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Developing High School Students' Reading Comprehension Skill of Narrative Texts through Question-Answer Relationship (QAR)-Based Small Group Discussions

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates how the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy could be used to facilitate the development of students' critical reading skills in the context of narrative texts and explores students' responses to its implementation in small group discussions. The research was motivated by the need for more structured and student-centered strategies to enhance reading comprehension in senior high school settings. Employing a qualitative Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, the study was conducted in an 11th-grade class at a private senior high school in Karawang, Indonesia. Data were gathered through classroom observations and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), then analyzed by using thematic analysis. The findings show that the teacher played a pivotal role in introducing QAR categories and guiding students in applying them through collaborative learning. The students demonstrated increased confidence, deeper comprehension, and greater motivation to engage with texts critically. The study concludes that QAR is an effective strategy to promote critical reading skills, support active student participation, and foster reflective classroom discussions. These results suggest that integrating structured questioning strategies such as the QAR into reading instruction can enhance both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, especially when supported by consistent teacher facilitation and peer collaboration.

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of academic achievement and intellectual development, serving as the foundation for effective learning across all subjects and educational levels. The ability to comprehend texts critically is particularly essential in senior high school, where students encounter increasingly complex and diverse reading materials. These materials require

learners to analyze structural elements, interpret implicit meanings, evaluate arguments, and synthesize information from multiple sources (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Among various genres, narrative texts pose unique challenges because they demand students to understand character motivations, recognize underlying themes, and relate textual content to personal experiences, cultural contexts, or societal perspectives. The multifaceted nature of narrative texts necessitates not only literal comprehension but also the development of inferential and evaluative skills that allow students to construct meaning beyond the surface level.

Despite the central role of reading comprehension in academic success, numerous studies and educational assessments reveal that many secondary school students continue to struggle in this domain. For instance, national assessments in several countries indicate persistent underperformance in reading among adolescents, suggesting that conventional reading instruction may be insufficient to meet the demands of modern educational standards. A key factor contributing to these difficulties is the limited exposure to structured, strategic approaches to reading that explicitly teach students how to process, analyze, and reflect on textual content (Pressley & Gaskins, 2006). Traditional instruction often emphasizes decoding and rote memorization of information, which may help learners recall facts but does not adequately prepare them for critical engagement with complex texts. Consequently, there is a growing need to implement instructional strategies that go beyond basic comprehension skills, fostering higher-order thinking, metacognitive awareness, and reflective reading practices that support students' independent learning and analytical capabilities.

One promising approach to addressing these challenges is the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy, originally developed by Raphael (1986) and further elaborated by Hartman (1991). The QAR framework categorizes comprehension questions into four distinct types: "Right There," "Think and Search," "Author and You," and "On Your Own." This classification provides learners with a clear guide for locating information, distinguishing between literal and inferential content, and connecting textual meaning to their prior knowledge and personal experiences. Studies have shown that QAR improves students' comprehension accuracy, metacognitive control, and critical reading performance across grade levels (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2021; McKeown et al., 2021). When combined with collaborative structures such as small group discussions, QAR further enhances student engagement, negotiation of meaning, and justification of textual interpretations (Reading Rockets, 2025; Brozo, 2016).

However, the application of QAR in senior high school contexts remains limited. Existing research tends to rely heavily on quantitative assessments such as pre- and post-tests, which do not fully capture qualitative aspects of learning, including student engagement, collaborative interactions, and reflective reasoning (Brozo, 2016; Anggraini et al., 2020). Empirical studies examining how students use QAR during interaction with peers and teacher facilitation are still scarce, particularly in Indonesian high schools. This gap indicates the need for research that explores not only reading outcomes but also the processes through which QAR supports

comprehension development in authentic classroom settings. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the implementation of the QAR strategy in an 11th-grade classroom by examining (1) how teachers facilitate QAR-based reading instruction and (2) how students respond to and engage with QAR during small group discussions. This research seeks to provide insights into the instructional processes, collaborative interactions, and reflective practices that shape students' critical reading development.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative Classroom Action Research (CAR) design to investigate the implementation of the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy in small group discussions (SGD) within a senior high school classroom. CAR was selected for its suitability in exploring dynamic instructional practices in authentic educational settings. The research followed a cyclical process adapted from Ramdani et al. (2022), consisting of four stages: (1) developing a plan of action, (2) implementing the plan, (3) observing the outcomes, and (4) interpreting the results. This framework enabled the researchers to monitor and adjust the learning process in real time while fostering reflective teaching practices. The study was conducted at a private senior high school in Karawang, Indonesia, and focused on a group of 30 11th-grade students with diverse reading proficiencies. These participants were selected to reflect varied academic backgrounds and to observe how the QAR strategy functioned across different ability levels. Informed consent was obtained from both students and their guardians to ensure ethical compliance.

Data were collected using two primary instruments: classroom observations and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The observations were used to monitor teacher facilitation, students' interaction, and engagement with QAR during small group tasks. The FGDs were conducted to capture students' perceptions, difficulties, and reflections on using QAR. All data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify emerging patterns and insights related to instructional dynamics, student collaboration, and comprehension development. By integrating action research methodology with qualitative inquiry, this study aimed to provide a holistic view of how QAR can be meaningfully applied in high school reading instruction to foster critical reading and collaborative learning.

3. Results and Discussion

The class involved in this study consisted of approximately 30 eleventh-grade students, all of whom were female due to the school's internal placement system. Although they shared similar demographic characteristics, their English reading proficiency ranged from high to limited. Prior to the introduction of the QAR strategy, instruction was largely teacher-centered, focusing on explanations, key points, and literal textbook questions. This approach encouraged students to rely on retrieving explicit information rather than engaging in deeper cognitive processes

such as inference-making, evaluating narrative meaning, or interpreting implicit elements. Collaborative learning was also rarely implemented, resulting in limited opportunities for students to articulate ideas, negotiate meaning, or respond to alternative perspectives, despite the classroom's flexible seating arrangement that could support group work.

Initial observations showed that students were generally attentive and demonstrated positive attitudes toward English lessons. However, many relied on basic reading techniques such as keyword scanning, which hindered their ability to answer inferential or evaluative questions requiring deeper reasoning and text-based justification. Some students hesitated to share their interpretations due to uncertainty about how to express their reasoning clearly, and their limited experience with structured group work contributed to low participation and confidence. When the QAR strategy was introduced, it offered a clearer framework for differentiating question types and locating answers, while its step-by-step structure encouraged more intentional reading. The collaborative format also increased interaction and engagement, indicating that students had strong potential to improve higher-level comprehension when supported through organized, cooperative instructional practices.

The learning activities during the research were conducted through systematically organized instructional procedures that integrated the QAR strategy into collaborative group work. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher introduced the four QAR categories using a PowerPoint slide specifically designed to visually differentiate each type of question, as shown in Figure 1. This visual media helped students gain a clearer conceptual understanding before engaging with the reading task.

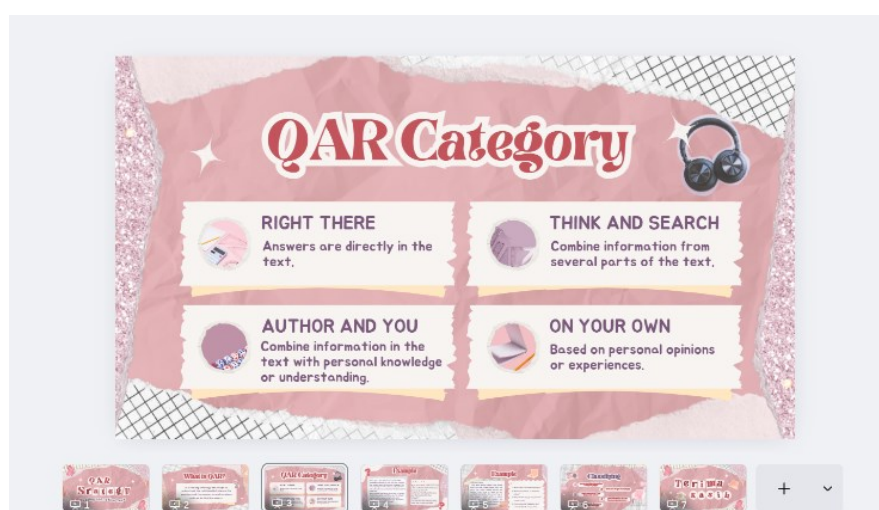


Figure 1. PowerPoint slide used by the teacher to explain the QAR categories

Following the explanation phase, students were provided with a narrative text and QAR worksheet, presented in printed form, which served as the primary learning materials for the activity, as illustrated in Figure 2. Students were then divided into

small groups consisting of four to five members and instructed to analyze the text collaboratively by categorizing questions and locating answers based on the QAR framework. Throughout the activity, the teacher observed the dynamics of student interaction, monitored their ability to classify question types accurately, and examined how they justified their answers using textual evidence. The collaborative atmosphere is depicted in Figure 3, which captures the students actively discussing



Figure 2. Narrative text provided to students as the primary learning materials for the group activities



Figure 3. Students working in small groups while analyzing the narrative text

the narrative text and completing their QAR tasks together. Data collection was carried out through classroom observations, field notes, documentation of learning activities and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), all conducted during regular class hours to maintain the authenticity of the learning environment.

Result

Teacher's Facilitation in QAR-Based Reading Instruction

The implementation of the QAR strategy through small group discussions revealed the teacher's central role in fostering critical reading development. The teacher

introduced the four QAR categories systematically, providing clear examples to support students in understanding how to distinguish among literal, inferential, and evaluative questions. This structured introduction allowed students to internalize the logic of each question type and apply it while interacting with narrative texts. As a result, students demonstrated increasing confidence in identifying where answers were located in the text and which strategy to use when responding. This marked a shift from surface-level reading to a more purposeful, guided comprehension process. Students showed signs of developing metacognitive control over their reading, such as being able to categorize questions and anticipate which parts of the text to focus on. This transition highlights how the teacher's scaffolding contributed to shaping students into more strategic and engaged readers in a structured yet flexible environment.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the teacher explicitly presented the four QAR categories—Right There, Think and Search, Author and You, and On Your Own—while pointing at the projected slide. This moment exemplifies the teacher's facilitative role in providing structured guidance. The visual representation supported students' understanding of how each question type required different reading strategies. It also reflects the way the teacher scaffolded students' comprehension by breaking down the categories and modeling how to use them, which aligns with the shift from surface-level reading to deeper, more strategic engagement.



Figure 4. Teacher introducing QAR categories during classroom instruction

Beyond initial instruction, the teacher's facilitative role during small group work was critical in maintaining student focus and deepening comprehension. Rather than simply delivering answers, the teacher encouraged students to discuss their ideas and clarify misunderstandings collaboratively. This method fostered critical thinking and made students more actively involved in their own learning. Although some students initially struggled with the more interpretive QAR categories, they gradually gained confidence through repeated practice and peer discussions. They began distinguishing between types of questions more accurately and could apply these insights to analyze elements such as character motivations and narrative structure. Furthermore, students started recognizing that different question types aligned with different parts of the story—for instance, factual questions worked

well for story openings, while interpretive ones were better suited for understanding conflicts.

As shown in Figure 5, the teacher moved around the classroom and engaged with students during small group discussions. This facilitative presence allowed her to monitor progress, provide clarifications, and encourage peer-to-peer interaction. The teacher's supportive stance enabled students to articulate their reasoning, confront misunderstandings, and refine their comprehension strategies collaboratively. This practice demonstrates how teacher-led scaffolding, paired with structured peer interaction, supported not only comprehension but also critical analysis and independent reasoning among students.



Figure 5. Teacher facilitating students' small group discussion

Student Response and Comprehension Development

Students responded to the QAR-based reading strategy with strong engagement and a high level of acceptance. Many perceived the structured question categories as helpful in making complex texts more approachable and less intimidating. The use of QAR strategy gave them a framework to understand what type of thinking each question required, allowing them to navigate the reading process with greater confidence. As a result, students appeared more motivated to participate in discussions and contribute their ideas. The strategy also appealed to various learning styles, as it allowed for both textual analysis and personal reflection. Many students found the process not only manageable but also enjoyable, indicating a positive emotional response. This shift in perception—from viewing reading as a passive task to an active inquiry process—suggests that QAR played a meaningful role in reshaping students' attitudes toward reading comprehension in an academic setting.

In addition to attitudinal shifts, students showed measurable improvements in their comprehension skills. They began applying the QAR framework more fluently, especially in identifying key elements of narrative texts such as orientation, conflict, and resolution. Many students developed the ability to match different types of questions with the appropriate information in the text, leading to more accurate and justified answers. Their understanding of literal questions appeared strong early on, while inferential and reflective questions required more practice. Nonetheless, over

time, students became increasingly capable of articulating their reasoning and choosing appropriate strategies. This development was also visible in classroom interactions, where collaborative learning played a major role. Students often worked in groups, discussing and clarifying different categories of QAR questions with their peers. Such peer-to-peer explanations not only strengthened comprehension but also built a supportive learning atmosphere (see Figure 6). These social dynamics contributed significantly to students' comprehension development and fostered a more inclusive and reflective learning environment. Overall, the QAR approach enhanced not only reading accuracy but also students' confidence and ability to engage critically with narrative material.



Figure 6. Students collaboratively engaging with QAR-based reading tasks

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the teacher's structured implementation of the QAR strategy significantly enhanced students' reading comprehension, particularly through explicit modeling and classification of question types. This aligns with Hartman's (1991) argument that comprehension strategies must be explicitly taught and reinforced through guided practice. The shift observed in students—from passive reading to active, question-driven inquiry—demonstrates the cognitive benefits of making questioning strategies transparent. It also reflects Gough and Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading, which posits that comprehension stems from the interplay of decoding and linguistic understanding. These findings resonate with McKeown et al. (2021), who found that students taught using QAR strategies demonstrated significantly improved comprehension accuracy and reasoning. Likewise, Kelley & Clausen-Grace (2021) emphasized the benefit of QAR in promoting students' metacognitive control over reading. In this context, the teacher's role in repeatedly guiding students through each QAR category was crucial for enabling learners to internalize the strategy and develop higher-order reading skills.

Beyond the cognitive impact, students' affective responses indicate that QAR fostered a positive and empowering learning environment. Many described the experience as “easy” and “fun,” which reflects an emotional shift that supports learning persistence and classroom engagement. This is consistent with Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, which links increased motivation with feelings of competence and autonomy. Furthermore, students reported that the structure of QAR reduced confusion when answering questions and increased their

confidence when tackling narrative texts. These perceptions align with findings by Ratnasari (2024), who noted that students using QAR became more self-directed in identifying main ideas and textual details. Students' ability to articulate which question types they found easiest or hardest also demonstrates emerging metacognitive awareness. However, the difficulty students experienced with "Author and You" questions highlight the need for prolonged modeling and reflection in higher-order inference tasks. These questions demand interpretation, emotional reasoning, and integration of prior knowledge—skills that develop gradually and benefit from collaborative discussion and peer modeling.

The integration of QAR with small group discussions played a pivotal role in deepening comprehension and building collaborative learning routines. Consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory, the group setting functioned as a Zone of Proximal Development where students who initially struggled could scaffold their understanding through peer support. This was especially evident in how students helped one another navigate more abstract QAR categories, fostering both social and academic growth. Research by Gonzalez et al. (2023) and Huang et al. (2022) supports this, suggesting that collaborative discussions grounded in QAR promote critical engagement and comprehension depth. Additionally, Safitri (2024) found that QAR improved comprehension scores significantly, yet her study, like many others, relied heavily on quantitative data. The present study extends that conversation qualitatively by revealing the lived classroom interactions, peer dynamics, and reflective processes that underlie successful QAR use. Thus, this study contributes to a growing body of literature that positions QAR not merely as a comprehension tool, but as a catalyst for student-centered, inquiry-driven literacy instruction in secondary education.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the implementation of the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy in developing students' reading comprehension of narrative texts, with particular attention to the role of teacher facilitation and collaborative group work. The findings confirmed that the structured and explicit instruction of QAR categories, delivered through modeling and guided practice, significantly enhanced students' ability to distinguish between different question types and apply appropriate strategies for answering them. The teacher's role was crucial not only in introducing the QAR framework but also in maintaining student engagement and supporting deeper comprehension through interactive scaffolding. Students transitioned from passive reading to a more strategic and reflective approach, demonstrating increased confidence and metacognitive awareness. Furthermore, the integration of QAR with small group discussions fostered peer collaboration, allowing students to clarify concepts, practice inferential thinking, and overcome challenges related to more complex question types such as "Author and You." The positive emotional responses and heightened motivation observed suggest that QAR contributed not only to cognitive development but also to the creation of a more supportive and engaging literacy environment. Therefore, the

findings confirm that QAR, when effectively facilitated and socially embedded, is a powerful instructional approach that promotes both academic achievement and student-centered learning in reading comprehension.

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