

GUIDING READING CLUB MEMBERS TO BUILD BETTER READING SKILLS USING DIRECTED READING THINKING ACTIVITIES (DRTA)

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Abstrak: Menindaklanjuti hasil wawancara dengan anggota klub membaca di UIN Tulungagung yang menggambarkan bahwa sebagian besar dari mereka mengaku mempunyai berbagai permasalahan membaca, terutama membuat referensi dan inferensi. Kedua keterampilan tersebut sangat dibutuhkan untuk memperoleh pemahaman bacaan yang baik. Oleh karena itu, untuk mengatasi permasalahan tersebut, maka perlu dilakukan pengabdian kepada masyarakat melalui metode Community Based Research (CBR). Teknik mengajar membaca Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) diimplementasikan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan membaca mereka khususnya keterampilan membuat referensi dan inferensi. Pengabdian masyarakat berbasis penelitian ini dilaksanakan pada bulan Juni 2023 kepada 47 anggota Klub Baca UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung melalui penelitian tindakan. Nilai rata-rata pre-test yang diberikan sebelum dilakukan perlakuan adalah 52,23 dan hanya 10,6% yang memperoleh nilai ketuntasan minimal 75 dari total nilai 90. Sedangkan nilai post-test setelah perlakuan adalah 72,75, dan terdapat 75 % peserta mencapai nilai ketuntasan minimum. Hasil pengabdian berbasis penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penerapan teknik mengajar membaca DRTA dapat membantu pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing untuk meningkatkan keterampilan mereka dalam membuat referensi dan inferensi. Hal ini dapat mengarahkan mereka untuk mencapai pemahaman membaca yang lebih baik

Kata Kunci: keterampilan membaca, teknik DRTA, klub membaca

Abstract: In response to the interview results with the reading club members at the State Islamic University of Tulungagung, most of them claim to have various reading problems, mainly in making references and inferences. Those two skills are significantly needed to achieve good reading comprehension. Therefore, it is essential to address the problem through a community service program with Community Based Research (CBR) method. The Directed Reading Thinking Activities (DRTA) technique of teaching reading was implemented to improve their reading skills, specifically in making references and inferences. This research-based community service was carried out in June 2023 to 47 members of the Reading Club at the State Islamic University of Tulungagung. The mean score of the pre-test before the treatment was 52,23 and only 10,6% got the minimum passing score of 75 out of the total score of 90. Meanwhile, the post-test score after the treatment was 72,75, and 75% of the participants reached the minimum passing score. The result of this CBR indicates that implementing the DRTA technique of teaching reading helps EFL learners improve their skills in making references and inferences. This further leads them to achieve better reading comprehension.

Keywords: reading skills, DRTA technique, reading club

Introduction

Reading skills is a key indicator of literacy and hold significant importance across various facets of life. The foundation of a scientific culture is established through the cultivation of positive reading habits, which, in turn, greatly contribute to overall life success. Academic achievements are notably bolstered by the adoption of effective reading habits (Yildiz, 2020), as reading serves to acquire extensive knowledge (Mirza et al., 2021), enhance creativity, and refine critical thinking skills (Jaenudin et al., 2020). However, existing research underscores that

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students grapple not only with inadequate reading habits (Endris, 2022), but also encounter challenges in both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects during reading (Mustafa et al., 2021). Kasim & Raisha's (2017) study reveals that EFL students face substantial reading difficulties, particularly in linguistic domains such as semantics and unfamiliar vocabulary, impacting their comprehension of English texts. Non-linguistic comprehension issues, including a lack of cultural knowledge, text length, limited understanding of reading strategies, difficulty distinguishing between main and supporting ideas, working memory constraints, challenges in connecting ideas, and an inability to engage in speed reading, are also highlighted in previous research. Another noteworthy problem identified by Al-Jarrah & Ismail (2018) in their investigation into Arab EFL learners at higher education levels is their struggle to recognize different types of text. This difficulty may adversely affect both English language proficiency and academic performance. Al-Qahtani (2016) studied the poor reading abilities of Saudi EFL readers, identified various factors contributing to this issue, including a "lack of exposure to the target language, poor teaching skills and teacher training programs," an imbalance between comprehension and reading aloud emphasis in instruction, student motivation deficits, minimal focus on reading skills in textbooks, unfamiliar or unsuitable reading topics, insufficient reading skills training, limited student vocabulary, and a lack of parental involvement. These studies have exposed some factors that affect poor reading habits, but they do not investigate further how poor reading habits can be tackled. Thus, this gap can be the underlying reason for this research-based community service.

In the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, Indonesian EFL students face various challenges. These challenges, as identified by Jayanti (2016), are perceived similarly by both teachers and students and encompass linguistic aspects such as vocabulary, sentences with intricate structures, and syntactical functions, as well as non-linguistic difficulties like cultural disparities between authors and students, lack of background knowledge, and personal issues leading to frustration in their reading practices. Background knowledge emerges as a pivotal factor in categorizing readers, as illustrated by Smith et al.'s (2021) study, which indicates that readers with lower background knowledge tend to derive more benefit from highly cohesive texts. Weaker readers can somewhat compensate for their limited reading skills in contexts with a high degree of background knowledge. Text-related challenges, including vocabulary, ideas, and writing style, are also highlighted by Mbato (2019). In higher education, cultivating good reading habits and deriving enjoyment from various reference materials, particularly academic texts, is recommended for EFL students to support their academic success. However, Anwar & Sailuddin's (2022) investigation into academic reading difficulties in higher education identifies the meaning of difficult words as the most significant obstacle. The lack of reading practice and motivation, reported as common issues among EFL learners, contributes to poor reading (Satriani, 2018). This situation is also observed at the State Islamic University of Tulungagung, where interviews conducted with members of the reading club on February 13, 2023, reveal they could not synthesize ideas from various reading sources, define unfamiliar vocabulary, make inferences, summarize, and they faced a lack of motivation when reading academic texts. All might contribute to poor reading habits. This can inhibit them from pursuing

their learning goals. Among those problems, making references and inferences was considered the basic problem and was mostly encountered while reading.

The undergraduate students were supposed to have good skills in reading various kinds of text to widen their knowledge to support their academic success. Reading plays a crucial role in developing EFL learners' English competency, and graduates' quality is often evaluated based on their oral and written English competence (Lismay & Ramadhani, 2021). Gustanti and Ayu (2021) identified a positive correlation between cognitive reading strategies and scores in English proficiency tests, as students frequently utilized these strategies when reading texts. Marcos et al. (2020) demonstrated that reading and writing activities can positively influence creative thinking, showing a moderate correlation with academic achievement. Atayeva et al. (2019) discovered in their study on the impact of reading on students' writing ability that the habit of reading significantly affects academic writing. Additionally, Wolf et al. (2019), in their research on the relationship between reading and listening comprehension, established that vocabulary and word reading fluency contribute to both reading and listening skills. The ability to decode words (word reading fluency in this study) and linguistic comprehension (encompassing listening comprehension and vocabulary) are predictors of reading ability. These are the reading community members should have to support their good reading comprehension.

The need to appreciate and guide the emerging reading community among students is crucial to addressing the existing gap between the perceived importance of reading and the social reality of challenges in reading comprehension and competence. It is essential to alleviate these issues during reading practices and support their overall academic success. Therefore, it is necessary to train the Reading Club members at Islamic state university in Tulungagung to improve their reading skills through an appropriate strategy. One proven effective strategy is Directed Reading Thinking Activities (DRTA), as demonstrated by various previous studies. For instance, a study by Utami & Sugirin (2019) highlighted the effectiveness of DRTA in enhancing students' reading comprehension. Other research, such as the ones done by Safitri, Marhaban, and Erdiana (2022), Sari, Yunita, & Harahap (2020), Nerim (2020), Wijaya & Zulaeha (2021), Rahman, Hikmah, & Fahira (2022), and Anaktototy & Lesnussa (2021), consistently supports the efficacy of DRTA in improving not only reading comprehension but also critical thinking skills. Some studies also proved that DRTA can enhance students' skills of prediction and summarizing, which are very significant to make inferences (Kurniaman et al., 2021; Bennouioua, 2021) and help them to identify references. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating the DRTA strategy in teaching and learning to enhance students' reading comprehension in common and making inferences and references.

In addressing the reading challenges faced by the members of the reading community at State Islamic University of Tulungagung and recognizing the significance of reading comprehension, it becomes crucial to provide training aimed at enhancing their reading skills-making inferences and references. This training is essential to resolve their reading difficulties because those reading problems might hinder their reading comprehension, which can further inhibit their learning success. Given that research has demonstrated the effectiveness of DRTA in improving students' reading comprehension, this community service was conducted to train

the members of the Reading Club by using DRTA. The goal was to improve their reading skills and enable them to achieve better comprehension while reading English essay texts at intermediate level.

Method

This community service was carried out by providing the community members of the reading club in Tulungagung with direct training. The training was done at the State Islamic University of Tulungagung by adopting Community Based Research (CBR) as stated in a book written by Afandi et al. (2022) *Metodologi Pengabdian Masyarakat (Direktorat Pendidikan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam)* through training the members of *Reading Club* community at the university. Forty of them were students of the English Department, and some others were from non-English study programs. Specifically, two Islamic Education students, three Syari'ah Banking, and two Sharia Economics students (See Diagram 1). The participants are members of the Reading Club Community who are undergraduate students. They are specifically the ones who experience difficulties in making references and inferences. This community service was carried out in June 2023.

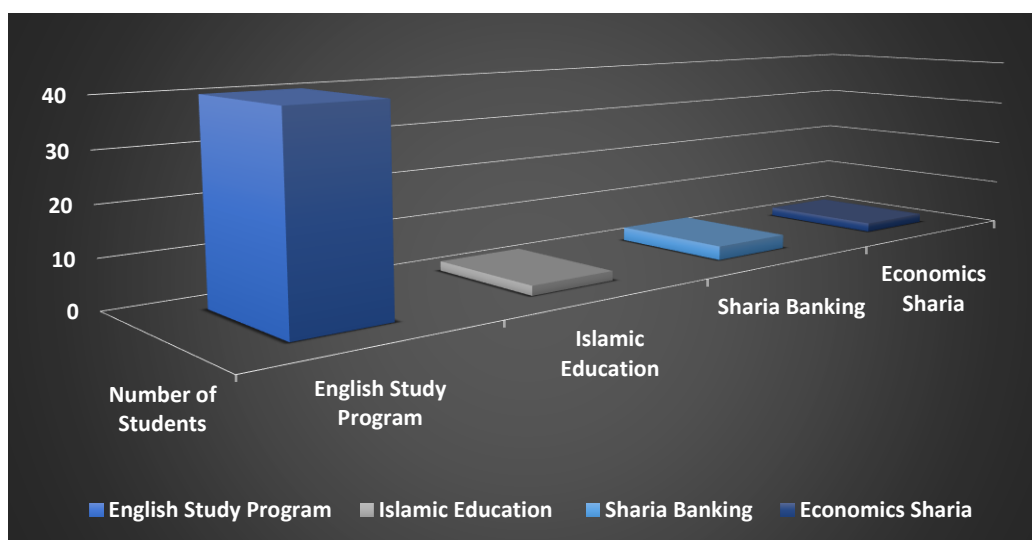


Diagram 1. Demographics of the participants

This training was adapting theories in action design as stated by Allen B. Moore (2002) through guiding their daily activities and employing action research as well. In the context of this community service, the theories related to Reading Comprehension and Directed Reading Thinking Activities (DRTA) were practiced and implemented by the participants of this community service- Reading Club Community. Moreover, this community service was done through a cycle of action research consisting of four stages.

There were four steps in the cycle: preparation, implementation, evaluation, and reflection. In the *planning section*, there were some activities, namely conducting the diagnostic test of the participants' reading skills, preparing the procedures for action research, and setting the criteria for success. Before distributing the reading test to the participants, the test itself

was developed in the form of multiple-choice questions based on short passages, with the total number of questions was twenty. The first ten questions asked about references and the rest twenty asked about making inferences from the text. The test was also validated by expert validation by an experienced teacher of Reading Comprehension to see its content and construct validity. The test was tested on 10 students, with a Cronbach's Alpha 0,925 score. The test was developed by considering the participants' reading comprehension level, mostly at the intermediate level as revealed from the results of the diagnostic reading test and the materials or research objective. The test was put in G-form as seen in this link <https://forms.gle/t1zNFdtWR2WmDP9w8>. The test was then distributed online to the participants, even though they were invited to stay in a class. This is done by considering the effectiveness of either its implementation or scoring.

Then, in the implementation step, the DRTA strategy was implemented through some steps, namely 1). Selecting passages as introductory materials including some appropriate stopping points to create, verify, and define predictions by students; 2). Giving some open questions to help the student's thoughts on comprehending the passages and encourage them to predict the references used and to make inferences; 3). Putting down each prediction made by students on the whiteboard and asking students to get justifications and activate previous knowledge, i.e. "Why do you think that?"; 4). Guiding students to revise their predictions by considering the new information. Changes were made to the predictions that were still on the board so that all students could see the changes; 5). Allowing students to read for themselves. Stop it after the first part of the passage and talk to a class to confirm or produce forecasts. "What makes you believe that this term refers to...?" "Why did she disappear?", "Can you prove it?". Modifying the predictions is necessary; and 6). Repeating this process until the students have read all sections of the passage. To help students become more comfortable with the process, have them write down their prediction on a piece of paper and let them discuss it with their peers. Then, they summarize statements and compare their predictions to the texts. It was implemented for two meetings. In the first meeting, the material given was directed reading thinking activities in making references. Making references is one of the important elements in reading comprehension and is also considered a basic reading skill. In this step, the participants were first taught the conceptual understanding of making references in various kinds of simple texts or passages. Then, they were also trained in how to implement making inferences. It was emphasized that the participants should be equipped to make inferences to paragraphs and passages. The skimming, scanning, previewing, predicting, and summarizing practiced during the implementation DRTA technique could help to make inferences.

Subsequently, in the evaluating step, the post-reading test was done to test how much reading improvement they made after attending training using the DRTA strategy. Like the pre-test, the post-test as can be seen in this link, <https://forms.gle/XAN2AqCwQipCfLyT9> was also implemented and scored via Google form. In addition, the open-ended questionnaire asking about their preference for using DRTA to improve their skills of making references and inferences, and the joy of reading was also distributed to the participants after the post-test to get their views.

Finally, in the reflecting step, all the quantitative data were analyzed quantitatively to reveal the mean, median, and mode scores. Then the data resulting from an open-ended questionnaire were qualitatively analyzed. Finally, the result of the data analysis was summed up. The criteria for success is that at least 75% of this community service program participants improved their skills in making references, which can be seen from their score of at least 75.

Results and Discussion

Before training the forty-seven (47) members of the Reading club to read and make references and inferences on English texts, the pre-test was given and the result of the test (See Table 1) showed that there are only 5 out of 47 (10.6%) participants who reached the minimum passing score- 75 out of the total score, 90 for all the correct answers. The rest 89,4 % got below minimum passing score.

Table 1. The Result of Pre-Test

Score of Pre-test	Percentage(%)
75	10,6
70	12,8
65	6,4
60	10,6
55	6,4
50	12,8
45	14,9
40	4,3
35	6,4
30	10,6
25	4,3
Total	100
N	47

These quantitative data proved that their reading skills need to be improved. The average score gained from the pre-test was 52,23, the median score was 50, the range score was 25-75, and the mode was 45 (See Figure 1).

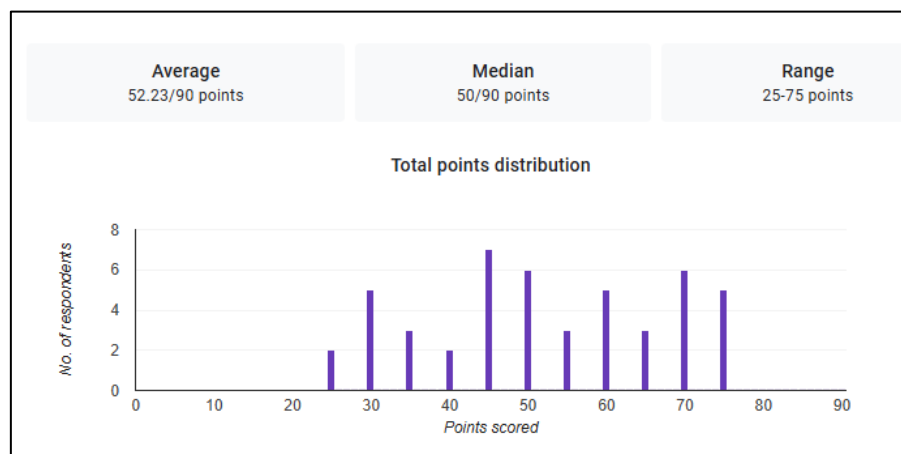


Figure 1. The Descriptive Statistic of the Pre-Test Score

Then, after implementing the DRTA techniques to teach them how to make references and inferences, the post-test was given to see how much improvement they achieved. The post-test result (See Table 2) showed that 30 out of 40 participants or 75 % (42,5% got 80 and 32,5% got 75) of them already achieved the minimum passing score (75).

Table 2. The result of Post-test

Post-Test Score	Percentage (%)
80	42,5
75	32,5
70	2,5
65	7,5
60	5
55	2,5
50	5
35	2,5
Total	100
N	40

Meanwhile, there are 10 out of 40 participants or 25 % of them got below passing grade comprising one participant with 35 points, two participants with 50 points, one participant with 55 points, two participants with 60 points, three participants with 65 points, and 1 participant with 70 points. Moreover, as described in Figure 2, the average score of the post-test was 72,25 out of 90, the median score was 75, the range score was 35-80, and the mode score was 80.

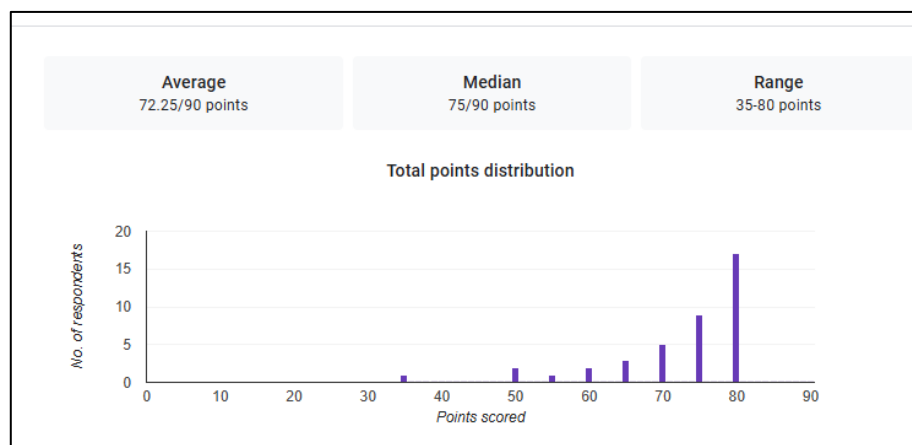


Figure 2. The Descriptive Statistic of the Post-Test Score

There was a significant increase in the mean score of the pre-test, 52,23 toward the average score of the post-test 72,25 (See Figure 2). 75% of the respondents got the minimum passing grade, which shows that the success criteria have been achieved. This result implies that implementing DRTA can improve the students' skills of making references. This teaching strategy has shown its benefit in helping students improve their reading comprehension on making references and inferences.

The results of training for the members of the Reading Club by using the DRTA to solve their problems of making references and inferences reveal four important points as disclosed from the result of the open-ended questionnaire to the participants. The first, this technique trains the learners to get actively involved in reading and then encourages them to think faster about the texts being read to better make references and inferences. This is proved by one of the participants quoted student' statements below:

"This teaching method of Directed Reading Thinking Activities makes the students get actively engaged in reading texts and encourages them to think faster when reading texts." (Metode pembelajaran Directed Reading Thinking Activities yang melibatkan siswa dalam membaca teks Bahasa Inggris dan kemudian mendorong mereka untuk berpikir lebih cepat dalam teks yang dibaca)." (NBL)

With the skill of thinking faster to comprehend the text, their reading comprehension improves. This finding supports several previous studies proving that DRTA has successfully improved the reading comprehension of secondary school students in Indonesia (Ismail, 2018; Situmorang, Sinurat, and Sihombing, 2023).

The second benefit of implementing this DRTA is that the learners can accomplish the test and exercises faster, making them more critical to help them make references and inferences. This DRTA technique is also claimed to be effective in learning because they are trained and can predict, summarize, and evaluate their reading through their teachers' direction and guidance. This can be seen in the following respondents' interview quotation:

"With the DRTA (Directed Thinking Reading Activity) method, in my opinion, my learning becomes easier to understand and faster to work on questions. DRTA also makes me more critical and responsive to the questions provided. In my opinion, the DRTA method is also effective when used in learning because this method involves predicting, summarizing, and evaluating reading" (Dengan metode DRTA -Directed Thinking Reading Activities, menurut saya pembelajaran menjadi lebih mudah difahami dan cepat dalam mengerjakan soal. DRTA juga menjadikan pikiran lebih kritis dan tanggap pada soal yang disediakan. Menurut saya metode drta ini efektif jika digunakan dalam pembelajaran karena dalam metode ini terdapat prediksi, meringkas, dan mengevaluasi bacaan)" (NWP)

This finding parallels some previous studies revealing that DRTA improves reading comprehension and increases students' critical thinking in elementary school (Utomo & Syamsi, 2019) and college school (Yeny & Nadjmuddin, 2020).

The third benefit of implementing the technique of DRTA from the student's point of view is that it helps students to identify and find the answer to reading comprehension questions more effectively so that they do not waste time. It is also qualitatively proved that DRTA is effective for the learners to experience and improve their skimming, scanning, previewing, and predicting skills to support making references and inferences to achieve better reading comprehension. This is supported by one of the participants' claim below:

"My opinion regarding applying the DRTA method when working on questions is that it really helps me understand the questions more easily and can find answers more quickly so that I don't waste a lot of time reading the entire text. "This method is very effective because it teaches skimming, scanning, previewing, and predicting. (Pendapat saya mengenai penerapan metode DRTA saat mengerjakan soal adalah sangat membantu saya untuk lebih mudah memahami soal dan bisa lebih cepat dalam menemukan jawaban

sehingga waktu tidak terbuang banyak untuk membaca bacaan secara keseluruhan. Metode tersebut sangat efektif karena diajarkan untuk skimming, scanning, previewing, dan predicting)." (NDS)

Some previous studies have proven that DRTA has proven to improve students' reading comprehension at any school level, such as Senior High School (Agustine, Suparman, & Mahpul, 2019; Dewi, Astrid, & Ilma, 2023; Rangkuti, 2022).

The fourth is in addition to solving problems on making references and inferences, the DRTA technique could help the learners to become independent readers who can independently read and answer reading comprehension questions. Its characteristic is to direct the students to read, predict what the text is about, and then confirm their prediction, so that the learners can comprehend the reading materials more comprehensively. This can be explicitly found in the following participants' quoted comment of the implementation of DRTA to improve their reading skills and further nurtures the joy of reading.

"My opinion regarding the learning method "DRTA" is very easy to understand even though the brain has to digest it a little at a time. The method given by the lecturer starts with reading, then teaching you to think for yourself to find the answer. (Pendapat saya mengenai metode embelajaran tadi "DRTA" sangat mudah difahami walaupun harus sedikit-sedikit dicerna oleh otak. Cara yang diberikan oleh dosennya dimulai dengan membaca, lalu diajar untuk berfikir sendiri untuk mmencari jawabannya)." (NDF)

"The method used (DRTA) can make those who don't understand understand. Very easy to understand, delivery to the point. (Metode yang digunakan (DRTA) bisa membuat yang tidak faham menjadi faham. Sangat mudah difahami, penyampaianya to the point)." (JS)

This study supports the previous studies revealing that DRTA can improve the students' reading comprehension (Nurmadina & Yuliah, 2021; Akmal, 2018) and improve reading skills (Purba & Lubis, 2019; Munfadlila, 2021). The implementation of DRTA to the members of the reading club not only can improve their reading skills by making references and inferences towards the texts they are reading, but it also leads them to get some advantages, namely the DRTA technique of teaching reading can make students to more actively participate in reading activities which can bring about the joy of reading. In addition to be able to answer the reading comprehension question faster. This technique also makes them improve their critical thinking. Moreover, the DRTA technique gives them more confidence to read independently.

Conclusion

This community service program, which is formulated in the form of training the members of the reading club at the State Islamic University of Tulungagung by using Directed Reading Thinking Activities (DRTA), was attended by 47 students from various Study Programs like the English Department, Islamic Religion Department, Sharia Economic Department, and Syaria Banking Department. The community service aims to help them improve their reading skills in making references and inferences and to build the joy of reading English text. After implementing this DRTA technique, this research-based community service reveals that the DRTA technique of teaching reading is beneficial in improving their reading skills in making references and inferences through these activities: predicting, reading, and proving/disproving

predictions. Moreover, implementing this technique could also improve their critical thinking, get more confidence to read independently, and improve their reading comprehension skills.

The result of this study can be pedagogically implemented to teach reading comprehension, mainly to improve students' skills in making references and inferences by using the DRTA technique. However, the implementation of this community service needs to be improved because of its limitations. For example, there is no participant classification, so all participants were treated similarly. Meanwhile, the participants were from several study programs and had various reading competencies. As a result, even though most of them claim that the DRTA technique is advantageous, about 25% of students still got points below the passing rubric. This indicates that the implementation of this program needs to be more carefully planned for further community service such as carefully classifying the participants' reading competencies. The following community service can also be done longer to give more treatments to those experiencing problems.

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