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## Examining Teaching Reading Using Local Culture-Based Pictorial Narrative Texts: A Case Study to Secondary School Students

Iwan Fauzi<sup>1\*</sup>, Natalina Asi<sup>2</sup>, Tampung N. Saman<sup>3</sup>, Elanneri Karani<sup>4</sup>, Maria Arina Luardini<sup>5</sup>, Mary Novary Ngabut<sup>6</sup>

<sup>123456</sup>FKIP, University of Palangka Raya, Indonesia

<sup>1\*</sup>[i\\_fauzi@edu.upr.ac.id](mailto:i_fauzi@edu.upr.ac.id); <sup>2</sup>[natalinaasi@gmail.com](mailto:natalinaasi@gmail.com); <sup>3</sup>[tampung.saman@edu.upr.ac.id](mailto:tampung.saman@edu.upr.ac.id);

<sup>4</sup>[elanneri@edu.upr.ac.id](mailto:elanneri@edu.upr.ac.id); <sup>5</sup>[maria\\_luardini@edu.upr.ac.id](mailto:maria_luardini@edu.upr.ac.id); <sup>6</sup>[marianovary@gmail.com](mailto:marianovary@gmail.com)

### \*Correspondent Author

#### Keyword

local culture, narrative text, picture series, teaching reading

#### Abstract

The local culture integration in foreign language (FL) reading classroom can help learners understanding text more easily and quickly. This research took 37 secondary school students in the junior level (11 males & 26 females) as the sample. The quantitative research method was used with a case-study research design. There were three research objectives focused in this study: (1) the influence of local culture-based pictorial narrative texts on students' reading comprehension; (2) the correlation between students' perceptions of integrating local culture into the development of reading materials and students' reading comprehension; and (3) the difference of problems faced by students in understanding pictorial narrative texts in terms of purpose of the story, characters in the story, orientation, complications, and resolution of the story. The results showed that local culture-based pictorial narratives had a significant effect on students' reading comprehension, and were positively correlated to each other. In addition, students do not have discrepancy in terms of problems encountered when understanding the narratives such as the purpose of the story, characters in the story, orientation, complication, and resolution of the story.

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## Introduction

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four basic language skills that EFL learners must master during the language learning process, in which speaking and writing belong to productive language skills while listening and reading are categorized as receptive language skills. In this regard, reading is the most important of these four skills for understanding the language.

In a more traditional context, the act of reading might be defined as the process of extracting of meaning from written or printed linguistic symbols (Nuttal, 1982, p. 42). What Nuttal (1982) defines here implies that reading activity is an interaction between the orthographic processing that represents a language and the linguistic ability of the reader. Hence, the process of reading facilitates the establishment of connections among a written text, the reader, and the social context within which this activity occurs. This aligns with the perspective of Hudelson in Murcia (2001, p. 154), who posits that the process of reading entails the reader's active engagement with and interpretation of the text, which is inevitably shaped by the reader's prior experiences, linguistic background, cultural context, and reading objectives.

As known, reading is considered to be one of four language skills that students should acquire and prioritize. The process of reading is not only limited to understanding the content of the text but how the reader engages an interactive relationship with the text being read. To read is the constructive approach facilitating students to acquire a new language knowledge and life experiences too. In essence, the act of reading can be described as the active cognitive activity of comprehending and interpreting written and visual texts (Souhila, 2014, p. 4). It examines how readers can interpret and communicate meaning through written symbols. In addition, Howart (2006) as cited in Fauzi (2018) states that reading, undoubtedly, possesses the same communication capacity as any other mode of language. This implies that within the act of reading, there exists a reciprocal engagement between the author and the readers facilitated by the written material. The author makes an attempt to convert the linguistic symbols intended for the reader, whereas the reader tries to interpret the messages delivered by the author. Hence, it can be assumed that reading is a complex cognitive process that significantly integrates language and cognition to comprehend the intended message or information conveyed by the author through written linguistic symbols, including graphic and written verbal representations.

Regarding with teaching principles, Richards & Renandya (2002) state that principles in teaching refer to the views and conceptions that teachers uphold regarding effective instructional methods and learning processes. These principles form the foundation for teachers' decision-making processes.

In teaching reading, more specifically, Harmer (2003) classifies that there are six principles behind it, 1) *Reading is an active skill*. Reading is an extremely vigorous activity. To be successful, one must comprehend what the words mean, observe the picture the words paint,

comprehend the reasoning, and determine whether one agrees with them, 2) *Reading materials should be interesting*. For the same reason that students are less likely to learn anything else in class, they are less likely to gain from reading if they are not interested in it. They get much more from what's in front of them when they are really interested in the subject or the task, 3) *Students should have opportunity to give response for what they read*. The text's meaning, or "message" is equally essential, and teachers have to offer students the opportunity to think about that message. It is essential that they have the opportunity to express their thoughts about the topic, as this will encourage personal involvement with it and the use of language,

4) *Students should infer reading texts*. It is important for teachers to give 'hints' for their students so that they can prepare for what they can predict in ahead. They will improve as readers and enjoy reading more as a result, 5) *Various reading topics*. Teachers could provide students with a certain topic of reading. This can be done, for instance, by providing them a local cuisine menu and support them to have the ingredients. This seems absurd, but there might be adequate reasons for having tasks of reading, 6) *Exploiting students to read more texts*. Reading material is full of words, phrases, sentences, descriptions, and so on. Good teachers use the texts of reading to create interesting class routines and use the topics for open discussion and other tasks. They also use the language and local culture to help students learn.

Based on those principles, at least there are three ideas which explicitly drive this research to the reading principles. Firstly, since reading is not a passive skill, to figure words into pictures may allow students understand narration and description on what they read. Secondly, as known that reading is to predict, pictures and headline on reading are about the hints that the students can predict after what they read. Last and the most importantly, exploiting reading texts with full ideas and description using the language and local culture is the best way for teachers to utilize topic for discussion and further tasks.

### Local Culture in English Language Teaching

Language is the vehicle through which “a culture transmits its beliefs, values, and norms” (Sun, 2013, p. 317). In the same way, Kramersch (1998) stated that when people talk to each other, language and culture are linked and connected because people make experiences through language. In fact, people can only learn a language in the context of its culture, and they have to be able to communicate in that culture's language in order to learn it (Nambiar and Anawar 2017).

Recently linguists have only begun to pay attention to how local culture can help people learn a new language. Understanding the target culture is important, but understanding the local culture is even more important. This is because, according to Wijaya in Nambiar et al (2020), by understanding learning material related to local culture will build students' understanding in learning the target language when it is associated with their own cultural content. Besides, Phyak (2011) asserts that it is essential to prioritize the incorporation of local culture in the

language acquisition process, in addition to the target culture. In the context of Indonesia, a study investigated by [Suardana et al. \(2018\)](#) found that students who were exposed to the local culture-based learning model demonstrated superior critical thinking abilities compared to students who were instructed using the discovery learning model. Therefore, it is undeniable that the local culture used as the content of target-language learning can play a positive role in learning the target language itself.

By teaching students through new ways to use language, incorporating local culture into the English classroom can help them. People who are just starting to learn English often say that it helps them speak faster when they use words from their own culture once they speak English. This implies that possessing prior knowledge on a subject offers learners accessible and pertinent input ([Krashen, 1987](#)) that they can employ in their language acquisition process. Moreover, [Garcia \(2011\)](#) asserts that knowledge supported by use of local vocabulary aids students with limited proficiency in enhancing their language fluency. According to [Wang and Mansouri \(2017\)](#); and [Asmaa et al. \(2015\)](#), English learners demonstrate improved proficiency in spoken English when they are provided with vocabularies from the local culture to incorporate into their expressions. This enhancement in critical language awareness appears to facilitate their ability to produce English speech more easily.

Moreover, [Regmi \(2011\)](#) noted that the cultural context of the first language is important to consider when learning a second or foreign language. Instead, she has suggested moving from the local culture and setting to the target language that would make learning the language less strange. Consequently, involving local culture in language resources lets students learn a language and learn about its culture at the same time. Then, it finally makes important chances for students to practice the English language in the classroom which subsequently enhance their skills in the target language itself ([Xu, 2016](#)). Additionally, [Richards \(2005:78\)](#) states that using materials based on local culture when teaching English as a foreign language provides two things: it helps students learn the target language and it lets teachers perform their duty to teach about local culture. There is evidence that the Indonesian government already reinforces using local content in schools. This is also supported by the Ministry of National Education Decrees (*Permendiknas*) Numbers 22 and 23/2006. In this act, according to [Dharma \(2008:92\)](#), "what the government expects regarding the integration of local content into various subjects at the primary and secondary education levels is not optimal because the local content implemented is not sought to develop student competencies but only as an extracurricular activity where it just underscores the characteristic of unique local potential. Thus, local excellence that can be used as material in learning cannot be clustered into existing subjects". Hence, based on the aforementioned explanations, it can be inferred that local content-based materials give a positive contribution in teaching. Not only does student's reading comprehension skill improve through implementing the approach of teaching reading by this model, but student's understanding of local knowledge also increases.

Several evidences proved that integrating local culture into the English classroom may also support students make experiences through language learned. [Garcia \(2011\)](#), for

instances, stated that understanding local words and vocabulary can help students who aren't very good at speaking English improve their fluency. In addition, [Wang & Mansouri \(2017\)](#), argued when English learners are provided words from the local culture in their English use, they appear to be able to speak English more easily because they are more aware of how language works. This implies that how local culture facilitates students to improve learning. It is not difficult to include culture into classrooms where language is being taught. In fact, it is something that can be done easily and simply. In reading skill, teachers may integrate local culture into other English skills where reading skill provides students content materials which may be taken from students' local culture. Several studies investigate about integrating local culture into learning materials for supplementary reading texts which is benefited to aid language learning. [Ahmadi and Shah \(2014\)](#), for example, assessed reading materials drawn from traditional folklore, cultural practices, food, games, dance, and other elements that were based on the cultures of the various ethnic groups (Malays, Indians, Chinese, Eurasians, Ibans, Kadazans, etc.). From the study, the language materials that were made with the learners' culture and situation in mind were more useful than making everyone follow a set of Western norms.

In the recent study, [Inderawati et al. \(2022\)](#) developed reading materials for secondary school students that included stories based on local culture. They investigated the use of local story-based reading materials they developed whether there was an improvement with students' grades before and after the experiment. Meanwhile, [Azizah et al. \(2021\)](#) used local culture to create interesting reading material for the vocational school students. The result showed that the reading material that was made could help students comprehend what they were reading. This is also confirmed by [Tarigan, et al \(2019\)](#) that a development of reading materials for high school students which is based on Karo local culture proves that students' reading comprehension improves after being given such reading materials. Of all that previous research reviewed, it can be summarized that the process of learning the target language and exploration of the local culture incorporated into the learning material can be likely made by inserting the local culture in the foreign language material being learned. At the same time, it creates valuable opportunities for learners to practice the English language.

### Problems in Teaching Reading

When it comes to the teaching of reading, a number of most common problems will need to be dealt with. The first problem is that they don't understand what they are reading. The difficulties have been associated with background knowledge, culture knowledge, and text type knowledge. Background knowledge refers to what the students already know about the world. Students who haven't read a text before won't be able to understand it since they won't know what it is about. The difficulty in understanding content of reading can be caused by lack of knowledge related to the cultural context and cultural content of the target language. Moreover, problems can also arise while students read the texts. This is due to insufficient knowledge to

the type of text. Students cannot understand what the text is about if they do not know the genre of the text being read. This implies that when students know the type of text they are reading, they can understand the content of the text because they are comfortable with that type of text itself (Alderson, 2002 in Chawang, 2008).

The second problem is the limited vocabulary that students have. When they do not have enough vocabulary, they will certainly have difficulty in understanding the content of the text as a whole. This problem sounds classical but it can be an obstacle for students if they do not understand such as technical terms, synonyms, antonyms, and vocabularies that have more than one meaning. For a better result, students should master a large amount of vocabulary (Harmer, 2003). The third problem is that students find it difficult to understand words or phrases written in the form of complex sentences on the reading texts, because in this type of sentence many concepts are abstract and hard for students to understand. Thus, according to Harmer (2003) longer sentences can make students difficult to understand what they are reading.

To overcome these problems in teaching reading, the researchers utilized local culture-based reading texts in the form of pictorial narrative texts. Pictorial narrative texts are texts narrated with pictures where the whole story is illustrated with serial pictures to show the structure of narration from the orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and reorientation. These pictorial narrative texts are provided into five stories of Central Kalimantan local cultures where those stories were designed by Asi & Fauzi (2023). Five titles pictorial narrative texts used are: (1) The legend of *Pulau Nusa*, (2) The legend of *Malawen Lake*, (3) The Curse of *Raja Mintin*, (4) The story of *Tumbang and Ingey*, and (5) The legend of *Batu Suli*.

By implementing those local stories in teaching English, this study took the experiment of teaching reading to the secondary school students by focusing on three research objectives: (1) to examine the effect of local culture-based pictorial narrative texts on students' reading comprehension in terms of understanding narratives; (2) to examine the correlation between students' perception about integrating local culture into reading material development and students' reading comprehension; and (3) to examine the difference of students' problems in comprehending local culture-based pictorial narrative texts in terms of the purpose of the story, the characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution.

## Method

### Research Design, Sample, and Procedure

A quantitative method with a case study research design was used in this research. All data obtained from the subjects were quantified and calculated through statistical analysis. The subject taken as sample to this research was the eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri-2 Palangka Raya. This sample was chosen as the research subject because the school had

included local content for each subject taught based on *Permendiknas* number 22 and 23 by 2006. In addition, reading texts which are provided in narrative stories, legends, or myths are abundantly in the English textbooks of secondary schools. Hence, this study was eligible to investigate the level of junior secondary school or SMP. The number of subjects taken in this study was 37 students with the ages ranging between 13--14 years old covered by 21 females and 16 males.

Then, the procedure of doing experiment for this research was by doing treatment of teaching reading to students. The experiment given after pre-test and before post-test is that to teach students local culture-based pictorial narrative texts. In the teaching experiment, the local culture-based narrative texts are designed using picture series to dig student comprehension toward the pictorial texts. The treatment was done in two weeks where once a week referring to teaching schedule of the English subject at the school.

### Research Instrument and Data Analysis

The instruments of this study were test and questionnaire. The test was about the evaluation of reading comprehension through five reading texts of pictorial narrative texts based on local stories of Central Kalimantan. The evaluation of reading comprehension covered the purpose of the story, the characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution. To score students' reading comprehension, it was by calculating number of correct answers divided by number of items tested and multiplied with 100. Then, scores attained are ranging from 0 to 100. To categorize student's comprehension by scores obtained, the following classification is used.

**Table 1.** Classification of comprehension by score range

Score range	Classifications
0 -- 20	<b>Very bad comprehension</b> (serious problems found in comprehending X indicator)
21 -- 40	<b>Bad comprehension</b> (many problems found in comprehending X indicator)
41 -- 60	<b>Fair comprehension</b> (several problems found in comprehending X indicator)
61 -- 80	<b>Good comprehension</b> (less problems found in comprehending X indicator)
81 -- 100	<b>Very good comprehension</b> (almost no problems found in comprehending X indicator)

The term of X indicator in Table 1 means the indicator of comprehending narrative texts respectively representing the purpose of the story, the characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution of the story.

Meanwhile, the questionnaire is the other instrument to be used on evaluating the students' perception on learning English using local culture-based pictorial narrative texts. The questionnaire has 20 questions using 5-scale answers of Likert. To analyze the data, the researchers used three statistical models based on three research objectives aforementioned.

By the evaluation of data obtained, whole data violated the normality assumption where all data variables showed  $p < 0.05$ . Therefore, non-parametric tests were used for the three statistical computation analyses.

- (1) *Wilcoxon sign rank* was used to examine the effect of local culture-based pictorial narrative texts on students' comprehension in reading narrative text;
- (2) *Spearman correlation* was used to examine the correlation between students' perception about integrating local culture into reading material development and students' reading comprehension.
- (3) *Kruskall-Wallis* was used to examine the difference of students' problems in comprehending pictorial narrative texts based on local culture in terms of the purpose of the story, the characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The result of this study is elaborated based on three research objectives which are (1) the effect of local culture-based pictorial narrative texts on students' comprehension in reading narrative text; (2) the correlation between students' perception about integrating local culture into reading material development and the ability of students to comprehend the text narratives; and (3) the difference of students' difficulties in comprehending pictorial narrative texts in terms of the purpose of the story, the characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution. Furthermore, the more specific findings on three objectives are depicted respectively in the following.

#### The effect of local culture-based pictorial narrative texts towards students' reading comprehension

In this analysis, the data were fulfilled from scores of reading comprehension evaluated from students both in pretest and posttest. In pretest, the students were given two texts of local culture-based narratives (texts only) and each text contains seven to eight questions to be answered in terms of the purpose of the story, the characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution. Meanwhile, in the posttest the students were given other three narrative texts (with picture series) based on local culture which contain six to seven questions by the same indicator to be answered as in the pretest. In this regard, the pretest has 15 questions and the posttest has 20 questions. Thus, the questions given for the evaluation in pretest and posttest are 35 items in sum.



**Table 2.** The effect of local culture-based pictorial narrative texts on reading comprehension by Wilcoxon test

Scores	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Z-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Pretest	37	62.3514	19.10820	-3.264	.001
Posttest	37	68.0000	13.09792		

Table 2 depicts that mean score of reading comprehension attained by students in the pretest is  $M=62.4$  and in the posttest is  $M=68.0$ . To examine the effect of the experiment, the Sig-value shows that  $p < 0.05$  which means local culture-based pictorial narrative texts give significant effect on student's comprehension in reading narrative texts.

### The correlation between reading material development and students' reading comprehension

In relation to the correlation between reading material development and students' reading comprehension, table 3 below depicts the result of the analysis. The scores of reading comprehension fulfilling the data are the scores attained by students in the posttest while the scores of perceptions are obtained from a questionnaire given after the students are taught by reading materials which are developed through local culture-based pictorial narrative texts. The students perceived their opinions by answering the questionnaire.

**Table 3.** The correlation between student's perception on reading material development and reading comprehension by Spearman test

Spearman's rho		Comprehension Scores	Perception Scores
<b>Comprehension Scores</b>	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.984**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	37	37
<b>Perception Scores</b>	Correlation Coefficient	.984**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	37	37

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 3, there is a positive correlation between student's perception on reading material development and student's comprehension in reading pictorial narrative texts where  $p < 0.01$  and  $R = 0.984$ . By this result, the scores improved in the posttest are consistent with what students perceived in the questionnaire. This is to note that the reading materials developed through local culture-based pictorial narrative texts remarkably support student's comprehension in reading the narrative texts, especially in understanding the purpose of the story, the characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution of the story.

### Students' problems in comprehending local culture-based pictorial narrative texts

The scores to find out students' problems in comprehending texts developed through local culture-based pictorial narrative texts are scores which are taken from the posttest where the breakdown of comprehension indicators is shown on Table 4.

**Table 4.** The difference of students' problems in comprehending local culture-based pictorial narrative text

Indicators	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Purpose of the story	37	67.0270	15.78763	5.268	4	.261
Characters	37	67.0270	15.78763			
Orientation	37	66.4865	13.37830			
Complications	37	66.4865	15.67309			
Resolution	37	72.9730	15.78763			

As depicted on Table 4, the mean score of each indicator to comprehend narrative texts is in between 61–80 which is classified as a good comprehension. This comprehension classification indicates that students made less problems in comprehending narrative texts in terms of the purpose of the story (M=67.03); characters in the story (M=67.03); orientation of the story (M=66.50); complication of the story (M=66.50); and resolution of the story (M=72.97).

Then, the analysis is seeking for the dominant problems made by students among those five indicators of narrative text. A *Kruskal-Wallis's* test is used to examine whether there is any difference in the mean scores of those five indicators. The result depicts that  $p > 0.05$  in which this specifies no difference among those five indicators of reading comprehension in narrative texts, or no dominant indicator to one another. This means the experiment of using local culture-based pictorial narrative texts in teaching reading at the secondary school has minimized problem discrepancies among students in comprehending the text in terms of understanding the purpose of the story, characters in the story, orientation of the story, complication of the story, and the resolution of the story.

Thus, teaching reading using local culture-based pictorial narrative texts may contribute positive learning outcome in reading comprehension since this kind of reading material do not make any discrepancy among students' problems in comprehending the narrative texts referring to five indicators evaluated. In addition, teaching reading by using that technique also provides good reading comprehension among students where they experienced less problems in their comprehension.

## Discussion

Indeed, there are many studies investigating English reading skill in terms of local culture-based reading texts to support foreign language learners in comprehending narrative texts. In this regard, this study has examined three research aims related to that matter. First, it examined the effect of local culture-based pictorial narrative texts on students' reading comprehension. Second, it examined the correlation between students' perception about integrating local culture into reading material development and students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. Third, it examined the difference of students' problems in comprehending local culture-based pictorial narrative texts in terms of the purpose of the story, the characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution.

In relation to the first research aim, the practice of implementing teaching reading to students using local culture-based pictorial narrative texts shows a good result in enhancing students' reading comprehension where there is an improvement of achievement related to the comprehension scores. This result is to reconfirm that storybook contents which are based on local culture and embedded with pictures can construct the visual information provided in the text (Woolley, 2011). In addition, this finding is also in line with Ratminingsih, et al (2020) who affirm that the activity of reading narrative stories embedded by pictures on their texts is much more interesting, so students feel more imaginative in the reading activity which then they can manage their reading comprehension better. Moreover, this study also affirms to what Alwasilah (2006) states that the development of ELT materials using local culture as its content is a very big contribution from English teachers in the use of English subject matter as a foreign language. Such implementation is one example of how to preserve the national identity of learners through the inclusion of local culture into ELT materials.

Then, related to the second research aim, a positive correlation between student's perception on reading material development using local culture-based pictorial narrative texts and student's comprehension has been evidenced in this study. Based on data analyzed, students perceived positively on the reading materials developed for teaching narrative texts. Those positive perceptions correlate with students' achievement on comprehending reading texts which are narrated by local stories. This result asserts the related studies by Restanto (2016) and Roslina (2017) that students are likely assisted with picture books in understanding the story of narratives, and students positively perceive the pictures provided to narrate the story itself. In this regard, pictures really help students to dig more information given in the story. Therefore, serial pictures in narrative story that are used to teach reading narrative texts have evidenced giving significant correlation on reading comprehension as this study deals with.

The third research aim is seeking for the difference of students' problems in comprehending local culture-based pictorial narrative texts in terms of the purpose of the story, the characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution. The result shows that there is no any difference among those five indicators of reading comprehension in narrative texts attained by students. To be more specific, the experiment of using local culture-based pictorial

narrative texts in teaching reading at the secondary school has minimized problem discrepancies among students in comprehending the text. Indeed, there are still found few problems by the students in comprehending narrative texts such as the purpose of the story, the characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution of the story. However, those problems are not dominant to be depicted by one student to the others. This might be due to the effectiveness of serial pictures narrated in the stories, so that students grasp the five components of narrative text easily.

This result affirms [Ratminingsih and Budasi \(2018\)](#) that narrative stories are easily visualized by students through embedded pictures so that they no longer have to struggle to imagine the characters and places being narrated. Further, as asserted by [Kotaman & Balci \(2017\)](#) that only in narrative text the story components such as characters, plot, conflict, and resolution of the conflict are easily and clearly presented with pictures. Therefore, the existence of verbal and visual interaction can clarify the content of the story because to understand words alone is not enough, especially for English learners at the lower-intermediate level ([Malu, 2013](#); [Sidik, 2019](#)). Thus, teaching reading using local culture-based pictorial narrative texts may contribute positive learning outcome in reading comprehension since this kind of reading material do not make any discrepancy among students' problems in comprehending the narrative texts referring to five indicators evaluated. In addition, teaching reading by using that technique also provides good reading comprehension among students where they experienced less problems in their comprehension. Of all those studies revealed, one important thing which can be highlighted is that the combination of local culture and serial pictures narrated in the story can enhance reading skill of secondary-school students in comprehending narrative texts.

## Conclusion

Understanding the narrative texts for secondary school learners does need an initial stimulus for emerging their reading motivation, so that they are interested in reading the texts in such kind. Since the narrative text contains five components to be understood such as the purpose of the story, characters, the orientation, complications, and the resolution, for ELT learners in the secondary school level, to understand all these components must be narrated through the visualization of the story. The pictorial narrative text is one of techniques to narrate the story. For this reason, local stories such as legends and fairytales based on learners' culture which have been developed through pictorial texts can be used to teach reading, especially the narrative texts. In this regard, through experiment made by this study using local culture-based pictorial narrative texts has evidenced a positive influence on the reading comprehension of ELT learners at the secondary school level. Furthermore, pictorial narrative texts based on local culture are also able to minimize the gap in problems faced among students in terms of understanding the purpose of the story, characters, orientation, complication, and the resolution of the narratives. As a result, pictorial narrative texts based on local culture are highly

recommended to be developed by teachers of English in teaching narrative texts at the secondary school level in accordance with ELT learners' culture.

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