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THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION AT SMP NEGERI 8 GUNUNGSITOLI

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to enhance eighth-grade students' reading comprehension through Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in narrative-text instruction at SMP Negeri 8 Gunungsitoli. Methods: This Classroom Action Research involved 29 students of class VIII-B in the Even Semester of the 2025/2026 Academic Year and was conducted in two cycles consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through reading-comprehension tests, observation sheets, field notes, interviews, and documentation. Quantitative data were analyzed using mean scores and classical mastery based on the school's Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 68, while qualitative data were analyzed descriptively. Results: The mean score increased from 57.76 in the pre-test to 69.59 in Post-Test 1 and 84.45 in Post-Test 2. Classical mastery increased from 17.24% (5 of 29 students) to 62.07% (18 of 29 students) and finally to 100% (29 of 29 students). Classroom observations also indicated increased participation, collaboration, confidence, and engagement. Novelty: The study integrates collaborative narrative-text analysis, vocabulary-building, structured group roles, and a reading-summary project within reflective classroom action cycles. The findings provide contextual evidence for using PjBL to support active EFL reading instruction at the junior high school level.

ABSTRAK

Objektif:Penelitian ini bertujuan meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa kelas VIII melalui Project-Based Learning (PjBL) dalam pembelajaran teks naratif di SMP Negeri 8 Gunungsitoli. Metode:Penelitian Tindakan Kelas ini melibatkan 29 siswa kelas VIII-B pada Semester Genap Tahun Ajaran 2025/2026 dan dilaksanakan dalam dua siklus yang meliputi perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes pemahaman membaca, lembar observasi, catatan lapangan, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan nilai rata-rata dan ketuntasan klasikal berdasarkan Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal (KKM) sebesar 68, sedangkan data kualitatif dianalisis secara deskriptif. Hasil: Nilai rata-rata meningkat dari 57,76 pada pre-test menjadi 69,59 pada Post-Test 1 dan 84,45 pada Post-Test 2. Ketuntasan klasikal meningkat dari 17,24% (5 dari 29 siswa) menjadi 62,07% (18 dari 29 siswa) dan akhirnya 100% (29 dari 29 siswa). Observasi juga menunjukkan peningkatan partisipasi, kolaborasi, kepercayaan diri, dan keterlibatan siswa. Kebaruan:Penelitian ini mengintegrasikan analisis teks naratif secara kolaboratif, penguatan kosakata, pembagian peran kelompok, dan proyek penulisan ringkasan dalam siklus tindakan kelas yang reflektif. Temuan ini memberikan bukti kontekstual tentang penggunaan PjBL untuk mendukung pembelajaran membaca EFL yang aktif pada tingkat SMP.

Kata kunci: *Project-Based Learning; Pemahaman Membaca; Teks Naratif; Penelitian Tindakan Kelas; EFL*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is an essential component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it requires learners to identify important information, connect ideas, interpret vocabulary in context, and construct meaning from written texts. Contemporary reading research emphasizes that comprehension is an active process rather than simple word recognition, making strategic and meaningful reading instruction important for EFL learners (Imbaquingo & Cárdenas, 2023; Tolhah & Sugirin, 2021).

Narrative texts are relevant to junior high school English instruction because students must understand characters, settings, event sequences, conflicts, resolutions, and moral values. These demands require students to identify main ideas, locate supporting details, infer information, and interpret unfamiliar vocabulary. Research on Indonesian EFL learners reports difficulties in distinguishing main ideas and supporting details, identifying the main idea across paragraphs, understanding vocabulary, and making inferences (Ramadhianti & Somba, 2023).

The urgency of the present study was identified through preliminary observation at SMP Negeri 8 Gunungsitoli in February 2026. Reading lessons were predominantly teacher-centered, while students had limited opportunities to discuss texts, collaborate, and explain their understanding. The initial pre-test also showed that most students had not reached the school's KKM of 68. The data below provide an empirical basis for conducting the intervention.

Initial Condition	Result
Participants	29 students of class VIII-B
Pre-test mean score	57.76
Students reaching KKM ≥ 68	5 students (17.24%)
Students below KKM	24 students (82.76%)
Observed difficulties	Main idea, details, inference, vocabulary, and summary writing

Table 1. Preliminary condition of students' reading comprehension

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) offers a learner-centered framework in which students investigate meaningful tasks, collaborate, construct knowledge, and produce a tangible outcome. In EFL settings, PjBL has been associated with active participation, collaborative learning, and positive classroom experiences (Ngadiso et al., 2021; Yamada, 2021). Its project-oriented process can therefore be connected to reading instruction by requiring students to read, discuss, select relevant information, reorganize ideas, and produce a meaningful reading product.

Recent research also provides evidence relevant to the present intervention. Imbaquingo and Cárdenas (2023) examined PjBL for English reading and comprehension development, while Rosita et al. (2024) investigated PjBL in reading comprehension and reported improvement after implementation. In an Indonesian context, Mumtazah et al. (2024) examined PjBL combined with flipped learning for reading comprehension, and Rizkilla et al. (2025) investigated PjBL as a strategy for improving reading comprehension at the junior high school level. These studies support the relevance of PjBL while also indicating the need for classroom-based evidence in specific school contexts.

The present study differs by using Classroom Action Research with eighth-grade students and by integrating narrative-text analysis, vocabulary-building activities, structured group roles, and a reading-summary project. Reflection after Cycle I was used to refine the

intervention in Cycle II through clearer instructions, vocabulary preparation, role distribution, time management, and intensified teacher guidance. This design was intended to address both comprehension difficulties and unequal student participation.

Based on the identified classroom problems and the preliminary achievement data, this study aimed to investigate how Project-Based Learning could enhance the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 8 Gunungsitoli. Specifically, the study examined changes in students' reading comprehension achievement across the pre-test, Post-Test 1, and Post-Test 2 and documented changes in classroom participation during the two action cycles.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to improve reading instruction and students' reading comprehension through Project-Based Learning (PjBL). The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 8 Gunungsitoli during the Even Semester of the 2025/2026 Academic Year. The participants were 29 students of class VIII-B. The research consisted of two cycles, and each cycle followed the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

At the planning stage, the researcher prepared lesson modules, narrative-text materials, students' worksheets (LKPD), project tasks, observation instruments, field notes, and reading-comprehension assessments. The action stage implemented PjBL through narrative-text reading, group discussion, identification of story elements, comprehension questions, summary writing, and presentation. The English teacher acted as collaborator during observation. Reflection compared the learning process and students' achievement with the predetermined success criterion and informed the next cycle.

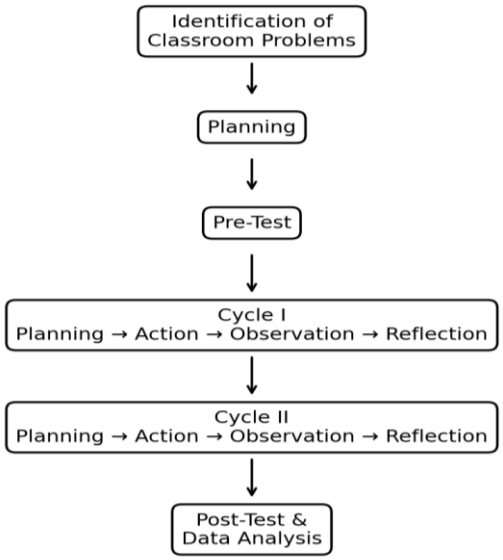


Figure 1. Research procedure

Cycle I was conducted in two meetings. Students worked with the narrative text "The Mouse Deer and Elephant," identified characters, setting, orientation, complication, resolution, and moral value, and collaboratively produced a reading summary. The reflection showed that some students remained passive, experienced difficulty with unfamiliar vocabulary and inference, and needed support in organizing summaries. Cycle II therefore introduced vocabulary-building before reading, clearer project instructions, specific group roles, more intensive teacher guidance, and immediate feedback. The first Cycle II meeting used "The

Honest Woodcutter," and the second used "The Lion and the Mouse."

The instruments consisted of reading-comprehension tests, teacher and student observation sheets, field notes, interviews, and documentation. The reading test consisted of five essay questions and one summary-writing task. The essay questions measured main idea, detailed information, and inference. The summary task assessed content (15), organization (10), vocabulary (10), grammar (10), and mechanics (5), for a total score of 100. The school's KKM was 68.

Quantitative data were analyzed using individual scores, the mean score, classical mastery, and improvement. The mean score was calculated by dividing the total score by the number of students. Classical mastery was calculated as the percentage of students obtaining a score of at least 68. The research success criterion was at least 85% of students achieving the KKM. Qualitative data from observations, field notes, interviews, and documentation were interpreted descriptively to identify changes in participation, collaboration, confidence, and engagement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

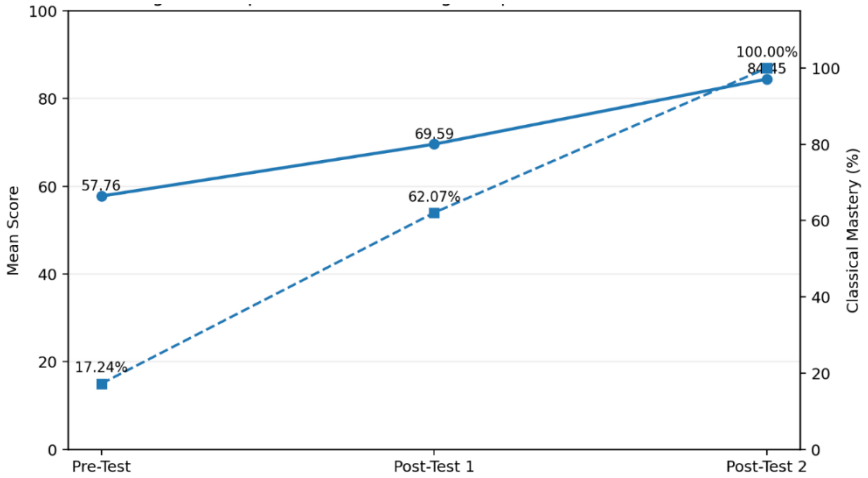
The quantitative findings show a continuous increase in students' reading comprehension achievement from the initial condition to Cycle II.

Assessment	Mean Score	Students Achieving KKM	Classical Mastery	Improvement
Pre-Test	57.76	5 of 29	17.24%	—
Post-Test 1 (Cycle I)	69.59	18 of 29	62.07%	+11.83
Post-Test 2 (Cycle II)	84.45	29 of 29	100%	+14.86

Table 2. Students' reading comprehension achievement

The pre-test mean score was 57.76, below the KKM of 68, and only 5 of 29 students (17.24%) achieved mastery. After Cycle I, the mean increased to 69.59 and classical mastery reached 62.07% (18 students). Because this percentage was below the 85% success criterion, the action continued to Cycle II. After the improvements introduced in Cycle II, the mean increased to 84.45 and all 29 students (100%) achieved the KKM. The highest score was 95 and the lowest was 72.

Figure 2. Improvement in reading comprehension achievement



Implementation of Project-Based Learning

The qualitative findings indicate a shift from a predominantly teacher-centered learning pattern toward more active collaborative learning. Students were involved in reading narrative texts, discussing story elements, identifying important information, exploring vocabulary, answering comprehension questions, preparing summaries, and presenting their work. The reading-summary project required students to select and reorganize important information from the text in their own words.



Figure 3. Documentation of classroom implementation of Project-Based Learning: (a) group discussion during narrative-text reading, (b) student presentation of the reading-summary project

In Cycle I, planned researcher activities were implemented at 92% in the first meeting and 96% in the second meeting, while observed student participation reached 86.07% and 86.97%, respectively. After reflection, vocabulary-building, clearer instructions, structured group roles, and more intensive guidance were introduced. In Cycle II, planned activities were completed in both meetings, while student participation reached 94.24% and 98.39%. These observations are consistent with research describing PjBL as a collaborative and learner-centered approach in EFL classrooms (Ngadiso et al., 2021; Yamada, 2021).

Discussion

The increase from 57.76 to 69.59 and then 84.45 indicates progressive improvement in students' reading comprehension during the classroom action cycles. The increase in classical mastery from 17.24% to 62.07% and finally 100% shows that the improvement involved both the class mean and the number of students reaching the KKM. This pattern is consistent with recent research showing that PjBL can support English reading development through active and contextualized learning (Imbaquingo & Cárdenas, 2023; Rosita et al., 2024).

One plausible explanation is the integration of collaborative reading with the project process. Students had to discuss narrative content, compare interpretations, identify important information, and construct a summary. Such activities require learners to process the text

actively instead of relying only on teacher explanation. Research on Indonesian EFL classrooms similarly reports that PjBL can create opportunities for group work, learner participation, and more active classroom processes (Ngadiso et al., 2021).

The reading-summary project also connected comprehension with meaning production. To write a summary, students needed to distinguish important information, identify event sequences, organize ideas, and express content in their own words. This directly addressed difficulties identified in the pre-test, especially selecting details and organizing information. The finding is also relevant to studies of Indonesian EFL reading difficulties, which identify problems with main ideas, supporting details, vocabulary, and inference (Ramadhianti & Somba, 2023).

Vocabulary-building was added before reading in Cycle II because unfamiliar words were a recurring difficulty in Cycle I. Students discussed word meanings and used contextual information before completing comprehension tasks. This adjustment likely helped students access the text and participate more confidently. The use of structured group roles also addressed unequal participation by assigning responsibilities such as leader, reader, writer, presenter, and timekeeper. The higher participation percentages in Cycle II suggest that the revised classroom management supported more consistent involvement.

The findings are also comparable with recent PjBL studies. Mumtazah et al. (2024) reported positive reading-comprehension outcomes from combining PjBL with flipped learning, while Rizkilla et al. (2025) examined PjBL as a strategy for improving reading comprehension among junior high school students. A recent study of online PjBL in an EFL context also found improvement in reading comprehension and critical thinking, although that study used a different population and quasi-experimental design (Song et al., 2025). Therefore, the present findings should be interpreted as classroom-specific evidence rather than as a basis for broad generalization.

This study has limitations. It involved one class of 29 students and was conducted over two cycles, so the findings describe improvement in this particular classroom context. Other factors, including students' vocabulary levels, motivation, participation, classroom conditions, and learning facilities, may also have influenced the learning process. Future studies may examine PjBL with larger groups, different text genres, longer implementation periods, or digital learning resources.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Project-Based Learning enhanced the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 8 Gunungsitoli within the context of this Classroom Action Research. The mean score increased from 57.76 in the pre-test to 69.59 in Post-Test 1 and 84.45 in Post-Test 2. Classical mastery increased from 17.24% to 62.07% and finally to 100%, exceeding the predetermined 85% success criterion. The qualitative findings also indicated greater participation, collaboration, confidence, responsibility, and engagement during reading activities. The combination of narrative-text analysis, collaborative discussion, vocabulary-building activities, structured group roles, and reading-summary production supported the improvement observed across the two cycles. However, the study was limited to one class of 29 students and two cycles; therefore, the findings should be understood within the specific classroom context. Further research may examine PjBL with larger groups, other text genres, longer implementation periods, and digital learning resources.

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