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Using Guided Reading to Enhance Reading Comprehension among Junior High Students During Online Learning.

Siswoyo[1]*
[1]Universitas Muhammadiyah Pringsewu, Indonesia
*Corresponding Author: Siswoyo@umpri.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of implementing the Guided Reading technique in enhancing reading comprehension among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Lampung during online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The research method employed is Classroom Action Research (CAR), conducted over two cycles with a total of 44 eighth-grade students as participants. Data collection involved reading comprehension tests, observations of learning activities, and student response questionnaires concerning the learning process. The findings reveal a significant improvement, with the average pre-cycle score of 60.11 increasing to 73.41 in the first cycle, and further rising to 83.52 in the second cycle. This progress can be attributed to Guided Reading's provision of structured guidance, which facilitates students' understanding of texts through guiding questions, vocabulary reinforcement, and targeted discussions. These results suggest that Guided Reading is an effective, straightforward, and flexible strategy for supporting online reading instruction. Furthermore, this research contributes substantially to the existing literature by confirming the relevance of the Guided Reading strategy in the context of remote learning at the middle school level.

Keywords: Guided reading, reading comprehension, online learning, and reading strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID- 19 pandemic has brought about substantial changes within the realm of education, particularly concerning the instruction of English at the junior high school level. Previously conducted through face- to- face interaction, this instructional process was abruptly transitioned to an online format. Such a significant shift necessitates that educators and students modify their pedagogical approaches, learning methods, and media utilisation to sustain the attainment of educational objectives. This scenario has led many students to experience diminished motivation, challenges in comprehending the material, and limited engagement with teachers and peers. These phenomena are consistent with research indicating that the pandemic influences attitudes towards language acquisition, including students' interest and readiness to participate in online classes (Noviarini, 2021). The implications of these effects suggest that online learning demands the adoption of appropriate strategies to ensure the effectiveness of reading instruction. Without adapting these strategies to the pandemic context, students may encounter increasing difficulties in understanding English reading texts. Reading proficiency constitutes a fundamental skill that junior high school students must acquire, as it underpins other language skills such as writing, speaking, and listening. Within the context of online learning, reading comprehension presents additional challenges due to possible distractions, limited internet connectivity, and difficulties in posing questions directly to teachers. Numerous studies have demonstrated that employing suitable reading strategies can enhance students' comprehension of English texts (Noviarini, 2021). Furthermore, reading strategies are vital in assisting students in developing text comprehension skills through structured guidance provided by educators (Rajaei et al., 2020). Consequently, teachers should select adaptable, versatile, and effective reading strategies suitable for online learning environments. This underscores the fact that reading instruction cannot be delivered in the traditional manner when conducted through online platforms.

Previous research confirms that online reading strategies assist students in understanding texts even with limited teacher interaction. Online learning demands greater independence from

students; however, many have not fully developed these skills (Erni, 2021). To stay relevant during the pandemic, teachers in various schools are modifying teaching methods by offering digital reading materials and comprehension questions, ensuring students read with clear guidance rather than passively reading without understanding. Other studies show teachers employing strategies such as summaries, key vocabulary, and video explanations (Setiawati & Budiasih, 2021), highlighting the importance of structured reading approaches.

An effective and readily implementable strategy in online settings is Guided Reading. This involves teacher-led support through questions, discussions, vocabulary reinforcement, and brief content explanations. Such guidance assists students in gradually building understanding, even in distance learning via digital platforms (Kasman et al., 2021). Teachers can provide guidance through worksheets, voice messages, or instructional videos, thereby facilitating student comprehension without face-to-face interaction. Consequently, Guided Reading remains pertinent for enhancing reading comprehension during the pandemic.

Guided Reading has a longstanding history in literacy education, offering scaffolding that helps students comprehend texts appropriate to their level. Iquaita (2006) describes it as a research-based approach involving direct support with questions, predictions, vocabulary, or summaries. In online learning environments, this strategy can be adapted with step-by-step digital materials, enabling teachers to sustain guided practice remotely (McNeil, 2022). Its flexibility renders Guided Reading suitable for various learning contexts.

Furthermore, reading interventions during the pandemic must be tailored to students' psychological and academic needs. Reduced teacher-student interaction in online settings underscores the necessity of guidance (Sucena et al., 2022). Research indicates that intensive reading support during the pandemic substantially benefits students facing difficulties, emphasizing the importance of strategies that facilitate direct online mentoring (Seybold, 2023). These findings suggest that teacher-supported approaches like Guided Reading outperform entirely independent learning methods. Globally, the pandemic has had a significant impact on students' reading development across different nations. In the United States, studies on elementary students reveal declines in reading achievement attributable to shifts within the learning system, particularly online models (Relyea et al., 2023). This decline varies based on students' characteristics, backgrounds, and instructional approaches. It underscores that online learning necessitates specific strategies, with Guided Reading being highly relevant due to its provision of structured support that enables students to systematically comprehend texts.

Although numerous studies have explored reading strategies during the pandemic, research concerning the effectiveness of Guided Reading within junior high school (SMP) contexts in Indonesia, particularly at SMP Negeri 2 Lampung, remains limited. Prior research has predominantly focused on general learning strategies, instructional media, or the use of specific applications to enhance reading interest and comprehension. For example, the use of flashcards has proven effective in improving students' reading comprehension during instruction (Rahman et al., 2023). Similarly, the use of the Wattpad application has increased the recount text reading ability of high school students (Mawarni et al., 2023). However, research specifically examining guided support strategies tailored for junior high school levels remains scarce. This indicates a significant research gap.

In addition to the limited research on Guided Reading, most previous studies did not specifically focus on the online learning conditions experienced by middle school students. Many studies discuss reading strategies for college students or high school students, so the context of middle school students receives less attention. However, during the pandemic, middle school students are a vulnerable group to experiencing a decline in reading comprehension because they are still in the transition phase toward independent learning. This situation requires a more targeted approach focused on the guidance process. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by testing the effectiveness of Guided Reading in the online learning context.

Research further emphasizes the necessity for teachers to utilize straightforward yet efficacious learning alternatives to overcome the limitations of online education. The blended learning model, for instance, integrates digital and face-to-face instruction but relies heavily on sufficient infrastructure, which is not universally available among schools (Noviarini, 2024).

Concurrently, overly complex learning strategies may pose implementation challenges in settings constrained by technological deficiencies. Guided Reading emerges as an appropriate strategy due to its simplicity, specificity, and independence from advanced technological requirements. This advantage renders it particularly pertinent for educational institutions with limited technological access.

An additional concern pertains to the decline in student motivation to participate actively in online learning, especially in English subjects. Students frequently encounter boredom and face difficulties in reading extensive texts on digital devices. Reduced motivation can adversely affect academic performance, including reading comprehension capabilities. Monotonous online lessons devoid of guidance may further diminish students' willingness to complete reading assignments. Consequently, there exists a pressing need for a learning strategy that not only enhances comprehension but also elevates student motivation. Guided Reading effectively addresses these needs by promoting interaction and support from educators.

The role of teachers in providing support during online learning has been demonstrably pivotal to the success of English language education. Educators who pose guiding questions, offer feedback, and deliver step-by-step instructions facilitate a deeper understanding of reading materials among students. Research indicates that instructional strategies emphasizing teacher-student interaction are more successfully implemented in post-pandemic contexts and during online instruction (Nadian & Afifi, 2023). Therefore, learning approaches that facilitate structured interactions, such as Guided Reading, are critically relevant for the enhancement of reading skills. This method ensures that students do not perceive themselves as learning independently.

In light of these observations, it is apparent that students require reading learning strategies that are pragmatic, straightforward to implement, and provide direct support. Guided Reading offers a pedagogical framework that enables educators to deliver ongoing guidance through guiding questions, vocabulary explanations, and discussion sessions. This strategy decomposes texts into manageable segments, thereby facilitating comprehension. Nevertheless, research on the efficacy of this approach within online learning environments remains limited, particularly at the junior high school level in Indonesia. This highlights the necessity for further investigation to determine whether Guided Reading can improve reading comprehension among junior high school students.

Building upon these phenomena and identified research gaps, this study introduces a novel exploration of the application of Guided Reading in online learning, specifically at SMP Negeri 2 Lampung. The research not only investigates potential improvements in reading comprehension but also considers how this strategy can be adapted effectively to distance learning contexts. Moreover, it addresses a notable gap in the existing literature concerning the implementation of Guided Reading among junior high school students during the pandemic. Accordingly, this study aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to the advancement of reading instruction strategies in online educational settings.

METHOD

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design aimed at enhancing the reading learning process and outcomes through the application of Guided Reading techniques. The CAR methodology was chosen because it permits researchers to undertake direct interventions within the classroom environment, evaluate each procedural step, and implement improvements in subsequent cycles as necessary. The research encompassed two cycles, each comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection phases. The participants consisted of 44 eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Lampung, who engaged in online English lessons during the pandemic period. Considering the diverse reading abilities among the students, Guided Reading was considered an appropriate approach. The study was conducted over the course of one semester utilising Google Classroom, WhatsApp Group, and Zoom platforms for instruction and data collection.

The instruments employed in this study comprise a reading comprehension assessment, an observation sheet for student learning activities, and a questionnaire regarding student responses

concerning the implementation of the Guided Reading technique. The reading comprehension assessment was administered during the pre- implementation phase, after Cycle I, and following Cycle II to monitor the development of students' reading capabilities. The observation sheet was utilised to document students' activities during online learning, including their engagement in answering guiding questions, participation in discussions, and comprehension of the reading steps provided by the instructor. The questionnaire was distributed at the conclusion of the study to collect students' perceptions of employing Guided Reading in an online learning environment. These three instruments were used triangulatively to enhance the accuracy and consistency of the data collected, thereby enabling a comprehensive analysis of the changes in students' reading comprehension. The data analysis methodology integrated both quantitative and qualitative descriptive approaches. Quantitative data were derived from the results of the reading comprehension assessments, with analysis focused on calculating the class average at each treatment stage. An increase in scores across cycles served as an indicator of the successful implementation of the Guided Reading strategy. Concurrently, qualitative data were obtained from observations of student activities and responses recorded through questionnaires, reflecting students' reactions, motivation, and engagement levels during the learning process. The results of the qualitative analysis corroborated the quantitative findings, offering a holistic view of the strategy' s effectiveness. This analytical approach ensures that the improvements in reading proficiency are evidenced not only through test scores but also through observable shifts in students' learning behaviors.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This research was conducted in two cycles with the aim of determining the effectiveness of implementing the Guided Reading technique in improving the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Lampung. The subjects of the study consisted of 44 students who participated in online English lessons through Google Classroom, WhatsApp Group, and Zoom Meeting. Before the action was implemented, the researcher conducted an initial test (pre-test) to assess the students' reading abilities. The pre-test results showed that most students were in the low to moderate categories, with only a few students reaching the good category. This condition indicates the need for more targeted learning strategies so that students can gradually understand reading texts.

Pre-Cycle Results

During the initial pre-cycle phase, students are provided with a brief reading passage concerning daily activities, carefully selected to correspond to their reading proficiency appropriate for junior high school students. This passage is employed to evaluate their capacity to comprehend both explicit content and straightforward inferences through ten multiple-choice questions. The pre-test results revealed that the mean score of the students was 60.11, with a substantial range of scores spanning from 40 to 80, thereby indicating variability in reading skills within the class. These diverse scores exemplify that some students are capable of understanding the structure of the text, whereas others continue to face challenges with fundamental comprehension of the reading material.

Out of 44 students, only 6 (13.6%) achieved a score above 75, indicating good reading skills. A majority, 72.7%, scored between 55 and 70, reflecting middle to lower reading abilities that require more focused guidance. Some students scored below 55, showing ongoing struggles with identifying main ideas and details. These results suggest that overall reading comprehension is still inadequate and needs more structured interventions. The challenge is intensified by online learning conditions, where students face issues like limited interaction, scarce technological resources, and low confidence when reading unaided. These factors hinder their ability to interpret new vocabulary, understand context, and make inferences. Consequently, a learning approach that provides scaffolding or gradual support is crucial. These initial findings support the use of Guided Reading, which offers step-by-step assistance and continuous teacher support to boost students' reading comprehension.

Results of Cycle I

In Cycle I, the researcher applied Guided Reading by offering guidance through guiding questions, vocabulary reinforcement, and small group discussions via WhatsApp. After this activity, students took a second reading test. The results indicated that the average score rose to 73.41, with 20 students (45.45%) scoring ≥75.

Below is Table 1, displaying students' score development from pre-cycle to Cycle I:

Table 1. Distribution of Pre-Cycle Reading Scores (N = 44)

Range of Values	Category	Number of Students	Percentage
76–100	Good – Very Good	6 students	13,60%
55–75	Enough	32 students	72,70%
<55	Less	6 students	13,60%
Average	—	**60,11**	—

This indicates that students are beginning to understand the steps of Guided Reading, such as answering prediction questions, identifying difficult vocabulary, and making simple summaries. However, observations also show that students still struggle with answering inferential questions that require higher reasoning. Interactions in online discussions are also not yet optimal because some students are passive in providing responses.

Chart 1

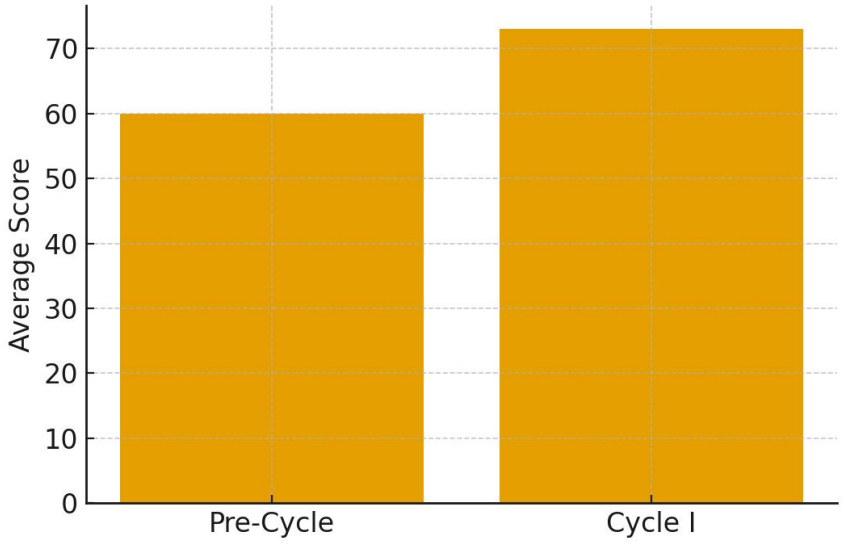


Table 1. Value Increase from Pre-Cycle to Cycle I

3. Hasil Siklus II

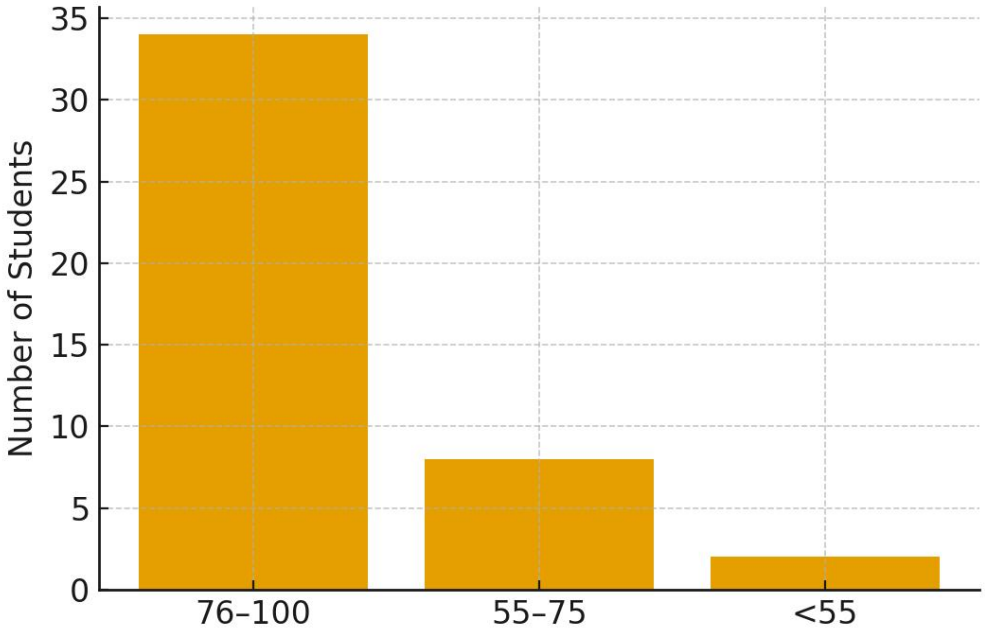
In Cycle II, the researcher improved the strategy by increasing the guidance intensity, providing examples of how to answer inferential questions, and adding discussion sessions via Zoom. At this stage, students showed higher participation and better understood how to analyze texts in a focused manner. The reading test administered at the end of Cycle II showed an average score of 83.52, with 34 students (77.27%) achieving a score of ≥75.

Here is the complete result:

Tabel 2. Perkembangan Nilai Siklus I dan Siklus II (N = 44 siswa)

Range of Values	Category	Number of Students	Percentage
76–100	Good – Very Good	34 students	77.27%
55–75	Enough	8 students	18.18%
<55	Less	2 students	4.55%

Average	—	**83.52.00**	—



Stage 2. Increase in Value from Cycle I to Cycle II

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of Guided Reading techniques in online learning can be carried out effectively and provides a clear learning structure for junior high school students at SMP Negeri 2 Lampung. In response to the first research question, this strategy was applied through stages of providing guiding questions, vocabulary reinforcement, guided discussions, and reading comprehension exercises. Students follow the reading process gradually, starting from predicting the content, understanding parts of the text, to answering both low- and high-level literacy questions. The clarity of these stages ensures that students do not learn entirely independently but still receive directed guidance. This aligns with the concept of Guided Reading, which emphasizes teacher support in understanding the text (Iaquinta, 2006). Therefore, the application of Guided Reading has proven to be able to adapt to the needs of online learning, which requires a stronger structure and guidance than face-to-face learning. Regarding the second research question about improving students' reading comprehension, the results show a significant increase in scores from pre-cycle, cycle I, to cycle II. The average score increased from 60.11 to 73.41 and finally to 83.52 after the second cycle. This improvement indicates that Guided Reading not only helps students understand the text literally but also enhances their inferential skills. Students become more capable of drawing conclusions, interpreting implied meanings, and connecting ideas within the text. This occurs because the guiding questions help students focus their attention on important parts of the text. Thus, the Guided Reading strategy has proven effective in improving reading skills during online learning.

In comparison to the research conducted by Setiawati & Budiasih (2021), the findings of this study endorse their conclusion that structured reading strategies are highly beneficial for middle school students in comprehending texts amidst the pandemic. Both studies demonstrate that students require explicit guidance in understanding reading material when instruction occurs online. Moreover, this research aligns with the findings of Erni (2021), which underscore the significance of online reading strategies in assisting students to maintain comprehension even in the absence of direct interaction. In Erni's study, students who received digital-based reading guidance exhibited improvements in academic performance, which is pertinent to the results

observed herein. These similarities indicate that guided assistance constitutes a fundamental necessity in reading instruction during the pandemic. The findings of this research are also consistent with those of Rajaei et al. (2020), who posited that both collaborative and non-collaborative reading strategies can enhance text comprehension skills. Within the scope of this study, Guided Reading functions as a light collaborative strategy through small group discussions via WhatsApp and Zoom sessions. Students appeared to be more actively engaged when provided with opportunities for discussion under teacher guidance, as also observed in Rajaei et al.'s research, where directed interaction facilitates the development of higher-level comprehension skills. Consequently, this study reaffirms that teacher-facilitated interaction is an essential element of effective reading strategies. Furthermore, this research corroborates the findings of Noviarini (2021), which assert that reading strategies play a crucial role in improving text comprehension, particularly when students possess varying levels of learning readiness. In Noviarini's study, the systematic application of reading strategies enhanced students' performance in understanding academic texts. A similar pattern was observed among middle school students in this research, notwithstanding the differing context—online learning during the pandemic. These findings contribute novel evidence that Guided Reading, traditionally employed at lower educational levels, is also effective for middle school students in remote learning environments. The unique contribution of this research lies in the implementation of Guided Reading during the pandemic and online learning at the middle school level with a sample of 44 students, a subject rarely explored in previous studies.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the implementation of Guided Reading in an online environment at SMP Negeri 2 Lampung and its impact on reading comprehension. Results show the technique is effective for online English instruction, with teachers guiding students through prediction questions, vocabulary, and discussions to foster understanding. The scaffolding process ensures systematic comprehension, making it suitable for online learning requiring more guidance than face-to-face. The application of Guided Reading significantly improves students' reading skills, as reflected in higher scores from pre- to post-assessment, including literal and inferential skills like identifying main ideas and understanding vocabulary. This progress is due to targeted cognitive engagement and systematic teacher guidance, which enhance comprehension during online learning. Overall, this research contributes to reading instruction during the pandemic by demonstrating Guided Reading as an effective, adaptable, and motivating strategy. It fills a gap in literature regarding its use at the junior high level in Indonesia for distance learning. The findings offer valuable insights for educators and institutions to develop better reading strategies both during and beyond the pandemic.

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