 2025).

Table 2. Criteria Result of Students' Learning Activities

No	Range of Score (%)	Category
1	≥8.00	Very Active
2	7.50-7.99	Active
3	7.00-7.49	Quite Active
4	6.00-6.99	Less Active

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion are presented based on the implementation of Deep Learning-Based Activities in English reading instruction. The findings are derived from reading tests and classroom observations in each cycle, followed by an explanation of the changes observed in students' reading performance and learning activities throughout the teaching and learning process.

Results

The Result of Data in Cycle 1

The data obtained from the reading test in Cycle 1 show the students' achievement in meeting the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC). In terms of percentage, 22% of students passed the MCC, while 78% did not pass. Among the 27 participants who took the 40 multiple-choice test items, a wide majority struggled to hit the minimum academic standard. Specifically, only 6 individual students managed to reach or exceed the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) score of 75. In contrast, the remaining 21 students failed to satisfy this intended score.

Table 3. The Result of Data in Cycle 1

No	MCC	The number of students	Percentage	Criteria
1	≥75	6	22%	Passed
2	≤75	21	78%	Failed

In relation to the observation criteria, the sheet was used to measure students' classroom activity during the learning process as well. The data in Cycle 1 show that students' participation during the learning process was generally still limited. Most students were categorized as quite active to less active, indicating that they were not fully engaged in the learning activities and still needed more guidance to actively respond to the lesson.

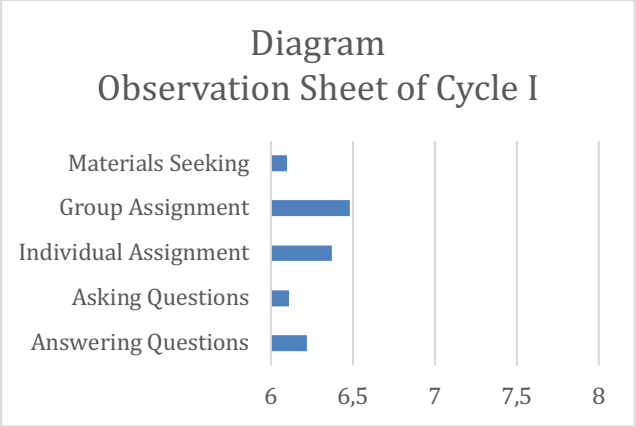

Figure 1. Diagram Observation Sheet of Cycle 1

The Result of Data in Cycle 2

The post-test results of Cycle II showed a substantial improvement in students' reading comprehension. Most students achieved scores at or above the Minimum Competency Criterion (MCC), indicating that the instructional revisions and the more structured implementation of the deep-learning strategy were effective.

Table 4. The Result of Data in Cycle 2

No	MCC	The number of students	Percentage	Criteria
1	≥75	19	70%	Passed
2	≤75	8	30%	Failed

It can be explained from the table above that the percentage of the number students who passed the MCC was 70% and the number of students who did not passed was 30%. Based on the data obtained from the results of the research, it showed that there was an improvement in students' reading performance from cycle 1 to cycle 2. The data percentage obtained from the cycle 1 the students who passed the MCC was 22%

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and in the cycle 2 obtained data percentage of the students who passed the MCC was 70%.

In the second cycle, the researcher revised the lesson plan and supporting learning materials based on the weaknesses and challenges identified in Cycle I. Therefore, the result can point the striking improvement on their performance while the writer observing throughout the cycles.

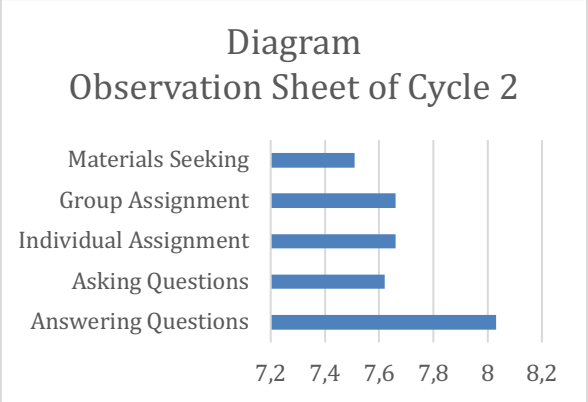

Figure 2. Diagram Observation Sheet of Cycle 2

The learning activity of students in cycle 2 achieved "Very Active", and "Active". It was obtained that the average score of learning activity was 7.71 with the total score 2.082. It can be concluded that the students' learning activity had improvement, especially in material seeking and asking questions about the given task. From the first cycle with the average score of the students' learning activity 6.24 with the unsuccessful criteria (less active), to the second cycle with the average score 7.71 which the criteria were active.

Discussion

Based on the percentage data across both phases, there was a significant improvement in students' reading achievement from Cycle I to Cycle II. Although the initial cycle was carefully structured to introduce the deep learning strategy and assess student literacy, the result came out lower than the average score. Moreover, the number of students who passed the cycle 1 were only 6 of 21. Those minority pointed that they already have a better reading ability, than most of the students in the class. Thus, the writer reflected that providing more motivation as well as encouraging students with various reading materials and interactive environment where students felt encouraged.

Students' Reading Performance

The students' reading performance improved from Cycle I to Cycle II based on the results of the reading tests. In Cycle I, only 6 out of 27 students achieved the

Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) of 75, while 21 students remained below the required standard. This resulted in a class completeness rate of 22% and a mean score of 6.72. The result can be considered that many students still experienced difficulties in comprehending recount texts, particularly in identifying main ideas, understanding detailed information, and interpreting vocabulary in context. After the implementation of the revised Deep Learning-Based Activities in Cycle II, students' achievement increased considerably. A total of 19 students met the MCC, whereas only 8 students did not reach the target score.

Consequently, the class completeness rate increased to 70% in the second cycle, and the mean score rose to 7.50. The improvement suggests that students became more capable of understanding recount texts and applying reading strategies to answer comprehension questions more accurately. Therefore, the learning activities provided students with greater opportunities of the reading material in the EFL classroom.

The distinguished increase in the number of students passing the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC), surging from only 6 students in the first cycle to 19 students in the second cycle, can be reflected to specific cognitive improvements in their testing behavior. During the final assessment, the students pointed a better capacity to manage the 40 multiple-choice items within the 60-minute limit because they had learned how to read strategically rather than decoding the text word for word.

The improvement in students' reading performance from Cycle I to Cycle II indicates that the implementation of Deep Learning-Based Activities was associated with better reading comprehension in the EFL classroom. The number of students who achieved the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC) increased from 6 students (22%) to 19 students (70%), while the class mean score rose from 6.72 to 7.50 are consistent with the view that activating basic knowledge and applying reading strategies to improve L2 reading comprehension (Weng et al., 2023). Furthermore, students became more capable of understanding vocabulary in context, constructing meaning from sentences and paragraphs, and making inferences from the text, which are closely associated with reading comprehension development in EFL learning (Glady & Fadlila, 2023).

This progress directly shows that the deep learning strategy succeeds in upgrading students' reading proficiency. Consequently, this change in teaching style positively influenced the classroom performance, especially for students who only possessed very basic English skills.

Students' Learning Acitivity

Developing proficiency in recount texts not only improves students' reading skills but also contributes to their final success in academic reading tasks (Schleppegrell, 2004). In this case, each cycle has the same material which is recount text that appropriates with standard competence in one semester of the tenth grade's syllabus. On the other hand, each meeting has different sub-material that need to be delivered to

the students, such topic of story and the assessments.

In the first cycle, the writer strove to relate the approach to their feelings, holiday, and talked about some current issues which led them to the recount text topic (Roberts, 2008). Along with the learning activities, the writer began to see some problems in cycle one while teaching and learning process. There was lack of students who participate actively in learning activity, they were barely gave response to the questions that writer gave. While the writer was explaining the material, most of the students did not pay attention and playing their phone it caused lack of their understanding related to material. Moreover, most of the students were not interested in using Deep Learning Strategy instead of finding the answer by googling or cheating with their friends (Anggraini, 2025). In the first phase, student engagement was generally low, as reflected in the observation score of 1,684 with an average of 6.24, which placed the class in the "Less Active" category. This baseline evaluation stressed the need for strategic pedagogical interventions.

As they became familiar with the approach and materials about recount text, the second cycle gave out a better performance. Additionally, after adjustments were made in the planning and monitoring phases for the second cycle, a substantial turnaround occurred. The total observation score rose to 2,082, lifting the class average to 7.71, which falls firmly into the "Active" range. As for the growth of 1.47 directly corresponds to visible behavioural changes in the classroom, showing that the structural modifications effectively improved a more engaging learning environment. Hence, on the second meeting, some students showed their enthusiasm and response the questions that the writer gave even though there were still passive students.

Nonetheless, in cycle 2, they started to have confidence in asking question in English about the materials given (Anggraini, 2025; Utami et al., 2025). Whilst the writer started to ask the students to find important thing from the text by using Deep Learning Strategy to answer the question. During teaching and learning activity the students started to give active response in this meeting, Regarding the individual assignments, students initially struggled with the time because they were having a hard time to grasp the meaning of the context, so they required helps almost during the first cycle. However, by the second cycle, they can learn independently and had a better grasp of the material.

Moving on to group assignments, during the first few meetings, the writer noticed limited interaction among the students. Since the group was randomly assigned, many tenth-grade students felt nervous about using English, leading some who lacked confidence to be passive. As the classroom grew more accustomed to the activities over a month, the students began to open up. They pointed supportive behaviour to one another, which was clearly reflected when it came to present their work in front of the class. Another observed improvement was students' growing autonomy in locating answers and relevant learning resources, indicating a shift from teacher-dependent learning to more independent knowledge construction (Roberts, 2008; Weng et al.,

2023; Utami et al., 2025). Since the writer supported the use of phones in class merely for searching up the materials or translating new vocabularies.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that integrating deep learning-based activities improved both students' reading performance and classroom engagement in learning recount texts. This improvement was reflected in the increase of students who achieved the Minimum Completeness Criteria (MCC), from 22% in Cycle I to 70% in Cycle II. Similarly, students' learning activity increased from the "Less Active" category in Cycle I (M = 6.24) to the "Active" category in Cycle II (M = 7.71). These findings suggest that the strategy successfully addressed the initial problems related to low reading achievement and limited participation in the EFL classroom.

The improvement occurred because the learning process required students to become active participants rather than passive recipients of information. This positive shift is directly supported by the student count, which shows that the number of successful learners rose from only 6 individuals in Cycle I to 19 participants in Cycle II. As the cycles progressed, students became more willing to participate, more confident in expressing ideas, and more independent in completing learning tasks.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that Deep Learning-Based Activities are effective in improving students' reading performance and learning activity in EFL reading classes. Therefore, Deep Learning-Based Activities can be considered a suitable instructional approach for creating a more engaging reading classroom and supporting students' academic development in English learning.

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