

Improving the Reading Comprehension of Eighth-Grade Students through the Scaffolded Reading Method: A Classroom Action Research at MTs Muhammadiyah Kota Gorontalo

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a foundational competence for academic success in English as a foreign language, yet many Indonesian junior secondary students continue to struggle with understanding English texts. This study aimed to improve the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at MTs Muhammadiyah Kota Gorontalo through the implementation of the scaffolded reading method. The study employed classroom action research following the Kemmis and McTaggart model, conducted in two cycles of three meetings each and involving 18 students (nine male, nine female). Data were collected through multiple-choice reading comprehension tests (pre-test and post-tests), teacher and student observation sheets, and interviews, and were analyzed using descriptive quantitative and qualitative techniques against a success criterion of 70% classical completeness (KKM = 70). The results showed a consistent improvement across phases: the mean score rose from 56.1 in the pre-test (16.7% of students reaching the KKM) to 66.1 after Cycle I (55.6%) and 75.6 after Cycle II (83.3%), exceeding the success criterion. Scaffolding techniques—teacher modeling through read-alouds, shared and guided reading, structured group discussion of narrative texts, vocabulary journaling, and the use of picture storybooks—progressively increased student engagement and independence in comprehending texts. It can be concluded that the scaffolded reading method is effective in improving the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students, and its staged release of responsibility offers a practical framework that English teachers can adopt in comparable madrasah contexts.

Keywords: reading comprehension; scaffolded reading; classroom action research; narrative text; EFL

INTRODUCTION

Reading occupies a strategic position in the mastery of English as a foreign language because it is the principal channel through which students access information, expand vocabulary, and build the background knowledge required by other language skills (Habibie & Brianto, 2023; Ramadhani & Ayuba, 2023). In the Indonesian curriculum (M. M. S. A. T. Pido et al., 2023), reading comprehension is a priority competence that must be mastered by students at every level of education; through reading activities, students obtain information and knowledge that they would not otherwise encounter (Hafizhah & Hasan, 2023; Nabu, 2023). Nevertheless, students' reading comprehension remains one of the competencies that is still relatively low. Many students find reading activities boring, struggle to grasp the meaning or information contained in the texts they read, and continue to experience difficulty in understanding English passages even after repeated instruction in reading comprehension (Ali et al., 2025; Dayanto et al., 2025; Jusuf & Iskandar, 2025; Kaaba et al., 2025; Kasamo et al., 2025).

Reading comprehension is a complicated cognitive process: when someone reads, the activity is not merely oral or silent decoding (Anuli et al., 2023; Kaharu et al., 2023), but a cognitive act that affects how information is stored, how understanding is formed, and how a point of view on the text is determined. Comprehension begins with the knowledge a reader has acquired before reading; the reader connects new information with prior information to obtain new knowledge (Gama et al., 2023; Lembah et al., 2023). The message conveyed in written form is the most important element that students must grasp, because the main purpose of reading is to understand the ideas presented in printed material (Amala et al., 2024; Budunio & Saleh, 2024; Gobel et al., 2024; Pontoh et al., 2024). Comprehension is commonly described at four levels—literal, interpretive, critical, and creative—with literal comprehension, the understanding of meaning explicitly stated in the text, constituting the foundational level appropriate for lower secondary learners (Jusuf et al., 2024; Rajak et al., 2025; Yulianti et al., 2025).

The goals of reading comprehension include obtaining details and facts, identifying the main idea, recognizing the organization of the text, drawing conclusions, classifying information, and making comparisons (Ape et al., 2025; Moji et al., 2025; Nurwati & Gusnawaty, 2025; Pakaja et al., 2025). Consequently, students are expected not only to understand the text but also to manipulate the information they obtain—expressing thoughts, feelings, and views in group discussion during the teaching and learning process. Comprehension instruction, in turn, must help students interpret information precisely and in accordance with the meaning of words in the reading (Taylor & Beach, 1984).

This condition was also observed at MTs Muhammadiyah Kota Gorontalo. Based on daily test scores on reading skill practice administered by the English teacher, many eighth-grade students could not meet the minimum completeness criterion (Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal/KKM) of 70. According to the English teacher, students' difficulties are rooted in limited vocabulary (Hanafi et al., 2026; Katili et al., 2026; N. W. T. Pido, 2026; Uwente et al.,

2026), low reading interest, and the tendency to translate texts word by word rather than to construct meaning; as a result, students misinterpret the information presented in text-based activities. A pre-test administered before the intervention confirmed this diagnosis: only 3 of 18 students (16.7%) reached the KKM, with a class mean of 56.1. Such a profile signals that conventional practice—listening to the teacher’s explanation, completing assignments, and translating texts—has not been sufficient to develop comprehension.

One instructional alternative that directly addresses this problem is the scaffolded reading method. Grounded in Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, scaffolding refers to graduated assistance provided within the learner’s zone of proximal development: support is given when tasks exceed students’ current capability and is progressively withdrawn as competence develops (Wood et al., 1976). In reading pedagogy, Abidin (2013) defines scaffolded reading as a method that develops students’ reading ability through reading activities arranged in stages—from the comprehension stage, to the critical stage, to the creative stage—in which students work on complex, realistic texts while receiving just enough assistance to complete the task. Empirical studies in Indonesian secondary schools report that scaffolded reading and the related Scaffolded Reading Experience (SRE) framework improve students’ ability to find main ideas, locate specific information, and draw inferences from texts (Wartiningsih, 2019; Ismayanti, 2021; Apriyani et al., 2024; Ndraha et al., 2023).

Although the effectiveness of scaffolding for reading has been demonstrated in several contexts, its systematic application through classroom action research in madrasah tsanawiyah settings—where students’ exposure to English is typically limited—remains underreported. The present study therefore applied the scaffolded reading method in two action-research cycles to answer two questions: (1) How is the scaffolded reading method implemented to improve students’ reading comprehension in class VIII of MTs Muhammadiyah Kota Gorontalo? and (2) To what extent does students’ reading comprehension improve after the implementation of the scaffolded reading method? The findings are expected to enrich the theory and practice of English language teaching by providing classroom-based evidence on how staged support can be organized, and to offer English teachers a practical reference for selecting effective methods to improve reading comprehension.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed classroom action research (CAR/PTK), a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by practitioners to improve the rationality and quality of their own practices. The design followed the model of Kemmis and McTaggart, in which action research proceeds through a dynamic and complementary spiral of four phases—planning, acting, observing, and reflecting—repeated across cycles (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Burns, 1999; Arikunto, 2012). The research was conducted in two cycles, each consisting of three meetings with a time allocation of 2 × 35 minutes per meeting; the reflection of Cycle I served as the basis for revising the plan of Cycle II. Figure 1 presents the cyclical model adopted in this

study. Throughout the process, the researcher collaborated with the English subject teacher, who acted as observer, to identify problems in English learning, plan the actions, implement them in class, and evaluate their effects (Bajeneti et al., 2026; Habibie & Malik, 2026; Husin et al., 2026; Utina et al., 2026).

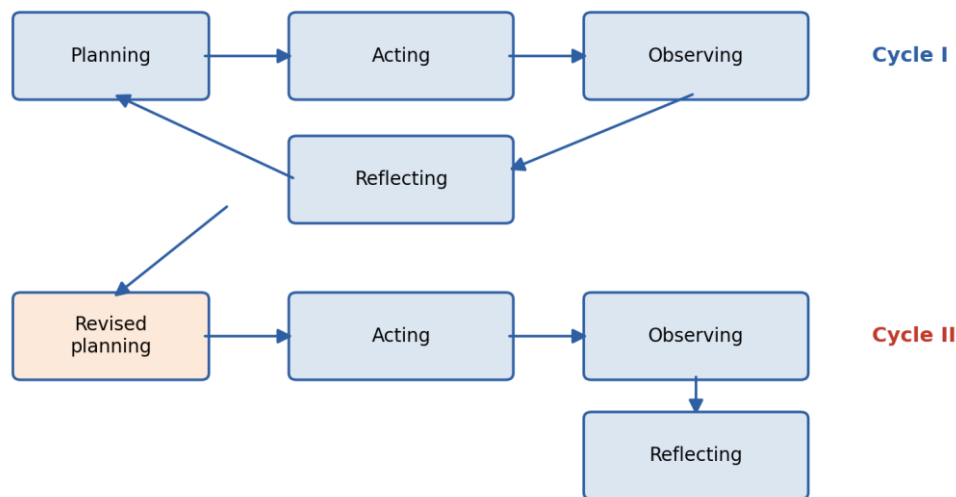


Figure 1. Classroom action research model of Kemmis and McTaggart adopted in the study

Setting and Participants

The research was carried out at MTs Muhammadiyah Kota Gorontalo from July to September 2024, with the final report prepared in September–October 2024. The participants were the 18 students of class VIII—nine boys and nine girls—in the 2024/2025 academic year. Prior to the intervention, learning in this class was dominated by listening to the teacher’s explanation, completing assignments, and translating texts, and most students had not reached the KKM of 70 in reading-skill assessments.

Procedure

Each cycle followed the four CAR phases. In the planning phase, the researcher determined the narrative-text material, prepared lesson plans (learning modules) that embedded the scaffolded reading steps, selected the texts and picture storybooks, and prepared the observation sheets, evaluation sheets, and documentation tools. In the acting phase, the scaffolded reading method was implemented in three meetings per cycle: the teacher opened with apperception and prediction questions about narrative text; modeled reading aloud with attention to pronunciation and meaning; guided shared reading; organized students into small groups to read and discuss the problems, characters, and moral messages of narrative texts (e.g., *The Clever Deer* and *The Emperor’s Call*); asked students to record and memorize newly encountered vocabulary; and closed each meeting with confirmation questions such as “What is the purpose of the text?” In the observing phase, the collaborating teacher recorded the implementation of each scaffolded reading step and students’ engagement using structured observation sheets. In the reflecting phase, test results and observation data were analyzed to

identify shortcomings—such as untranslated material sheets, unequal distribution of teacher questions, and passive group members in Cycle I—which informed the revised plan of Cycle II. A post-test was administered at the end of each cycle.

Instruments

Three instruments were used: (a) reading comprehension tests, (b) observation guides, and (c) interview guides. The test instrument comprised 10 multiple-choice items based on narrative texts, administered as a pre-test before the action and as post-tests at the end of each cycle, with 20 minutes of working time. The test blueprint covered three indicators, as shown in Table 1, and student performance on constructed responses was assessed with an analytic rubric covering grammatical choice, vocabulary, and coherence (Table 2). The observation guides recorded, for the teacher, the implementation of the scaffolded reading steps (text selection, pre-reading activities, modeling, shared reading, independent reading with support, group discussion, encouragement of independent analysis, and feedback), and, for the students, interest in the topic, attention to explanations of difficult words, fluency, independence and confidence in reading, activeness in discussion, and responsiveness to feedback.

Table 1. Blueprint of the reading comprehension test

Indicator	Sub-indicator	Form	Items
Ability to compose text responses	Students can write a clear and structured response to the text read	MC	1–10
Comprehension of narrative text	Students can understand a narrative story and analyze elements such as plot, character, and theme	MC	1–10
Activity and participation in discussion	Students are able to refer to parts of the text to support their opinions or answers in discussion	MC	1–10

Table 2. Analytic rubric for assessing students' reading responses

Aspect	Criteria	Score
Grammatical choice	Correct grammatical choices / partially correct / inappropriate language choice	3 / 2 / 1
Vocabulary	Reads vocabulary correctly / inaccurately / incorrectly	3 / 2 / 1
Coherence	Reading is coherent / less coherent / not coherent	3 / 2 / 1

Data Analysis and Success Criteria

Data were analyzed with descriptive techniques. Qualitative data from observation sheets and interviews with the English teacher were analyzed thematically to describe the implementation of each scaffolded reading step and changes in student engagement. Quantitative data from the pre-test and post-tests were analyzed descriptively by computing the class mean, the highest and lowest scores, and classical completeness—the percentage of

students attaining the KKM of 70. All summary statistics reported in this article were recomputed from the complete individual score data. The action was declared successful if at least 70% of the 18 students reached the KKM.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Pre-cycle Condition

The pre-test, administered before the action using 10 multiple-choice items on narrative text, confirmed the low initial condition of the class. As summarized in Table 3, the class mean was 56.1, with the highest score of 70 and the lowest of 40; only 3 of 18 students (16.7%) reached the KKM. Interviews with the English teacher attributed this profile to limited vocabulary, low reading interest, and students' dependence on word-by-word translation. These data established the baseline against which the effects of the scaffolded reading method were evaluated.

Table 3. Summary of pre-test results (pre-cycle)

Component	Value
Total score (n = 18)	1,010
Mean score	56.1
Highest score	70
Lowest score	40
Students reaching KKM (≥ 70)	3 (16.7%)
Students below KKM	15 (83.3%)

Cycle I

Planning. The team prepared learning modules embedding the scaffolded reading steps for narrative text, selected the texts, and prepared evaluation and observation sheets. *Acting.* Three meetings were conducted (4, 11, and 25 July 2024). In the first meeting, the teacher opened with apperception questions (“Do you know what narrative text is?”), distributed a narrative text, modeled reading, formed groups, and guided a discussion of the conflicts faced by the characters, providing scaffolding according to student needs—for example, directing attention to important aspects of the text. In the second and third meetings the procedure was repeated with different story titles; students additionally recorded and memorized newly encountered vocabulary. Post-test I was administered at the end of the third meeting.

Observing. The teacher observation sheet showed that most scaffolded reading steps were implemented—appropriate text selection, effective pre-reading activities, expressive modeling, shared reading, supported independent reading, and group discussion—but two steps were not yet optimal: encouraging students to analyze the text independently and providing

individual feedback during discussion. Three managerial shortcomings were also recorded: the material sheets were not accompanied by translations, so the teacher rewrote translations on the board; when no student asked questions the teacher immediately moved on; and questioning was concentrated on a few active students. The student observation sheet indicated growing interest and attention, although some students were still busy chatting, left the classroom, or were shy to ask questions, and several still struggled to pronounce certain words.

Test results. As summarized in Table 4, the class mean rose to 66.1 (from 56.1), the highest score reached 80, and the number of students attaining the KKM increased from 3 to 10 (55.6%). *Reflecting.* Although all indicators improved, classical completeness (55.6%) remained below the 70% criterion, and observation data showed that some scaffolding steps had not been implemented and some students remained passive in group discussion. The revised plan for Cycle II therefore included: providing glossaries/translations with the material sheets, distributing questions evenly across students, intensifying guidance for passive groups, optimizing the use of picture storybooks to support comprehension, and reinforcing the vocabulary-journal routine.

Table 4. Summary of post-test results in Cycle I

Component	Value
Total score (n = 18)	1,190
Mean score	66.1
Highest score	80
Lowest score	50
Students reaching KKM (≥ 70)	10 (55.6%)
Students below KKM	8 (44.4%)

Cycle II

Cycle II was conducted in three meetings (11 and 18 July, and 8 August 2024) following the revised plan. The scaffolded reading procedure was repeated with new narrative texts (including *The Emperor's Call* and *The Clever Deer*) and with the improvements identified in the reflection of Cycle I: translations accompanied the texts, the teacher distributed questions to all students rather than only the active ones, group guidance was intensified, and picture storybooks were used to anchor discussion. Post-test II was administered at the end of the third meeting.

Observing. The observation results in Cycle II showed marked improvement. Two aspects were categorized as very good—students' enthusiasm in participating in learning with the scaffolded reading method and their completion of the tasks given—and two aspects as good: significant improvement in understanding the topics of the narrative texts and participation in group work. Students had begun to be active in group discussion, asked about material they had not understood, and off-task talking decreased while the teacher was

explaining. *Test results.* As summarized in Table 5, the class mean reached 75.6, the highest score was 90, and 15 of 18 students (83.3%) attained the KKM. *Reflecting.* Because classical completeness (83.3%) exceeded the 70% success criterion and the observation data corroborated improved engagement, the action was declared successful and the research was terminated at Cycle II.

Table 5. Summary of post-test results in Cycle II

Component	Value
Total score (n = 18)	1,360
Mean score	75.6
Highest score	90
Lowest score	60
Students reaching KKM (≥ 70)	15 (83.3%)
Students below KKM	3 (16.7%)

Improvement across Phases

Table 6 and Figure 2 juxtapose the three measurement points. The class mean improved by 10.0 points from the pre-test to Cycle I and by a further 9.4 points from Cycle I to Cycle II, a total gain of 19.4 points. Classical completeness rose from 16.7% to 55.6% and then to 83.3%—an increase of 66.7 percentage points overall—crossing the 70% success threshold only after the refinements introduced in Cycle II. Figure 3 shows how the entire score distribution shifted rightward: scores of 40 disappeared after Cycle I, scores of 50 disappeared after Cycle II, and scores of 80–90, absent in the pre-test, were achieved by ten students in Cycle II. The improvement was thus not confined to a few high achievers but reflected a class-wide movement toward and beyond the KKM.

Table 6. Comparison of students' reading comprehension across phases

Component	Pre-test	Post-test I	Post-test II
Mean score	56.1	66.1	75.6
Highest score	70	80	90
Lowest score	40	50	60
Reaching KKM	3 (16.7%)	10 (55.6%)	15 (83.3%)
Below KKM	15 (83.3%)	8 (44.4%)	3 (16.7%)

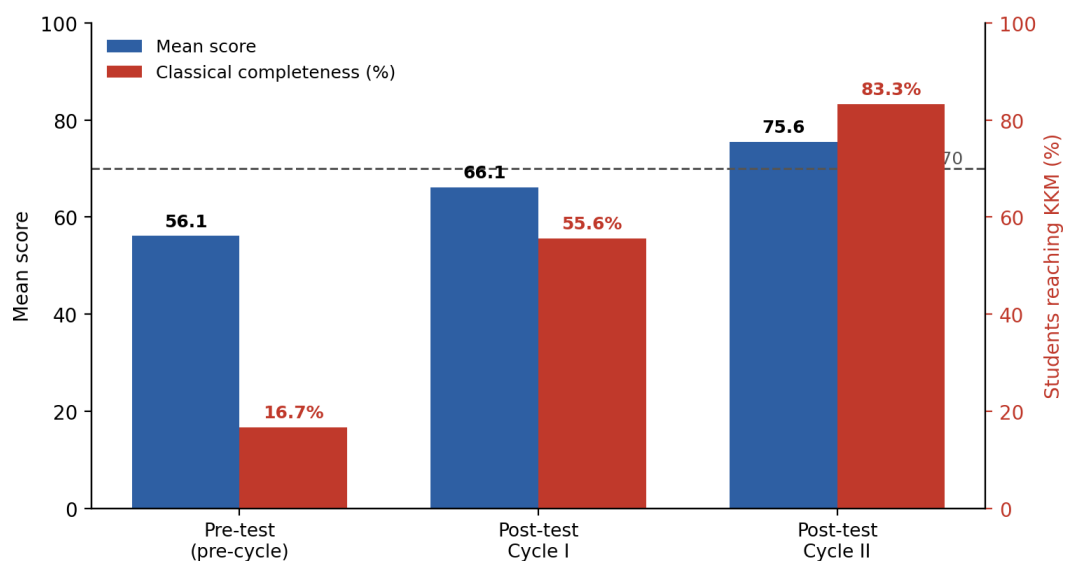


Figure 2. Mean scores and classical completeness across the pre-test, Cycle I, and Cycle II

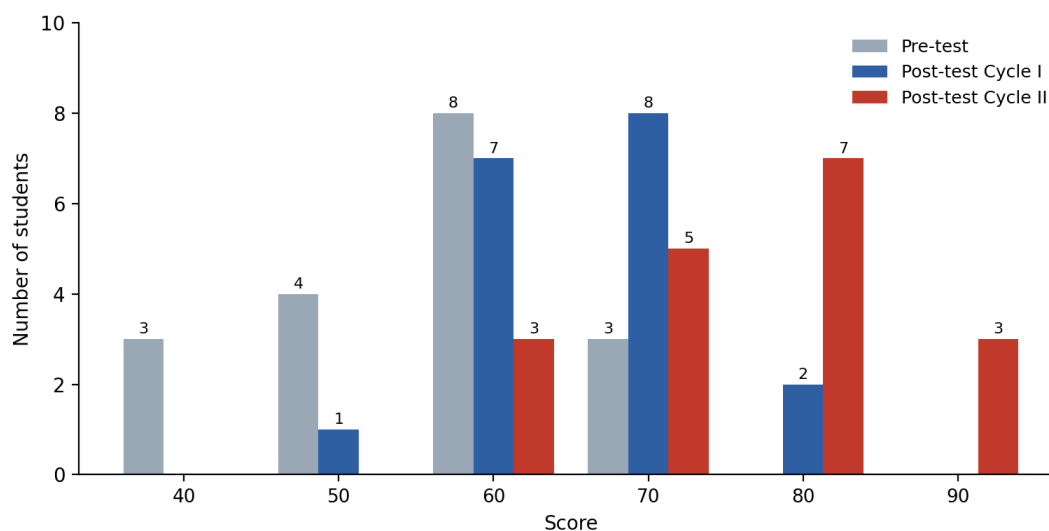


Figure 3. Distribution of students' scores in the pre-test, post-test Cycle I, and post-test Cycle II

Discussion

The first research question concerned how the scaffolded reading method is implemented to improve reading comprehension. The implementation in this study operationalized the staged-support logic of the method: pre-reading preparation and vocabulary introduction, teacher modeling, shared reading, guided group discussion, and gradually more independent work, consistent with the stages described by Abidin (2013) and with the design principles of the Scaffolded Reading Experience (Graves & Graves, 2003; Clark & Graves, 2005). The observation data show that the quality of implementation—not merely the presence of the method—determined its effects. In Cycle I, the omission of two steps (encouraging independent analysis and individualized feedback) and the concentration of questions on a few active students limited the gains; after these were corrected in Cycle II, both engagement and achievement rose markedly. This pattern reflects Vygotsky's (1978) account of the gradual

release of responsibility: support must be calibrated and progressively handed over, and scaffolds that remain static—or that reach only some learners—fail to move the whole class through its zone of proximal development (Daud et al., 2026; Diko et al., 2026; Habibie & Talib, 2026; Patilanggio et al., 2026).

The second research question concerned the extent of improvement. The class mean rose from 56.1 to 66.1 and then to 75.6, and classical completeness from 16.7% to 55.6% and finally 83.3%, surpassing the 70% criterion. These results are consistent with previous classroom studies. Wartiningsih (2019) found that scaffolded reading improved vocational students' comprehension of texts, helping them find main ideas, locate specific information, and understand word meanings; the present study documents parallel gains at the madrasah tsanawiyah level. The magnitude and trajectory of improvement also mirror Ndraha et al. (2023), who reported means rising from 63.6 (Cycle I) to 82.5 (Cycle II) with the SRE strategy on narrative texts, and align with Ismayanti (2021) and Herawati et al. (2020), who documented comprehension gains through scaffolding-based strategies in Indonesian secondary classrooms. Salem (2016) adds an instructive nuance corroborated here: teachers may apply scaffolding partially or unsystematically, and its benefits materialize fully only when the strategy is implemented deliberately and completely—as occurred between Cycle I and Cycle II of this study.

Three features of the intervention appear to explain its effectiveness. First, teacher modeling and shared reading made expert comprehension processes visible—pronunciation, intonation, word-attack, and the interpretation of difficult sentences—giving students strategies they lacked as word-by-word translators (Ananda et al., 2025; Dunggio & Akhmad, 2025; Pobela et al., 2025; Razak et al., 2025). Second, structured group discussion of narrative problems created the social interaction through which meaning was negotiated, activating the cooperative dimension of the ZPD; observation data show that discussion participation was precisely the aspect that improved from Cycle I to Cycle II. Third, the vocabulary-journal routine and the use of picture storybooks addressed the two root difficulties diagnosed at baseline—limited vocabulary and low reading interest—by making new words an explicit object of learning and by providing visual support for meaning construction (Datungsolang et al., 2025; Gusnawaty et al., 2025; Jusuf et al., 2025; Otoluwa et al., 2025). Together these mechanisms moved students from assisted to increasingly independent comprehension, the defining aim of scaffolded instruction (Akhmad et al., 2025; Kamaru et al., 2025; Saleh et al., 2025; Tuluki et al., 2025).

Some limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved a single intact class of 18 students in one madrasah, without a comparison group, so the findings describe improvement within this context rather than generalizable effect sizes (Efendi et al., 2026; Habibie et al., 2026). Comprehension was measured primarily with 10-item multiple-choice tests on narrative text; other genres and deeper constructed-response measures were not examined. Finally, as in all classroom action research, the researcher also acted as the teacher,

which strengthens ecological validity but requires the triangulation—observer records and test data—on which the present conclusions rest.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the series of classroom action research activities—from planning and implementation through observation, data collection, and analysis—it can be concluded that the implementation of the scaffolded reading method improves the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at MTs Muhammadiyah Kota Gorontalo. Students' reading comprehension increased in every phase: the class mean rose from 56.1 in the pre-test to 66.1 in Cycle I and 75.6 in Cycle II, while the proportion of students reaching the KKM of 70 rose from 16.7% to 55.6% and finally 83.3%, exceeding the 70% success criterion. The improvement was accompanied by observable changes in learning behavior: greater enthusiasm, more active group discussion, increased willingness to ask questions, and reduced off-task behavior.

Three suggestions follow from these findings. For students, sustained enthusiasm in the learning process should be maintained, since engagement proved decisive in converting staged support into comprehension gains. For English teachers, the scaffolded reading method—complete with modeling, shared reading, evenly distributed questioning, vocabulary journaling, and picture-storybook support—can serve as a practical framework for teaching reading in comparable madrasah contexts, with attention to implementing all steps rather than a subset. For future researchers, this study can be extended to other text genres, larger samples, and designs with comparison groups, and can explore aspects not addressed here, such as strategies for helping students find main ideas more independently.

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