Innovation of Online English Learning Based on Comprehension-Centered: Transforming Learning Strategies for Junior High School Students

Azzira Humairah[1], Aqila Najwa [2], Junwindah N.P Nisbat Waruwu[3], Sondang Purnamasari Pakpahan[3]
[1] Educational Technology, Universitas Terbuka
[2] Islamic Education, Universitas Terbuka
[3] Teacher Education and Elementary School Education, Universitas Terbuka
Email: azzirahumairah86@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the challenges of online English learning, where students often rely on rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar while struggling with comprehension and confidence. The purpose of this research was to design and implement a comprehension-centered approach to improve students' understanding of meaning in digital learning contexts. Using a qualitative case study design, the research involved five seventh-grade students who participated in a three-month online private course. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, documentation of student work, and open and closed questionnaires. The analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, which included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation and member checks to ensure validity. The findings indicate that students demonstrated stronger comprehension skills, such as identifying main ideas, making inferences, and reflecting on texts more meaningfully. They also showed improved confidence and active engagement through contextual discussions, project-based tasks, and reflective practices. This study contributes original insights by integrating a comprehension-centered approach with digital tools, emphasizing its adaptability and potential to transform online learning across disciplines beyond English language education. The research highlights the importance of aligning comprehension-focused strategies with educational technology to create inclusive and meaningful learning experiences in the digital era.

Keywords: comprehension-centered, case study, english comprehension, educational technology, online learning

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, the development of online English language learning has become a new trend, especially in learning English. As evidence of the accelerated paradigm shift amid post-pandemic challenges, online learning has emerged as an emergency solution and also serves as a new space for innovation in adaptive, contextual, and impactful technology-based learning engineering. Online learning as a transformation of educational technology also poses challenges due to low engagement, superficial understanding, and a focus on memorization, which contribute to children's low English proficiency.

One of the fundamental problems in online English learning is the low level of comprehension experienced by students. Many online learning models tend to focus on

memorizing vocabulary and grammatical structures without engaging students cognitively to understand the context of communication.

Based on the findings of national studies over the past five years, there are still gaps in the implementation of approaches that emphasize contextual understanding, through comprehension-centered approaches that place context and meaning at the core of learning. This is reinforced by Hilmi's study [3], which focuses on the achievement of language comprehension, text interaction, and the use of strategies to ensure that students truly "understand" before being directed to expressive abilities. This means that they must first "understand" the context and meaning before daring to speak. Without *input* (what is read or heard), the brain has no material for *output* (speaking/writing). Thus, reading and listening with a focus on comprehension helps build a strong vocabulary, sentence structure, and sense of language. These findings confirm that comprehension-centered teaching can be an important practice that teachers need to integrate to achieve deep understanding in the English language learning process. The main focus is on comprehension skills and meaningful interaction, no longer just grammar theory and so on. This approach has the potential to change the language learning paradigm for small groups.

In a qualitative case study approach, researchers work from the assumption that *"each student is a unique individual who develops according to their own experiences, characteristics, and learning styles."* As stated by Felicia [9]. This means that there is no single learning style or a one-size-fits-all approach to learning for every student. Each student's experience in the *comprehension-centered* process is their own unique learning style. Students build their learning process through interaction, reflection, and their respective contexts or learning styles.

As in the Group Discussion model study at SMP Negeri 3 Setia Bakti, located in Padang Village, Setia Bakti District, Aceh Jaya Regency, there was a significant increase in reading comprehension from the pre-test to post-test average scores [2]. Similarly, a study conducted at SMP Harapan 3 in Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra, found that after implementing the discovery learning approach, the pass rate increased from 33.5% to 73.5% [1]. After implementing the discovery learning approach, the passing score increased from 33.5% to 73.5% [1].

However, most studies use a large number of students through Classroom Action Research (PTK). Not many have explored in depth the impact of the comprehension-centered approach on the development of a small number of private tutoring students. This condition opens up opportunities for qualitative case studies of five junior high school students who have been studying for three months and have experienced real progress in their English language skills.

The comprehension-centered approach positions understanding as the central point of learning. As with the principle of educational technology that emphasizes learning-centered innovation, learning design must be built based on the authentic learning needs of students. This becomes relevant when applied to technology-based private learning, such as in online tutoring for five junior high school students over a period of three months.

This study is based on the view that the reality of learning is pluralistic and contextual, depending on the individual experiences of students in online learning. Learning is not only understood as the transfer of knowledge, but as a continuous interaction between learners, material, and learning media. Duffy & Jonassen [7] state that *"learning is a process of constructing meaning rather than acquiring it."*

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This research is constructivist-critical in nature, meaning that knowledge is not objective and universal, but rather constructed through dialogue, reflection, and student experiences in the online learning space. This encourages the use of qualitative case study methods to explore students' thought processes in depth. As stated by Ertmer & Newby [8]: *"the learner interprets and builds personal knowledge based on experiences and interactions with the environment."*

In this study, the researcher took on the role of learning designer and facilitator. Developing meaningful values, empathy for learning styles, and partiality towards students as the foundation for designing and evaluating learning innovations. Therefore, reflection, involvement, and progress of each student became the measure of success rather than just test results.

Problem Statement

Based on the background described above, this study was guided by three main research questions that shaped the entire investigation. The first question explored how a comprehension-centered online learning design could be effectively applied within the context of English tutoring for junior high school students. The second question examined how students' English comprehension developed throughout their participation in this innovative learning program. Finally, the third question focused on the learners' experiences, challenges, and perceptions toward the implementation of the comprehension-centered approach. These questions served as the foundation for understanding both the instructional design process and its impact on students' learning outcomes.

In line with these research questions, the objectives of this study were formulated to direct the overall purpose and scope of the investigation. The study aimed to design and implement an innovative comprehension-centered online learning model that responds to the needs of junior high school students in digital learning settings. It also sought to analyze the development of students' comprehension skills over the course of the program, identifying patterns of progress and the factors that contributed to their improvement. Furthermore, the study intended to explore students' reflections and responses toward their learning experiences, emphasizing the significance of learner-centered and context-based instruction in online environments.

The significance of this study extends to theoretical, practical, and professional domains. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on comprehension-based learning innovations in English education, particularly by highlighting how comprehension can serve as the central pillar of instructional design in digital contexts. Practically, this study provides an applicable model of online learning innovation that can be adapted by private tutors, educational institutions, and school teachers seeking to enhance students' engagement and understanding through contextual learning strategies. Professionally, the research underscores the role of university students as educational innovators who are able to integrate theory into practice, design meaningful learning experiences, and contribute to the advancement of education through applied technology and reflective practice. Altogether, the study aims to bridge the gap between theory and classroom application, reinforcing the value of comprehension-centered learning in promoting deeper, more inclusive, and more meaningful language education.

METHOD

Type and Design of Research

This study employed a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design [15], as the researcher aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the development of English comprehension within the specifically designed comprehension-centered online learning context. The research was conducted with five junior high school students who participated in a private online tutoring program for three consecutive months, using a learning design developed by the researcher.

Research Subjects and Context

The subjects of this study were seventh-grade junior high school students who attended online English tutoring sessions twice a week, each lasting 60 minutes. The five students had diverse initial abilities but shared common challenges in terms of low motivation and poor comprehension of English texts prior to the program. Learning was carried out through Google Meet and Google Classroom, utilizing interactive media (short videos, digital worksheets, and context-based text discussions) along with assignments that supported the active construction of meaning.

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected using various techniques, namely:

1. Participatory observation by researchers during the learning process. Researchers record student engagement, learning strategies that emerge, and the dynamics of interaction.
2. In-depth interviews with each student (before and after the program) to explore perceptions, challenges, and perceived changes.
3. Documentation of student work, such as listening summaries, reading reflections, and online interaction notes.
4. Closed and open questionnaires designed to measure students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the learning approach.

Data Collection Techniques

Data was analyzed using the Miles and Heberman [11] model:

- Data reduction, which involves identifying important data from observations, interviews, and documents.
- Presentation of data, by compiling patterns and themes that emerge from student interactions and learning outcomes.
- Drawing conclusions, interpreting the meaning of changes based on the overall findings.

Data validity is ensured through triangulation of sources (observations, interviews, and documents), clarification through interviews with students, and audit trails (documentation of reflections and the learning process over a three-month period).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student Comprehension Development

The comprehension-centered approach not only enhanced students' comprehension but also fostered critical thinking skills, learning strategies, and self-confidence in understanding

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English.

The findings revealed a consistent and gradual improvement across several key dimensions of students' English comprehension. One of the most significant developments was their growing ability to identify the main idea in various texts. Initially, students tended to focus on surface-level details or specific vocabulary items; however, as the program progressed, they demonstrated stronger capacity to capture the central message of a passage. This indicates an increasing awareness of textual structure and meaning, which is essential for higher-order comprehension.

Students also showed progress in interpreting implied meanings or making inferences from context. Through guided discussions and reflective questioning, they learned to connect information that was not explicitly stated in the text, demonstrating deeper analytical thinking and contextual understanding. This ability to infer meaning is a hallmark of mature reading comprehension and highlights the effectiveness of the comprehension-centered approach in stimulating critical reasoning.

In addition, students' understanding of words and phrases in context improved noticeably. Rather than memorizing vocabulary lists, learners began to interpret the meaning of unfamiliar words through contextual clues, images, and sentence structures. This skill reflects a cognitive shift from rote memorization to strategic language processing, aligning with comprehension-based pedagogy that prioritizes understanding over recall.

Another area of development was the students' enhanced ability to organize information sequentially. They became more adept at recognizing logical connections between sentences and paragraphs, allowing them to summarize or retell content coherently. This organizational skill not only supports comprehension but also builds the foundation for writing and speaking fluency.

Finally, students demonstrated a stronger capacity for reflection, as seen in their ability to respond thoughtfully to the content of texts and media. Through reflective activities such as mind mapping, personal responses, and short narratives they connected new knowledge with their own experiences, showing meaningful internalization of learning materials.

Collectively, these improvements illustrate that a comprehension-centered approach fosters not only cognitive growth but also metacognitive awareness. Students no longer viewed English learning as a process of memorization but as an interactive exploration of meaning an essential shift for developing long-term language proficiency.

Students gradually demonstrated more active engagement in processing meaning rather than memorizing vocabulary. Through activities such as summarizing readings, reflecting on listening tasks, and participating in contextual discussions, learners developed strategies to connect new information with prior knowledge. This reflective learning process also encouraged them to express ideas with greater confidence.

Kategori	Observasi Kemampuan
- Kosa kata (Vocabulary)	Hanifa termasuk cepat dalam menghafal kosakata bahasa Inggris, saat belajar dia dapat menghafal 20 kosakata. Namun, perbendaharaan kata-nya masih agak tersendat. Peningkatan kosakata bisa dapat diperoleh jika dia rajin menghafal dan mencatat kata baru. Misal dari menonton video pendek bahasa Inggris anak-anak.
- Tata Bahasa (Grammar)	Saat pertama kali belajar bersama, Hanifa memang kurang pada pelajaran grammar ini. Saya harus mengulang pembelajarannya berulang kali hingga dia benar-benar mengerti. Kadang di melupakan beberapa istilah yang sudah diajarkan sebelumnya. Namun jika dia sudah paham, maka langsung di praktekkan dan senantiasa teringat.
- Reading Comprehension (Membaca & Pemahaman bacaan)	Hanifa mudah mengerti jika diberi pertanyaan mengenai bacaan tersebut, tipe orang yang akan mengerti sebuah bacaan dengan dipicu pertanyaan, karena di pemahaman kosa kata dia kurang mumpuni, agak sulit baginya memahami bacaan secara keseluruhan. Pelafalan Hanifa sudah semakin membaik ditandai dengan bisa menyatukan beberapa kosa kata, selayaknya seorang native. Tapi, di beberapa kalimat atau kata masih suka salah pelafalannya.
- Writing Skill	Hanifa bisa menulis kata-kata yang diketahui dirinya dengan baik, dan tepat. Sulit baginya jika kata tersebut memiliki konsonan a, e, atau i, sehingga sering salah menuliskannya. Kamu bisa menonton video pendek dan lagu-lagu bahasa Inggris yang ada subtitle di bawahnya, lalu menuliskan ulang kata atau kalimat sederhana.

Figure 1. Observation Results of One Student's Ability (Hanifa)

Observation and Interview Results
Hanifa:

At the beginning of the sessions, she was passive, tended to read verbatim, and did not fully grasp the meaning of the texts. As the program progressed, she began to use strategies such as skimming and re-reading when encountering difficult words, as well as utilizing images or videos to infer meaning.

"Now I can guess the content of the reading even if I don't know all the meanings, whereas before I had to know all the vocabulary first."

Kira:

Initially, she only focused on answering the questions without understanding the relationship between paragraphs. Later, she was able to retell the content of the text in her own words, highlight important ideas, and respond to discussion questions.

"I have started to understand the main ideas. It is easier now—I first look for the important points, then the rest of the content becomes easier to follow."

Azzami:

He was previously reluctant to speak and felt weak in listening and reading. Over time, he became active in discussions, was able to construct sentences based on short videos provided, and eventually managed to describe his classroom in English for two minutes.

"I used to stay quiet, but after having more group discussions, I learned how to explain things around me using my own words."

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Figure 2. Video of Azzami Explaining His Classroom
([link](#))

Progress Based on student documents from Activity Sheets and Reflections.
Weeks 1-2: Students only fill in the questions without additional notes.
Weeks 3-5: Students begin creating a personal glossary for new vocabulary.
Weeks 6-8: Students able to summarize main ideas after reading short texts.
Weeks 6-12: Students develop reflections in the form of mind maps or short narratives after watching videos or reading articles.
Changes in attitude toward English language learning, as indicated by the questionnaire, are evident in:

- 4 out of 5 students reported greater confidence in understanding English texts.
- All students mentioned discussions, videos, and repeated practice as the main factors that supported their learning.
- Three students said they were afraid of getting it wrong, but now they are feeling more confident to try.

"When learning online through Google Meet like this, it does not feel embarrassing. I can ask questions first before answering."

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis revealed several key patterns that demonstrate how the comprehension-centered approach shaped students' learning experiences and outcomes.

First, in terms of comprehension strategies, students showed a notable improvement in their ability to infer meaning, connect vocabulary, and integrate ideas within interactive texts. This indicates that comprehension was no longer a passive process but an active construction of meaning supported by contextual cues and prior knowledge. Such progress reflects the effectiveness of the comprehension-centered approach in encouraging learners to think critically and develop strategic awareness while reading or listening in English.

Second, final engagement emerged as a crucial factor in sustaining students' motivation. Activities such as group discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and repeated practice not only enhanced comprehension but also built a sense of routine and collaboration among learners.

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The habit of peer support fostered an interactive learning climate, where students learned not merely from materials but also through shared experiences and dialogue. This finding reinforces the idea that social interaction plays an essential role in sustaining engagement within online learning environments.

Third, in terms of perceptions and motivation, four out of five students reported higher confidence levels and expressed a preference for comprehension-based methods over traditional question-answer drills. This shift suggests that learners value approaches that allow them to explore meaning and context rather than focusing solely on correctness. It also demonstrates the psychological benefit of being treated as active participants who co-construct knowledge rather than passive recipients of information.

Lastly, technical and content barriers were identified, primarily concerning limited vocabulary and unstable internet connections. Two students experienced difficulty understanding texts that were thematically distant from their daily lives, highlighting the importance of selecting relevant and contextually familiar materials. Although these challenges occasionally disrupted the learning flow, they also emphasized the need for adaptive instructional design and scaffolding strategies to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities.

Overall, the analysis underscores that comprehension-centered learning not only enhances students' linguistic understanding but also cultivates their confidence, collaboration, and autonomy. These findings collectively affirm that meaningful engagement and contextual relevance are critical components of effective online English learning.

Discussion

The comprehension-centered innovation developed in this study demonstrates effectiveness in creating a more reflective, adaptive, and meaningful learning process for junior high school students. This approach does not merely emphasize mastery of language structures but highlights the importance of context, meaning, and communicative messages. As stated by Nation [13], reading and listening skills in a foreign language can only develop when learners are given opportunities to understand texts meaningfully, rather than simply copying or memorizing vocabulary.

The findings showed that what matters most is not only the improvement of scores but also the transformation of how students approached texts. Initially, students tended to focus on literal forms and word-for-word translation. After six to eight weeks, they began applying strategies such as predicting meaning, identifying main ideas, and reflecting on content based on context. This aligns with Duffy and Jonassen [7], who emphasized that meaning is constructed when learners actively interact with materials and connect them to prior knowledge and experiences. With practice, students integrated videos, images, and texts into a unified understanding, which they later expressed through summaries, dialogues, or discussions.

This approach also contributes to increased emotional and cognitive engagement of students in learning. Interviews showed that most students felt more comfortable, motivated, and valued in the learning process. The use of meaningful discussions, retelling activities, and reflection exercises in online sessions provided space for students to voice their understanding. These findings are consistent with studies by Nugroho and Lestari [5] and Mulyadi [4] that online

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learning will be more effective if it is designed with strategies that bring the text closer to the students' real experiences and activate them as subjects of learning rather than passive task-doers.

Throughout the implementation of the comprehension-centered online learning model, several challenges emerged that reflected both technical and pedagogical complexities. One of the primary difficulties was students' struggle to understand texts whose topics were distant from their everyday experiences. This limitation hindered their ability to make meaningful connections between the material and real-life contexts, which is crucial in comprehension-based learning. The issue underscores the importance of contextual relevance in instructional design, as students tend to construct meaning more effectively when the content aligns with their personal background and prior knowledge.

Another challenge involved technical constraints, particularly unstable internet connections that occasionally disrupted online sessions. Such interruptions not only affected communication but also reduced the consistency of interaction, which is essential for maintaining engagement and comprehension in digital learning environments. This obstacle illustrates the persistent digital divide that continues to shape the quality of online education, especially among young learners.

In addition, some students initially faced difficulty adapting to a learning model that required deeper reflection rather than mere task completion. Having been accustomed to more traditional, task-oriented online lessons, students needed time to adjust to a system that emphasized comprehension, collaboration, and self-expression. This adjustment process revealed the shift in mindset required to transform learners from passive recipients to active meaning makers.

Address these challenges, several strategic solutions were implemented. The researcher carefully selected contextual texts and videos that were relatable to students' daily lives, such as moral stories and narratives drawn from children's real-world experiences to enhance engagement and comprehension. Flexible schedules and platforms were also provided to accommodate students' differing levels of internet accessibility, ensuring continuity of learning despite technical disruptions. Moreover, scaffolding strategies such as short texts, guided discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and reflective activities were employed to gradually strengthen students' comprehension abilities.

These measures collectively demonstrate that effective online learning design must be both context-sensitive and learner-centered. Addressing students' linguistic, emotional, and technical needs in an integrated way.
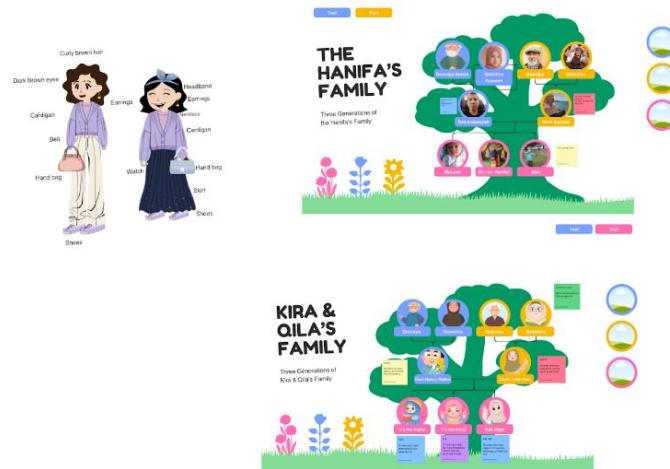
Figure 3. Example of Canva Mind mapping with Projects

This study contributes to two aspects:

a. Academic: Strengthening the basis that a comprehension-centered approach is effective in online learning, especially when combined with knowledge-based learning design.

b. Practice: Providing a concrete model of how students can create learning innovations based on empirical data, rather than assumptions.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that online English learning innovation based on a comprehension-centered approach can be an effective method to enhance the comprehension skills of junior high school students, particularly in the context of private online tutoring. The approach not only contributes to improving literal and inferential comprehension but also encourages the development of active learning strategies, such as analysing main ideas, constructing summaries, and connecting text meaning with real-life experiences. This indicates that language comprehension should not rely solely on memorization or translation but requires active and reflective cognitive processes in meaning-making.

From a process perspective, the learning design was based on student-centered instructional principles, making functional use of digital technologies as the primary medium to foster reflective, participatory, and contextual learning experiences. Strategies such as online discussions, interactive videos with English subtitles, project-based mind mapping, and personal reflections proved to enhance both cognitive and emotional engagement. These strategies enabled students to feel actively involved in the learning process and provided space for them to construct understanding independently.

Philosophically, this approach is grounded in a constructivist view: comprehension is built through social processes, contextual interaction, and gradual scaffolding support. The researcher's role as an Educational Technology student is evident in the ability to design, facilitate, and evaluate learning as a systematic innovation with tangible impact on students' learning experiences.

Thus, these findings emphasize the importance of integrating comprehension-based approaches and the use of educational technology in creating adaptive, humanistic, and

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transformative learning innovations. These findings are expected to serve as a reference model for education practitioners, private tutors, and education students in designing more meaningful foreign language learning experiences in the digital age. As a practical recommendation, it is suggested that the comprehension-centered approach be applied more widely in various learning contexts, especially online-based ones, and developed in teacher training and adaptive language learning curriculum design to meet the needs of 21st-century students.

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