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Using the Guided Reading Strategy to Improve Students' Reading Comprehension

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A B S T R A C T

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in English learning, yet many students still face difficulties in understanding texts effectively. This gap between theory and classroom practice calls for more effective teaching strategies. This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of the Guided Reading Strategy (GRS) in improving the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri Model Terpadu Madani. Using a quasi-experimental design, the research involved an experimental and a control group. The sample consisted of 64 students, with 32 students in the experimental group (Raden Saleh class) and 32 students in the control group (Gajah Mada class), selected through purposive sampling. Data were obtained through pre- tests and post-tests and analyzed using SPSS version 27 with Levene's Test, Shapiro– Wilk Test, and the Mann–Whitney U Test. The findings revealed that the mean post- test score of the experimental group (78.31) was approximately 20% higher than that of the control group (65.06), indicating a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension. Therefore, the Guided Reading Strategy effectively enhanced students' ability to comprehend definition exposition texts.

Keywords: *Guided Reading Strategy, Reading Comprehension, English Learning*
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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension remains a persistent challenge for many students at SMP Negeri Model Terpadu Madani. The conventional teaching method, which primarily requires students to read texts and answer comprehension questions, often fails to emphasize the actual process of constructing meaning from the text. This approach does not adequately diagnose students' comprehension difficulties and offers limited formative feedback, thereby hindering the gradual development of their reading skills. Several factors contribute to this issue, including the complexity of the texts, students' limited vocabulary, insufficient knowledge of text genres, and minimal exposure to effective reading strategies. Additionally, motivational factors, confidence levels, and individual learning differences significantly affect students' reading progress. Therefore, the implementation of an innovative, structured, and student-centered teaching method is essential to effectively enhance students' reading comprehension. One promising instructional approach that has gained widespread attention in literacy education is the Guided Reading Strategy (GRS). Guided reading is a structured, teacher-led approach in which students read carefully selected texts in small groups, allowing teachers to scaffold comprehension according to students' needs. According to Kahar and Garpenassy (2024), GRS provides explicit guidance and structured support by directing students to read materials aligned with specific instructional goals. This approach promotes active engagement with texts and encourages learners to practice essential comprehension skills such as predicting, inferring, questioning, summarizing, and monitoring their understanding.

A considerable body of research supports the effectiveness of GRS in improving reading comprehension. Ramsa and Rawian (2021) emphasized that guided reading creates a systematic and teacher-supervised framework that enhances not only comprehension but also

students' vocabulary development and critical thinking. Thage (2021) likewise reported significant improvements in students' reading proficiency, particularly in fluency and comprehension, noting that GRS helps cultivate positive attitudes toward reading. Syahputera (2016), through classroom action research, found that students' comprehension scores increased substantially after GRS implementation, demonstrating that structured small-group reading could effectively enhance comprehension processes. Similarly, Fadli (2019) observed improvements in both comprehension outcomes and classroom engagement after applying GRS in an eighth-grade setting. More recently, Kahar & Garpenassy (2024) concluded that GRS consistently improved reading performance across instructional cycles, reinforcing its reliability as an effective intervention in junior high schools.

In addition to its effectiveness, GRS supports differentiated instruction by allowing teachers to group students based on their reading abilities. This enables tailored guidance that addresses learners' specific comprehension needs. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2017), one of the leading authorities in guided reading, small-group instruction enables teachers to offer targeted support, helping students develop strategies they can eventually apply independently. This individualized approach promotes a more inclusive learning environment where diverse learners can progress at their own pace while still engaging meaningfully with the text.

Given these strong theoretical and empirical foundations, this study investigates the implementation of the Guided Reading Strategy to improve the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri Model Terpadu Madani. By examining its effectiveness through a quasi-experimental design, this research aims to provide empirical evidence on how GRS can address students' academic challenges while simultaneously fostering their personal growth as independent and confident readers.

Literature Review

Reading and Reading Comprehension

Reading is a complex cognitive process involving active interaction between the reader and the text. Hidayati (2022) defines reading as a critical and creative process that enables readers to gain a comprehensive understanding of written material. Similarly, Aisah (2019) views reading as an active process of constructing meaning from written language rather than simply recognizing words. These perspectives emphasize that effective reading requires comprehension, interpretation, and integration of ideas.

According to Heriyawati (2013), literal comprehension refers to the ability to identify information that is directly stated in the text, such as main ideas, facts, and details. This level of comprehension serves as the foundation for higher levels, including inferential, critical, and creative comprehension. Without mastery of literal comprehension, readers may struggle to interpret complex meanings within a text.

Reading comprehension, as stated by Ye et al. (2022), involves multiple cognitive activities that engage both linguistic understanding and prior knowledge. It is not merely decoding words but also interpreting and connecting information. Khotimah (2020) further asserts that students' comprehension improves when they read independently in a relaxed setting, emphasizing that an effective environment and strategy contribute significantly to comprehension success. Thus, reading comprehension represents a dynamic interaction among reader, text, and context.

Levels and Strategies of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension operates on several levels: literal, inferential, critical, and creative. At the literal level, readers focus on explicit meaning; at the inferential level, they interpret implied ideas. Critical reading requires analysis and evaluation of content, while creative reading encourages readers to generate new ideas and responses (Firdausi, 2020; DeBruin-Parecki & Cartwright, 2023; Safrudin et al., 2023; Al-Rimawi & Al-Masri, 2022). These progressive levels reflect the development from basic understanding to analytical and creative engagement with the text.

To enhance comprehension across these levels, various strategies can be employed. Ildarovna (2023) categorizes effective reading strategies into scanning, skimming, intensive,

and extensive reading. Scanning helps identify specific information quickly, skimming focuses on general ideas, intensive reading requires careful analysis for detailed understanding, and extensive reading promotes enjoyment and fluency. Strategic use of these approaches supports comprehension at both surface and deeper levels.

Guided Reading Strategy (GRS)

Guided Reading Strategy (GRS) is a structured, small-group instructional method where teachers guide students based on their reading levels. Zahran (2025) describes GRS as a systematic approach designed to help students recall, discuss, and understand relationships within a text while enabling teachers to select appropriate materials. Similarly, Surya et al. (2023) emphasize that GRS allows learners to work in groups suited to their abilities, enhancing engagement, comprehension, and feedback.

The GRS model typically includes three stages: before, during, and after reading (Nurdianingsih, 2021; Huang et al., 2023). In the pre-reading stage, teachers activate students' prior knowledge and introduce key vocabulary. During reading, students engage in guided questioning and discussion, while in the post-reading stage, they reflect on the text and consolidate their understanding through analysis or creative activities. Dixon and Oakhill (2024) highlight that teacher facilitation at each stage is crucial for developing comprehension and metacognitive awareness.

The advantages of GRS are well-documented. Sitepu et al. (2023) and Oral et al. (2022) note that this strategy develops independent reading habits while maintaining guided instruction. It also promotes social learning, enables teachers to observe reading behaviors, and fosters both fluency and comprehension. Students benefit from reading texts at their instructional level, which builds confidence and autonomy.

Hasibuan (2020) outlines a clear guided reading procedure emphasizing pre-reading preparation, structured reading sessions, recall, discussion, and synthesis of information. Similarly, Fountas and Pinnell (2010) recommend selecting appropriate texts, grouping students effectively, providing real-time feedback, and encouraging reflective discussion. In this study, Hasibuan's model was adopted because it aligns closely with the focus on improving literal comprehension through metacognitive engagement and collaborative reading.

Expository Texts in Reading Instruction

Expository texts are informative and factual texts that explain or define a topic systematically. Oteda et al. (2021) describe expository text structure as a framework that helps students identify and understand key elements of a text. Zuana (2020) outlines that an expository text typically consists of a thesis, arguments, and reiteration, while Karlsson et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of recognizing structural and inferential demands in such texts.

According to Sigalingging et al. (2018), understanding text structure significantly aids reading comprehension because it enables learners to map and organize information logically. Among various types of expository writing, this study focuses on definition exposition, a form that explains or defines a specific concept through examples and supporting details. This type of text is especially suitable for junior high school students, as it presents information clearly and explicitly, making it ideal for developing literal comprehension skills.

Definition exposition texts employ objective language, factual content, and cohesive devices such as "is defined as," "refers to," and "means." These linguistic features assist learners in identifying key ideas and details while strengthening their ability to comprehend informational texts. Therefore, definition exposition serves as an effective medium for applying the Guided Reading Strategy in improving reading comprehension.

METHOD

"In this study, the population consisted of all eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri Model Terpadu Madani Palu in the 2023/2024 academic year. From this population, a total sample of 64 students was selected using purposive sampling. The sample was divided into

two classes: class VIII Raden Saleh (32 students) as the experimental group and class VIII Gajah Mada (32 students) as the control group."

Table 1 The Experimental Design

Groups	Pretest	Independent Variable	Postest
Experimental Group	O1	X (Guided Readig Strategy)	O2
Control Group	O2	(No Treatment/Conventional Method	O4

Respondents

The respondents of this study were the eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri Model Terpadu Madani Palu in the 2023/2024 academic year. Two classes were purposively selected: class VIII Raden Saleh as the experimental group and class VIII Gajah Mada as the control group. Each class consisted of 32 students, making a total of 64 participants. The selection was based on the similarity of their English proficiency levels and schedules. The experimental group was taught using the Guided Reading Strategy (GRS), while the control group was taught using the conventional reading method.

Table 2 The Distribution of the Students

No	Class	Number of Students
1	Ki Hajar Dewantara	32
2	Gajah Mada	32
3	Suratin	32
4	Wr.Supratman	32
5	Raden Saleh	32
Total		**158**

Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was a reading comprehension test, consisting of True or False and Short Answer questions focusing on definition exposition texts. The test was administered twice: as a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test aimed to determine the students' initial reading comprehension ability before the treatment, while the post-test was designed to measure improvement after the implementation of the Guided Reading Strategy. This rubric allowed a more precise evaluation of students' comprehension and expression. The scoring procedure provided consistent and quantifiable data for analyzing students' improvement in reading comprehension following the implementation of the Guided Reading Strategy.

Table 3 The scoring system

Question Type	Aspect	Criteria	Score	Description
True/False	–	Correct answer	1	The student correctly identifies the truth value of the statement.
True/False		Incorrect or no answer	0	The answer is incorrect or left blank.
Short Answer	Content Accuracy	Complete and accurate answer	2	The student provides a fully correct answer with all key points included.
Short Answer		Partially correct answer	1	The student gives a relevant but incomplete or partially accurate response.
Short Answer		Incorrect or no answer	0	The answer is wrong, off-topic, or the student leaves it blank.
Short Answer	Language Use	Clear and correct language	1	The student uses appropriate and grammatically correct English.
Short Answer		Unclear or incorrect language	0	The answer contains grammar or spelling errors that hinder understanding.

Procedures

The treatment in this research involved the implementation of the Guided Reading strategy, which was administered only to the experimental group. This strategy aimed to improve students' reading comprehension skills through reading sessions directly guided by the researcher. The treatment was conducted over six meetings, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. The teaching process began with a pre-test to assess students' initial reading

comprehension skills. The teacher administered the test while students completed it individually. In the second meeting, titled "Reading Every Day," the teacher introduced the reading task and its purpose, guided students in silent reading, and facilitated discussion to recall and organize details. Students actively listened, read silently, and collaborated in reviewing notes. The third session, "Learning English Is a Useful Skill," focused on identifying main ideas and supporting details. The teacher guided silent reading, assisted students in recording key points, and helped them organize the information into an outline. The fourth meeting, "Social Media Can Be Both Good and Bad," emphasized academic vocabulary. The teacher assisted students in understanding unfamiliar words, inferring meanings, and contextualizing vocabulary, while students identified and reviewed key terms collaboratively. In the fifth session, "The Advantages of Learning English," students were guided to summarize key ideas and details, review the text, and develop structured summaries. Finally, the post-test was administered in the sixth meeting to evaluate students' progress after the instructional treatment.

Data analysis

The data collected from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS version 27. Several statistical tests were applied, including the Shapiro–Wilk Test to examine normality, Levene's Test to determine homogeneity, and the Mann–Whitney U Test to test the hypothesis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that the implementation of the Guided Reading Strategy (GRS) significantly improved students' reading comprehension. The pre-test mean score of the experimental group was 63.50, while the control group obtained 57.28

Result of Pre-test and Post-test of Experimental Class

Before implementing the treatment, the researcher administered a pre-test to the experimental and control groups to assess students' initial reading comprehension of expository texts. After providing the treatment, the researcher administered a post-test to determine students' reading comprehension after receiving the treatment. The following table presents the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups:

Table 4. Pre-test Score of Experimental Group

No	Initial of the Students	Score	Max Score	Final Score
1	AP	20	30	67
2	I	16	30	53
3	NN	17	30	57
4	ZA	21	30	70
5	AA	18	30	60
6	ES	16	30	53
7	AA	18	30	60
8	NA	22	30	73
9	RA	19	30	63
10	LG	24	30	80
11	IA	15	30	50
12	MR	18	30	60
13	RR	24	30	80
14	R	20	30	67
15	VA	22	30	73
16	NH	20	30	67
17	AS	22	30	73
18	Nu	17	30	57
19	CI	15	30	50
20	KN	23	30	77
21	AP	16	30	53

22	KA	14	30	47
23	LQA	23	30	77
24	IGY	14	30	47
25	MA	19	30	63
26	B	23	30	77
27	MA	14	30	47
28	MF	18	30	60
29	AL	20	30	67
30	H	24	30	80
31	HA	17	30	57
32	MA	20	30	67
	Total	609		2030
	Mean	19		63

Table 4 presents the pre-test scores of the experimental group prior to the implementation of the treatment. The pre-test aimed to assess the students' initial reading comprehension ability of expository texts. The total score achieved by the experimental group was 2030, with a mean score of 63. These findings indicate that before the application of the Guided Reading Strategy (GRS), the students' reading comprehension level was categorized as moderate.

Table 5. Post-test Score of Experimental Group

No	Initial of the Students	Score	Max Score	Final Score
1	AP	25	30	83
2	I	25	30	83
3	NN	25	30	83
4	ZA	22	30	73
5	AA	25	30	83
6	ES	26	30	87
7	AA	21	30	70
8	NA	23	30	77
9	RA	25	30	83
10	LG	24	30	80
11	IA	25	30	83
12	MR	25	30	83
13	RR	23	30	77
14	R	25	30	83
15	VA	20	30	67
16	NH	26	30	87
17	AS	25	30	83
18	Nu	26	30	87
19	CI	23	30	77
20	KN	28	30	93
21	AP	20	30	67
22	KA	21	30	70
23	LQA	26	30	87
24	IGY	25	30	83
25	MA	20	30	67
26	B	19	30	63
27	MA	26	30	87
28	MF	19	30	63
29	AL	20	30	67

30	H	25	30	83
31	HA	23	30	77
32	MA	21	30	70
	Total	752		2507
	Mean	24		78

Table 5 displays the post-test scores of the experimental group after receiving the treatment using the Guided Reading Strategy. The total score increased to 2507, with a mean score of 78. This improvement signifies that the students' reading comprehension ability has enhanced considerably following the implementation of GRS.

In summary, the comparison between the pre-test and post-test results shows a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension performance. The increase in the mean score from 63 to 78 suggests that the Guided Reading Strategy had a positive impact on students' understanding of expository texts and was effective in facilitating their learning progress.

Result of Pre-test and Post-test of Control Class

Pre-test and post-test were also given to the control group in class Gajah Mada. In this group, the researcher did not provide any treatment to the students. The researcher only taught them using conventional methods. The results are presented in the following Table:

Table 6. Pre-test Score of Control Group

No	Initial of the Students	Score	Max Score	Final Score
1	KP	19	30	63
2	A	15	30	50
3	DA	19	30	63
4	SH	18	30	60
5	GH	13	30	43
6	MA	15	30	50
7	AN	17	30	57
8	PA	20	30	67
9	KS	17	30	57
10	BA	16	30	53
11	DC	17	30	57
12	JM	21	30	70
13	FA	15	30	50
14	AN	20	30	67
15	MG	18	30	60
16	NA	20	30	67
17	SA	18	30	60
18	MA	14	30	47
19	RE	20	30	67
20	IGYP	16	30	53
21	DW	13	30	43
22	GA	13	30	43
23	AN	16	30	53
24	AD	18	30	60
25	PI	15	30	50
26	VA	16	30	53

27	RR	20	30	67
28	RN	17	30	57
29	MWR	22	30	73
30	MDF	15	30	50
31	JRA	18	30	60
32	DS	19	30	63
	Total	550		1833

Table 6 presents the pre-test scores of the control group, which was taught using conventional teaching methods without the implementation of the Guided Reading Strategy (GRS). The purpose of the pre-test was to measure students' initial reading comprehension of expository texts before any instructional intervention. The total score obtained by the control group was 1833, with a mean score of 57. These results indicate that the students in the control group had a relatively low to moderate level of reading comprehension before the treatment.

Table 7. Post-test Score of Control Group

No	Initials of the Students	Score	Max Score	Final Score
1	KP	20	30	67
2	A	19	30	63
3	DA	23	30	77
4	SH	17	30	57
5	GH	18	30	60
6	MA	17	30	57
7	AN	18	30	60
8	PA	19	30	63
9	KS	20	30	67
10	BA	17	30	57
11	DC	19	30	63
12	JM	18	30	60
13	FA	25	30	83
14	AN	19	30	63
15	MG	17	30	57
16	NA	21	30	70
17	SA	21	30	70
18	MA	20	30	67
19	RE	17	30	57
	IGYP	18	30	60
21	DW	21	30	70
22	GA	19	30	63
23	AN	18	30	60
24	AD	20	30	67
25	PI	17	30	57
26	VA	17	30	57
27	RR	21	30	70
28	RN	24	30	80
29	MWR	22	30	73
30	MDF	23	30	77
31	JRA	19	30	63
32	DS	20	30	67
	Total	624		2080

Mean	20	65

Table 7 shows the post-test scores of the same control group after the learning process using conventional methods. The total score increased to 2080, with a mean score of 65. This slight improvement suggests that the students experienced some progress in their reading comprehension, which can be attributed to regular classroom instruction rather than the use of a specific reading strategy.

In summary, the comparison between the pre-test and post-test results in the control group shows a modest increase in the mean score from 57 to 65. However, this improvement is considerably smaller compared to that of the experimental group, indicating that while conventional methods may help maintain or slightly enhance reading comprehension, they are less effective than the Guided Reading Strategy in producing significant gains in students' understanding of expository texts.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis is the first step in analyzing data using SPSS. It provides an overview of the data distribution, including minimum, maximum, and mean. This initial analysis helps the researcher understand the overall variability in students' writing performance. Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics of the experimental group's pretest and posttest scores, and Table 7 presents the pretest and posttest of the control group.

Table 8. Pre-test Results of Experimental and Control Class

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test Experimental	32	47	80	63.50	10.513
Pre-Test Control	32	43	73	57.28	8.176
Valid N (listwise)			32		

The descriptive statistics show that the experimental group (N = 32) obtained pre-test scores ranging from 47 to 80, with a mean of 63.50 and a standard deviation of 10.51. The control group (N = 32) achieved scores between 43 and 73, with a mean of 57.28 and a standard deviation of 8.18. Although the experimental group scored slightly higher, the difference of 6.22 points reflects normal variation in students' initial abilities rather than the effect of any treatment.

Overall, the pre-test data indicate that both groups were relatively comparable before the intervention. This similarity in starting performance suggests that any subsequent differences found in the post-test results can be attributed more confidently to the treatment rather than pre-existing disparities between the two groups.

Table 9. Post-test Results of Experimental and Control Groups

Descriptive Statistics

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Post-test Experimental	32	63	93	78.31	8.154
Post-test Control	32	57	83	65.06	7.224
Valid N (listwise)			32		

The table above presents the descriptive statistics of the post-test results for both the experimental and control groups after the treatment. Each group consisted of 32 students. The experimental group obtained post-test scores ranging from 63 to 93, with a mean score of 78.31 and a standard deviation of 8.15. Meanwhile, the control group's scores ranged from 57 to 83, with a mean score of 65.06 and a standard deviation of 7.22. These findings indicate that the experimental group performed better overall than the control group. The higher mean score suggests that students who received instruction through the Guided Reading Strategy (GRS) demonstrated greater improvement in reading comprehension compared to those taught using conventional methods. Additionally, the slightly higher standard deviation in the experimental group shows a wider range of achievement among students, reflecting varied but generally positive effects of the treatment. Overall, the data provide evidence that the implementation of GRS had a significant impact on improving students' understanding of expository texts.

Table 10. Normality Test Results

Tests of Normality

		Kolmogorov-Smirnova			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Class	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Reading Comprehension Performance	Pre-Test Control	.106	32	.200*	.961	32	.300
	Post-Test Control	.175	32	.014	.902	32	.007
	Pre-test Experimental	.099	32	.200*	.944	32	.096
	Post-Test Experimental	.249	32	.000	.903	32	.008

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The Tests of Normality table shows the normality results for students' reading comprehension scores in control and experimental groups before and after treatment, using Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests at a 0.05 significance level. Pretest results for both groups had significance values above 0.05, indicating normal distribution. However, posttest results for both groups showed significance values below 0.05, meaning the data were not normally distributed. Thus, only pretest data met the normality assumption. For this reason, the researcher used non-parametric tests like the Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon Signed-Rank tests for further analysis instead of parametric tests.

Table 11. Homogenity Test Result

Test of Homogeneity of Variance

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Reading Comprehension Performance	Based on Mean	1.130	1	62	.292
	Based on Median	.410	1	62	.524
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.410	1	56.790	.525
	Based on the trimmed mean	1.171	1	62	.283

Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance was conducted to assess whether the variances between the experimental and control groups were equal. The test used four criteria: mean, median, median with adjusted degrees of freedom, and trimmed mean. All significance values exceeded 0.05 (0.292, 0.524, 0.525, and 0.283), indicating no significant difference in variance between the groups. Thus, the data were considered homogeneous. Despite meeting the homogeneity assumption, the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, the researcher used the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test instead of the independent samples t-test to compare the groups, as it is more suitable when normality is violated.

Table 12. Mann-Whitney U Test

Test Statisticsa

	Final_Score
Mann-Whitney U	124.500
Wilcoxon W	652.500
Z	-5.244
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: Class

The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to assess differences in reading comprehension between the experimental and control groups, due to non-normal data distribution. The results showed a Mann-Whitney U value of 124.500, a Z value of -5.244, and a significance level of 0.000, indicating a statistically significant difference between the groups. The experimental group, taught using the Guided Reading Strategy (GRS), outperformed the control group, which received conventional reading instruction. This finding suggests that the

GRS significantly improved students' reading comprehension more effectively than the traditional method. In conclusion, the Guided Reading Strategy effectively enhanced students' reading skills and engagement, leading to better comprehension outcomes compared to conventional reading.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the Guided Reading Strategy (GRS) had a significant effect on improving the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri Model Terpadu Madani. The results of the pre-test and post-test show a substantial improvement in the experimental group compared to the control group. Students taught through GRS increased their mean score from 63.50 to 78.31, while the control group improved only modestly from 57.28 to 65.06. This difference was statistically confirmed through the Mann-Whitney U test, which showed a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05). These results indicate that the Guided Reading Strategy is more effective than conventional teaching methods in enhancing students' comprehension of definition exposition texts.

From a pedagogical perspective, this improvement can be attributed to the structured nature of GRS, which actively guides students before, during, and after the reading process. In this study, students were provided with pre-reading activities that activated their background knowledge, guided questioning during reading, and reflective tasks after reading. Such steps helped students identify main ideas, analyze supporting details, and understand vocabulary in context. The collaborative environment created through small-group discussions also increased students' engagement and helped them construct meaning collectively. These findings support Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (1978), which emphasizes that learning becomes more effective when students receive guided assistance that gradually decreases as they become more competent. During the treatment, students initially relied heavily on teacher guidance but gradually demonstrated the ability to comprehend texts independently.

The improvement in the experimental group also aligns with the results of previous studies. Ramsa and Rawian (2021) found that GRS supports the comprehension process by providing structured and systematic guidance. Similarly, Thage (2021) reported that students who receive guided reading instruction show better fluency, comprehension, and overall reading engagement. The findings of this research also correspond with Sitepu et al. (2023), who noted that guided reading enhances students' motivation and understanding, especially in informational texts. These similarities indicate that the Guided Reading Strategy is consistently effective across different educational contexts.

In addition to cognitive benefits, this study also revealed psychological and motivational improvements among students in the experimental group. At the beginning of the treatment, many students were hesitant and lacked confidence when reading and answering comprehension questions. However, after several sessions, students became more active and willing to participate in discussions. The step-by-step support provided through GRS helped reduce anxiety and increased students' self-confidence. This is consistent with Nadesan and Shah (2020), who state that structured learning environments can reduce students' fear of making mistakes and increase their motivation to participate. In this study, the presence of clear reading steps and group collaboration made students feel more secure in expressing their ideas.

The role of the teacher was also a crucial factor in the improvement of students' reading comprehension. Throughout the treatment, the teacher facilitated discussions, explained vocabulary, asked guiding questions, and modeled how to analyze text information. This teaching role aligns with Fountas and Pinnell's (2010) concept of guided reading, where teachers provide direct support that enables students to gradually develop independent reading skills. In this study, students began to rely less on the teacher's explanation and became more capable of identifying main ideas, relevant details, and text structures independently. This scaffolding process shows that GRS not only improves comprehension but also develops students' autonomy as readers.

Furthermore, the nature of definition exposition texts used in this research contributed to students' reading improvement. Expository texts, as described by Zuana (2020), provide clear and logically organized information that helps students identify definitions, supporting details, and explanations. During the treatment, students practiced recognizing text structures and analyzing factual information, which enhanced their literal and inferential comprehension skills. The structured format of definition exposition texts made them suitable for the step-by-step guidance provided through GRS.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that the Guided Reading Strategy effectively enhances students' reading comprehension across cognitive, motivational, and instructional domains. Students not only demonstrated higher post-test scores but also showed improved confidence, participation, and understanding of text features. The findings of this study align with previous research and reinforce the conclusion that GRS is a suitable strategy for junior high school students, especially in learning expository texts. The improvement observed in the experimental group reflects the combined impact of teacher guidance, collaborative learning, structured reading stages, and appropriate text selection. Therefore, GRS can be considered a highly effective and relevant strategy for improving reading comprehension in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study have several important implications for teaching practice, particularly in junior high school reading instruction. The Guided Reading Strategy (GRS) can serve as an effective model for helping students comprehend expository texts through its structured stages—pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading—which allow teachers to scaffold understanding by activating prior knowledge, monitoring comprehension, and encouraging reflection. The results also indicate that students benefit from small-group instruction, enabling teachers to provide targeted support that accommodates diverse reading levels through flexible grouping. Additionally, the improvement in students' reading comprehension underscores the need for more interactive strategies, such as guided questioning, vocabulary exploration, and collaborative discussion, to foster deeper engagement and critical thinking. Overall, the effectiveness of GRS emphasizes the importance of moving beyond traditional "read-and-answer" approaches toward more student-centered instruction that promotes active participation, metacognitive awareness, and independent meaning-making, ultimately enhancing both comprehension and motivation to read.

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