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Improving EFL Students' Reading Comprehension Through The Rare Strategy

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Abstract

This classroom action research examined changes in eighth-grade students' reading comprehension during the implementation of the Review, Answer, Read, Express (RARE) strategy at SMPN 2 Palibelo, Indonesia. Thirty students participated in two cycles of classroom action conducted in November 2022. Each cycle comprised planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were gathered through multiple-choice reading tests and classroom observations. The reported mean score increased from 46.0 on the pretest to 62.3 after Cycle I and 83.0 after Cycle II. The corresponding mean gains were 16.3 points in the first cycle and 20.7 additional points in the second cycle, yielding a 37-point increase from baseline. Classroom observations also described stronger participation and attention during the second cycle, although these observations were not quantified using a standardized engagement scale. The findings suggest that reading performance improved during the sequence of RARE-based lessons in this class. Because the design involved one class without a comparison group, the changes cannot be attributed exclusively to the strategy. The study offers a classroom-level account of iterative reading instruction and identifies areas for more rigorous follow-up evaluation.

Keywords: reading comprehension; RARE strategy; classroom action research; EFL; junior secondary school

Abstrak

Penelitian tindakan kelas ini mengkaji perubahan pemahaman membaca siswa kelas VIII selama penerapan strategi Review, Answer, Read, Express (RARE) di SMPN 2 Palibelo. Sebanyak 30 siswa

mengikuti dua siklus tindakan pada November 2022. Setiap siklus meliputi perencanaan, pelaksanaan, pengamatan, dan refleksi. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes membaca pilihan ganda dan observasi kelas. Nilai rata-rata yang dilaporkan meningkat dari 46,0 pada prates menjadi 62,3 setelah Siklus I dan 83,0 setelah Siklus II. Kenaikan rata-rata masing-masing sebesar 16,3 dan 20,7 poin, dengan kenaikan total 37 poin dari kondisi awal. Pengamatan kelas juga menggambarkan peningkatan partisipasi dan perhatian siswa pada siklus kedua, tetapi temuan tersebut tidak diukur dengan skala keterlibatan terstandar. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan kinerja membaca selama rangkaian pembelajaran berbasis RARE. Karena penelitian hanya melibatkan satu kelas tanpa kelompok pembanding, perubahan tersebut tidak dapat sepenuhnya dikaitkan secara kausal dengan strategi yang diterapkan.

Kata kunci: pemahaman membaca; strategi RARE; penelitian tindakan kelas; bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing; sekolah menengah pertama

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a central goal of English as a foreign language (EFL) education because students must construct meaning from written language rather than merely recognize isolated words. Comprehension involves coordinating linguistic knowledge, background information, text structure, and active monitoring of meaning (Snow, 2002). In junior secondary classrooms, students may struggle when reading is approached as word-by-word decoding without opportunities to anticipate content, test interpretations, or explain what they have understood. Teaching strategies that make these processes visible may support more purposeful engagement with texts.

Contemporary accounts of reading view comprehension as an interaction among the reader, the text, and the activity within a particular sociocultural context (Snow, 2002). Strategic readers activate prior knowledge, formulate questions, clarify uncertainty, and summarize or discuss key information. These activities are relevant to EFL contexts where limited vocabulary and grammatical familiarity can place additional demands on comprehension. Teaching reading therefore requires more than supplying texts and

checking correct answers; it also requires guidance in how readers approach meaning-making (Grabe, 2009; Duke & Pearson, 2002).

The Review, Answer, Read, Express (RARE) strategy organizes reading around four linked activities. Reviewing helps learners orient themselves to a text or topic and recall relevant knowledge. Answering encourages active responses to guiding questions. Reading directs attention to the written passage and its details, while expressing invites learners to communicate or restate what they have understood. Although the precise classroom implementation can vary, the sequence is pedagogically consistent with comprehension instruction that combines questioning, monitoring, and oral or written response (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Pressley, 2006).

Questioning can direct attention to essential information and help learners notice gaps in understanding. Explicit comprehension instruction may also support the movement from teacher-guided performance to increasingly independent strategic reading (Duke & Pearson, 2002). When learners explain their interpretations, the teacher gains opportunities to identify misunderstanding and provide immediate feedback. Such interactions are particularly important when students have difficulty demonstrating comprehension through written tests alone.

Classroom action research offers a means of examining reading instruction under ordinary teaching conditions. Rather than assuming that one lesson sequence will be sufficient, the teacher-researcher plans an intervention, observes its consequences, reflects on limitations, and revises subsequent action (Burns, 1999; Kemmis et al., 2014). Its strength is responsiveness to local learning problems; its limitation is that improvements over time may be affected by practice, maturation, changes in text difficulty, or other classroom factors.

The present investigation addressed a practical reading-comprehension concern among eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Palibelo. The source report described initially low test performance and limited classroom attention. The research introduced RARE activities across two cycles, using observations and repeated reading tests to inform

reflection. This article focuses on the documented progression of classroom performance and on how the second cycle responded to difficulties identified during the first.

A useful contribution of this study is its cycle-by-cycle account of a four-stage reading routine in a specific Indonesian junior secondary EFL classroom. Rather than treating improved scores as proof of a universal instructional effect, the analysis separates measured score changes from qualitative classroom impressions. This distinction addresses a recurring reporting challenge in action research: practical classroom improvement can be valuable even when the design does not support strong causal claims. Accordingly, the study asked how students' recorded reading-comprehension scores and observed participation changed across the baseline and two cycles of RARE-based instruction.

Regional research provides a useful comparison for the present intervention. Sumarsono et al. (2020) investigated partner reading, while Khairunissa et al. (2019) examined collaborative learning in reading comprehension. Terasne et al. (2018) reported classroom action research using Listen–Read–Discuss, and Terasne and Sugianto (2019) studied PQ4R in relation to reading comprehension and critical thinking. These approaches share an emphasis on active processing, questions, or peer interaction, yet their instructional sequences and study designs differ from RARE. Qomariyah and Utama (2020) additionally linked a classroom game with vocabulary and reading outcomes. Together, these local studies situate RARE within an established interest in structured EFL reading activities without establishing that any one strategy is superior.

METHOD

The study employed classroom action research at SMPN 2 Palibelo, Indonesia, during November 2022. The participants were 30 eighth-grade students in one class. The original report did not establish a random sampling procedure or a comparison class. The inquiry therefore aimed to document and respond to a local instructional problem rather than estimate a population-level treatment effect.

Two cycles of action were conducted, each consisting of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. A baseline reading test was administered on November 5, 2022. Cycle I lessons took place on November 7 and 12, followed by the first posttest on November 14. The second cycle involved further instruction on November 19 and 21, followed by a second posttest on November 26. The classroom report described instructional adjustments after the first cycle, including more intensive guidance and attempts to sustain student attention.

The teaching routine was identified as RARE: Review, Answer, Read, and Express. In the classroom context, the routine was intended to connect students' prior understanding with questions, reading activities, and opportunities to communicate their interpretation of a text. The source documents describe reading activities and classroom guidance but do not provide a sufficiently detailed, consistently recorded protocol to establish that each RARE component was delivered identically in every meeting. The intervention is therefore described at the level documented by the original study.

The principal quantitative evidence consisted of a pretest and two posttests of reading comprehension, described as multiple-choice assessments. Classroom field notes provided qualitative descriptions of student attention, participation, and difficulties encountered during instruction. The analysis used the reported class mean at each measurement point and calculated differences between successive means. No inferential significance test or effect size is reported because the available materials do not establish the assumptions, instrument equivalence, and complete paired data required for an independent inferential analysis.

The original source contains inconsistencies concerning the mastery threshold and numbers of students meeting it. It also contains some score-frequency summaries that do not align transparently with the reported means. Consequently, this article foregrounds the three repeatedly reported mean scores and treats claims about mastery rates cautiously. The study report did not supply sufficient information to verify ethics

approval, written consent, or instrument reliability; such details should be confirmed with the original researcher before journal submission.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The reported results show a progressive increase in the class mean across three measurement points. Students obtained a mean score of 46.0 before the intervention, 62.3 following Cycle I, and 83.0 following Cycle II. The difference between the pretest and the first posttest was 16.3 points, while the difference between the two posttests was 20.7 points. The cumulative difference from baseline to the end of Cycle II was 37.0 points. These figures describe changes in the observed class rather than a causal treatment estimate.

Table 1. Reading-comprehension mean scores (n = 30).

Measurement	Reported mean	Change from preceding test
Pretest	46.0	—
Posttest after Cycle I	62.3	+16.3
Posttest after Cycle II	83.0	+20.7

The baseline mean suggested substantial difficulty with the assessed reading tasks. The classroom account described limited attention among some students, including conversations unrelated to the lesson while tasks were being explained. These observations provided a practical rationale for changing the organization of reading instruction. However, because the field notes were not accompanied by a structured observation rubric or frequency counts, they should be interpreted as qualitative classroom impressions.

During Cycle I, students worked with classroom reading materials that included familiar topics and vocabulary, including types of vehicles and associated language activities. The first cycle was followed by a mean score of 62.3. Although this was higher

than the pretest mean, the researcher judged the outcome insufficient and proceeded to the second cycle. The reflective decision is consistent with the iterative logic of classroom action research, in which initial implementation provides evidence for instructional adjustment rather than serving as a final verdict (Burns, 1999; Kemmis et al., 2014).

The second cycle placed greater emphasis on guidance and student participation, according to the original observation account. Students were described as more focused and motivated during reading activities. The posttest mean increased to 83.0. The larger second-cycle gain is noteworthy, but the available record does not isolate which component of the revised instruction was responsible. Students may have become more familiar with the testing format or benefited from accumulated exposure to English reading tasks.

The RARE routine offers a plausible instructional explanation for the observed classroom pattern. Reviewing can activate background knowledge and establish a purpose for reading. Answering and reading create occasions for checking interpretations against textual evidence, while expressing encourages students to articulate understanding rather than remain passive recipients of explanations. Such practices correspond with research on strategic reading and reciprocal comprehension activities (Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Duke & Pearson, 2002). Nevertheless, the study did not measure the independent contribution of any individual stage.

The findings also highlight the importance of interaction in EFL reading lessons. Asking students to respond to questions and communicate their understanding can provide teachers with immediate information about misconceptions. From an instructional perspective, these responses can guide clarification, text selection, and the pacing of subsequent lessons. Comprehension research emphasizes the importance of coordinating reader knowledge, text demands, and instructional activity (Snow, 2002; Grabe, 2009), which helps explain why a multi-stage reading routine may be more supportive than a sequence limited to silent reading and answer checking.

At the same time, the evidence warrants restraint. First, the single-group design does not control for alternative explanations of improvement. Second, the original study did not document sufficient information about item equivalence across tests, scoring reliability, or the validity of the reading instrument. Third, inconsistencies in the reported mastery criterion and frequency tables make precise mastery percentages unsuitable as the primary outcome. Finally, qualitative claims about enthusiasm and confidence were not derived from a formal engagement instrument or systematically coded interviews.

These limitations do not eliminate the classroom value of the study. Its action-research structure shows how a teacher can use repeated assessment and observation to identify a learning problem, implement a reading routine, reflect on incomplete progress, and refine the next cycle. For practitioners, the key implication is to use review questions, text-focused reading, and student explanation as complementary stages while recording how each stage is enacted. For researchers, a future study could include parallel-form reading tests, a transparent scoring key, a structured observation protocol, and a comparison group or a stronger repeated-measures design.

In summary, the quantitative pattern and classroom observations point in the same general direction: reading performance and observed participation improved over the intervention period. The numerical data provide the clearest evidence of change, whereas the field notes add contextual information about classroom processes. This complementary reading of evidence is preferable to interpreting either data source as a definitive demonstration that RARE alone caused the improvement.

The findings can be interpreted alongside Indonesian EFL studies without conflating their outcomes. Sumarsono et al. (2020) investigated paired reading, and Khairunissa et al. (2019) examined collaborative learning; both emphasize learner participation as a component of reading instruction. In a more closely related action-research design, Terasne et al. (2018) documented reading outcomes across cycles of Listen–Read–Discuss instruction. Terasne and Hafiz (2023) also used two action-research cycles to examine PQ3R. These studies support the practical relevance of iterative and

staged comprehension activities, but differences in schools, instruments, and study designs prevent direct comparison of numerical gains. The present article therefore contributes a local descriptive account of the RARE sequence rather than a comparative effectiveness ranking.

CONCLUSION

The two-cycle classroom action research at SMPN 2 Palibelo documented a rise in eighth-grade students' mean reading-comprehension scores from 46.0 at baseline to 62.3 after Cycle I and 83.0 after Cycle II. Classroom observations also described more attentive and participatory learning during the later cycle. These findings support the practical use of iterative, structured reading activities as a promising classroom approach. They do not, however, establish a causal effect attributable solely to RARE. Future research should improve assessment documentation, resolve reporting inconsistencies, and employ stronger designs to examine whether similar gains are reproduced in other EFL classrooms.

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