

Chapter 6:

Engage, Read, Reflect: Deep Learning through Active Extensive Reading Strategies

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A. INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Belajar program has sparked educational innovation in Indonesia. It encourages learner independence and provides flexible learning pathways. This shift aligns with the rise of deep learning, which emphasizes lifelong learning, problem-solving, and analytical thinking in education (Bachtiar et al., 2025; Arina & Tri Herlambang, 2025). As Indonesia modernizes its curriculum, deep learning principles offer a chance to equip students (Gen Z) with essential skills for future challenges (Hasbi, et al., 2024). Within this evolving educational landscape, project-based, inquiry-based, and reflective learning take on greater significance. These key student-centered approaches can significantly advance the goals of deep learning. They require comprehensive teacher preparation, coherent curriculum alignment, and strong institutional infrastructure (Arina & Isyanto, 2025). With this support, these pedagogies enable students to engage in complex and meaningful learning experiences. They foster critical thinking and promote the synthesis of knowledge. They also encourage students to apply learning in diverse and authentic contexts (Nurhasanah et al., 2025). By emphasizing learner autonomy, sustained inquiry, and reflective practice, these approaches enhance cognitive development. They also help

cultivate enduring understanding and transferable competencies essential for lifelong learning.

Extensive reading activities can be an effective tool for facilitating and operationalizing deep learning in the classroom (Simanjuntak & Manurung, 2025). Extensive reading, as part of a student-centered curriculum, encourages students to read self-selected literature in significant quantities for enjoyment and general comprehension, rather than just for academic assessment (Samutkao & Chaturongakul, 2025). Interdisciplinary projects, critical conversations, and reflective writing can be based on substantial reading when combined with project-based and inquiry-based frameworks. When teaching the Extensive Reading class, the author employed a number of strategies that increased student participation and cultivated a long-lasting love of reading including vocabulary and grammar (Hasbi, et al., 2025). These methods align well with the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, which prioritizes meaningful involvement, flexible learning pathways by using technology (Hasbi, et al., 2024), and student autonomy. The exercises also embody the tenets of deep learning, helping students move beyond simple comprehension and develop critical thinking, knowledge synthesis, and application skills.

B. TEACHING DESIGN

Activity 1: Speed Reading (Newspaper or Magazine Materials)

Activity Description:

In this activity, the students will participate in a Speed Reading and Extensive Reading session. To start, select one or more authentic texts—such as magazines, newspaper articles, or short stories—that interest them. The students read chosen texts purposefully,

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/sep/06/how-spot-chemicals-avoid-food-kitchenware-cosmetics> aiming to improve their reading fluency, comprehension, and critical thinking, which are essential for academic success and lifelong learning. As the students read, they focus on identifying key ideas

and reflecting on content that resonates with their personal interests. After reading, the students share their reflections with peers to deepen their engagement and understanding. This activity encourages the students to become more autonomous readers and aligns with the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, supporting flexible learning and meaningful participation.

Objective:

This activity aims at improving reading fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking through an authentic text that connects with real-life health choices and environmental awareness.

Step 1: Speed Reading Practice

1. The students will have 7–8 minutes to silently read the article.
2. Read as quickly and efficiently as they can without losing comprehension.
3. Focus on identifying the main ideas, chemical names, and solutions mentioned.

Step 2: Post-Reading Summary

In 2–3 sentences, summarize the main message of the article.

What is the article warning readers about? What are some general tips provided?

Step 3: Comprehension Questions

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. What are endocrine disruptors, and why are they harmful?
2. The article mentions that “fragrance” on product labels is a red flag. Why?
3. Name two types of additives the article says should be avoided in food.
4. What are PFAS and why are they called “forever chemicals”?
5. What material is recommended as a safer alternative to Teflon-coated pans?

Step 4: Vocabulary Builder

Choose 3–5 unfamiliar or scientific words from the article. For each word:

- Write the word
- Write a brief definition in your own words
- Use it in a sentence

Step 5: Critical Reflection

Answer one or more of the following:

- Which part of the article was most surprising to you? Why?
- How can this information affect your daily habits or consumer choices?
- What challenges might people face when trying to avoid these chemicals?
- In what ways does this reading encourage learner independence, as emphasized in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum?

Optional: Peer Sharing (Group Discussion)

In small groups, share:

- The most shocking fact you learned
- A harmful product you've used without realizing it
- One change you're willing to try after reading this article

Activity 2: Gambling Game for Scores (Short Story Materials)

Activity Description:

Here's an engaging "Gambling Game for Scores" reading activity tailored around the short story "She Closed Her Eyes for One Second, And Woke Up in Yesterday" <https://englishstory.in/bedtime-story-she-closed-her-eyes-for-one-second/>. This activity is designed to make reading fun, competitive, and highly engaging. Students will work in groups, read short stories or other texts, and answer questions by "betting" points on their answers. The more confident they are, the more

they can bet and the more they can win (or lose). This encourages Careful reading and comprehension, Group discussion and collaboration, Strategic thinking, and Motivation to engage with multiple texts.

Objective:

Groups will read the story and answer questions by betting points on their confidence levels. This adds fun, tension, and critical thinking, encouraging careful reading and discussion. The aim is to enhance comprehension, group collaboration, and reflective learning.

Step 1: Group Formation & Story Reading

1. Divide the class into groups of 3–5 students.
2. Distribute the story text to each group.
3. Allow 15–20 minutes for silent reading and group discussion of key details and vocabulary.

Step 2: Betting Round

1. Each group begins with 100 points.
2. For each question:
 - a. Decide together how many points to bet (between 5 and 30 points).
 - b. Then, provide an answer.
 - c. Correct answers earn the bet amount; incorrect ones lose it.
3. Encourage thoughtful betting—use reading clues and discussion to guide confidence.

Step 3: Question Set

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. What unusual change did Maya notice when she reopened her eyes on the train?
 - A. Everyone had disappeared
 - B. Advertisements were gone and the lighting was different
 - C. The train was going backwards

- D. It was daytime
2. What replaced Maya's phone?
 - A photograph
 - B. A notebook with her name inside
 - C. A key
 - D. A letter
 3. What did Maya witness outside her grandmother's house?
 - A. Her younger self is waiting for her father
 - B. Her father (as a child) holding a bouquet
 - C. Her grandmother cooking by hand
 - D. A bakery painted blue
 4. How did Maya's attitude change when she returned to her present-day train?
 - A. She ran off as usual
 - B. She walked slowly, called her dad, and smiled
 - C. She ignored others and remained silent
 - D. She rushed to work
 5. What is the moral of the story?
 - A. Mornings should be appreciated
 - B. Always carry a notebook
 - C. Understanding the past leads to kindness
 - D. Time travel is possible

Open-Ended / Bonus Questions (worth double points)

6. How did experiencing the past change Maya's perception of her family?
7. Do you think Maya's journey was magical or metaphorical? Explain.
8. Describe a moment in your life when understanding someone's past changed how you felt about them.

Step 4: Determine a Winner

1. Once all questions are answered and points tallied, announce the group with the highest score as the winner.
2. Optionally, provide rewards like small certificates or tokens.

C. FURTHER DISCUSSION

The study by Zamfira et al. (2024) examines the impact of speed-reading strategies, specifically continuous text fading, on information processing efficiency and reading comprehension. These strategies emphasize the development of effective reading skills rather than simply increasing reading speed. The relevance of these findings is particularly evident when considered in the context of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Implementing speed reading techniques as described in the study may foster greater student autonomy and confidence in reading (Ekasari, 2021). Improved reading fluency enables students to allocate more cognitive resources to critical thinking, synthesizing information, and engaging with content at a deeper level, which are essential elements of deep learning.

Stiegelbauer and Diaconescu (2024) highlight the effectiveness of board and video games as immersive tools for English language learning, supporting vocabulary, communication, and critical thinking. Thoughtfully designed game mechanics, such as randomness, surprise rewards, and risk-reward choices (like in gambling game), can ethically boost learner motivation and engagement. Incorporating deep learning technologies allows these games to adapt in real time to individual learners, enabling differentiated instruction. This approach aligns with Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, which values learner agency, creativity, and personalized, joyful learning. Integrating game-based learning with adaptive technology provides educators with a practical way to create dynamic, student-centered environments that promote both language proficiency and learner autonomy (Muthmainnah & Hasbi, 2022; Prastiwi & Lestari, 2025).

AUTHOR

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