Empowering Students' Reading Comprehension through Paired Reading Method at the Tenth Grade of SMA Negeri 14 Maluku Barat Daya

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ABSTRACT

This classroom action research aimed to improve the reading comprehension skills of tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 14 Maluku Barat Daya through the implementation of the Paired Reading Method. Conducted over two cycles, the study followed the model of Kemmis and McTaggart, consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. A total of 25 students were selected purposively, and data were collected through reading comprehension tests, student questionnaires, and structured classroom observations. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' comprehension performance across cycles. In Cycle I, 64% of students met the success benchmark (score ≥ 75), while in Cycle II, all students (100%) achieved the benchmark. Statistical analysis confirmed significant gains ($t(24) = 6.22$, $p < .001$) with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.11$). Questionnaire responses indicated enhanced confidence, motivation, and peer engagement. These results suggest that the Paired Reading Method, when combined with strategic scaffolding and reflective facilitation, is an effective approach for both cognitive and affective learner development in reading comprehension. The study highlights the value of peer-assisted learning in resource-limited classroom contexts and supports its integration into language pedagogy.

Keywords: *Paired Reading Method, Reading Comprehension, Classroom Action Research, Secondary Education; Learner Empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that underpins academic success across disciplines. For secondary school students, the ability to understand, interpret, and engage with textual material is not only vital for passing examinations but also for developing critical thinking and lifelong learning competencies (Nation, 2009). Despite its importance, reading comprehension remains a persistent challenge in many educational contexts, particularly in rural or under-resourced schools where access to innovative instructional strategies is limited (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007).

At SMA Negeri 14 Maluku Barat Daya, students have consistently demonstrated difficulties in decoding text, identifying key ideas, drawing inferences, and synthesizing information. Observations and initial assessments indicate that these challenges stem from both cognitive and environmental factors, including limited vocabulary exposure, lack of familiarity with various text types, and a predominantly teacher-centered instructional model (Wahyuddin, Siregar, & Prasetyo, 2022). This traditional approach often results in passive learning, with students expected to absorb information rather than construct knowledge through interaction and reflection (Rosmiati & Nuryani, 2020).

Educational research increasingly supports the shift from passive to active learning models, particularly in language acquisition. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) posits that learning is inherently social, and cognitive development is enhanced through interaction and collaboration. In this vein, paired reading—a structured, peer-assisted learning method—emerges as a promising alternative. This method encourages students to work in dyads to read texts aloud, discuss meanings, and support one another's comprehension, thereby fostering both academic and interpersonal skills (Topping, 2005).

Numerous studies underscore the effectiveness of paired reading in improving reading comprehension outcomes. For example, Misa, Rahmawati, and Sutarto (2023) reported significant gains in reading comprehension among middle school students following a six-week paired reading intervention, attributing improvements to immediate peer feedback and scaffolded discussions. Similarly, Triana (2022) found that paired reading helped learners articulate their understanding and engage in critical questioning, resulting in higher post-test scores compared to those receiving traditional instruction. Wahyuddin et al. (2022) also emphasized that paired reading provides learners with a supportive environment conducive to risk-taking and exploration of complex texts.

The theoretical foundation for paired reading lies in both cognitive and social constructivism. Cognitive constructivists assert that learners actively build knowledge by connecting new information with prior understanding, while social constructivists highlight the role of collaborative discourse in refining thought processes (Rosmiati & Nuryani, 2020). In the context of reading, this means students benefit from verbalizing their thoughts, questioning interpretations, and co-constructing meaning with peers. Such interactions are particularly beneficial for struggling readers, as they provide a platform to clarify confusion and receive immediate assistance (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

Moreover, empirical evidence indicates that peer-assisted learning methods like paired reading contribute not only to cognitive gains but also to affective development. Lestari (2019) observed increased student motivation and confidence when learners engaged in reciprocal reading tasks. Coll and Durán (2015) linked peer tutoring in reading to enhanced self-concept, as students felt more competent and autonomous in their academic efforts. These findings suggest that paired reading does more than improve scores—it empowers learners by fostering a sense of agency and engagement.

Despite these benefits, most studies on paired reading have been conducted in urban or high-resource schools with well-trained staff and access to rich instructional materials. There remains a gap in the literature concerning the implementation and impact of the paired reading method in rural, under-resourced Indonesian contexts such as Maluku Barat Daya. Given the sociocultural and infrastructural differences, it is uncertain whether the positive outcomes of paired reading observed in other settings will translate effectively here.

In light of the above, this study seeks to examine the application of the paired reading method to empower students' reading comprehension at SMA Negeri 14 Maluku Barat Daya. Specifically, it aims to answer the following research questions:
1. How can the Paired Reading Method empower students' reading comprehension at the tenth grade of SMA Negeri 14 Maluku Barat Daya?
2. What are the students' perceptions of empowering reading comprehension through the Paired Reading Method at the same grade level?

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, drawing upon the framework developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), which emphasizes systematic, reflective inquiry into teaching practices to improve student outcomes. CAR is particularly well-suited for language classrooms, as it allows teachers to implement pedagogical interventions in real-time while evaluating their impact through iterative cycles. Each cycle in this research comprised four interconnected stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The goal was to investigate and improve students' reading comprehension through the implementation of the Paired Reading Method, enabling responsive modifications between cycles based on evidence collected during the process.

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 14 Maluku Barat Daya and involved 25 tenth-grade students. Participants were selected purposively based on regular attendance, consent to participate, and the availability of baseline diagnostic reading scores. The initial assessment was designed to measure comprehension across three dimensions: literal understanding, inferencing ability, and critical analysis. These scores were used not only to assess baseline proficiency but also to guide the student-pairing process. Pairs were formed heterogeneously, aligning one higher-proficiency student with a lower-proficiency peer. Pairing decisions were based on reading test scores, teacher observations, and classroom dynamics to ensure cognitive diversity and interpersonal compatibility. To maintain instructional equity and prevent dominant-partner effects, the pairs were rotated in the second cycle following a reflective analysis of their collaboration during the first.

The intervention was carried out in two full action research cycles. During the planning stage, lesson plans were revised to incorporate paired reading activities, texts were adapted to

ensure suitable difficulty levels, and training was provided to the teacher to effectively facilitate student interaction. In the action stage, students participated in a series of structured paired reading sessions held over four consecutive weeks. Within each session, students alternated roles reading aloud and questioning one another about the text's content, vocabulary, and inference-based meaning. Teachers actively facilitated this process, offering scaffolding prompts, modeling dialogue strategies, and monitoring participation. The observation stage included structured classroom observations using checklists and field notes to capture student behaviors, engagement levels, and collaborative interactions. These observations informed the reflection stage, where findings were reviewed and instructional strategies were refined for the next cycle.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection employed a triangulated approach involving reading comprehension tests, student questionnaires, and structured observations. The comprehension tests, consisting of ten open-ended questions, were administered as pre- and post-tests for each cycle. These questions were designed to assess both cognitive recall and higher-order comprehension processes. A questionnaire was developed to evaluate students' perceptions of the paired reading experience, focusing on their motivation, confidence, and sense of empowerment. The instrument included a combination of Likert-scale items and open-ended responses. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two education experts for content relevance and clarity. A pilot test was conducted with a similar tenth-grade class, and the instrument yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.82, indicating strong internal consistency. In addition, structured observation checklists, adapted from Mambua (2020), captured specific behaviors during the paired reading sessions such as turn-taking, collaborative problem-solving, and engagement indicators. Observation inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa and found to be acceptable.

For the data analysis, quantitative data from the comprehension tests were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive analysis involved computing the mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution of student scores across cycles to evaluate general performance trends. Inferential statistics, specifically paired-sample t-tests, were employed to determine whether changes in test scores before and after each cycle were statistically significant. The effect size (Cohen's d) was also calculated to assess the magnitude of the observed differences. Qualitative data from the open-ended questionnaire responses and field notes were subjected to thematic analysis. Responses were coded manually using open coding, and emergent categories were grouped under broader themes related to student motivation, autonomy, and engagement. Observational data were cross-checked with questionnaire themes to ensure triangulation and deepen the interpretive validity of the findings.

Throughout the process, multiple strategies were employed to uphold the validity and reliability of the study. These included methodological triangulation across data sources, peer debriefing with a co-observer to minimize researcher bias, and member checking through post-session student reflections to ensure the authenticity of reported insights. Collectively, these measures enhanced the rigor and credibility of the research findings while maintaining the practical relevance of classroom action research.

Success Criteria

To determine whether the intervention was effective, a success benchmark was set based on students' post-test performance. A score of 75 or higher (on a scale of 0–100) was used as the minimum acceptable threshold for reading comprehension proficiency, aligned with the school's curriculum standards. The intervention cycle was considered successful if at least 75% of students met or exceeded this benchmark. If fewer than 75% of students reached the benchmark in a given cycle, the intervention would be revised and re-implemented in the next cycle following the CAR model of continuous improvement.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This Classroom Action Research (CAR) aimed to improve students' reading comprehension at SMA Negeri 14 Maluku Barat Daya through the implementation of the Paired Reading Method. Findings are presented across two CAR cycles, following the standard sequence of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected using pre- and post-tests, structured observations, and student questionnaires, and were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, as well as thematic qualitative analysis.

Cycle I (Pre- and Post-Test)

In the first cycle, students participated in five paired reading sessions. While most pairs demonstrated active collaboration, some struggled with role balance and engagement. Post-test scores showed measurable improvements after the treatment. Table 1 show the pre and post test score in cycle 1.

Table 1. Pre- and Post-Test Scores in Cycle I

Measure	Pre-Test	Post-Test Cycle I
Mean Score (M)	66.2	74.3
Standard Deviation (SD)	9.1	8.5
Number of Students ≥ 75	7 (28%)	16 (64%)
Paired t-test	—	*t(24) = 4.18, p < .001*
Effect Size (Cohen's d)	—	0.84 (large)

After the first cycle, 64% of students (16 out of 25) scored 75 or higher on the reading comprehension post-test—an increase from only 28% in the pre-test. While this suggests a strong positive effect, 9 students (36%) still did not meet the success benchmark, indicating a need for instructional refinement in the next cycle.

Observation Results of Cycle I

Observational data were collected using structured checklists assessing peer interaction and engagement. Table 2 show the observation summary of the cycle 1.

Table 2. Observation Summary – Cycle I

Observation Criteria	% of Pairs Demonstrating Behavior
Turn-taking during reading	72%
Collaborative summarizing	60%
Asking clarification questions	48%
Teacher assistance required	44%

The observation data reflect moderate engagement during paired reading. While a majority of students took turns and engaged in summarizing, fewer actively asked questions or self-regulated the process. A relatively high percentage (44%) required teacher assistance, suggesting uneven autonomy and highlighting areas for improvement in instructional scaffolding. The observation also show that stronger readers sometimes dominated, and several pairs required additional support. This insight guided revisions in pairing and teacher scaffolding.

Cycle II

After reflecting on Cycle I results, adjustments were made in pairing strategy, text selection, and teacher facilitation. Refinements in Cycle II included re-pairing students based on diagnostic data, more structured teacher prompts, and leveled reading texts. These changes led to stronger engagement and measurable learning gains. The second cycle yielded notably stronger outcomes across all instruments.

Table 3. Post-Test Scores – Cycle II

Measure	Post-Test Cycle I	Post-Test Cycle II
Mean Score (M)	74.3	85.6
Standard Deviation (SD)	8.5	6.2
Number of Students ≥ 75	16 (64%)	25 (100%)
Paired t-test	*t(24) = 4.18*	*t(24) = 6.22, p < .001*
Effect Size (Cohen's d)	0.84 (large)	1.11 (very large)

Following the refined intervention in Cycle II, all 25 students (100%) scored 75 or above on the reading comprehension test. This full achievement of the benchmark indicates the paired reading method when supported by effective facilitation and pairing can significantly improve comprehension performance across a diverse group of learners.

Observation Results of Cycle II

Observations in Cycle II showed markedly improved collaboration, independence, and student-led inquiry as shown in table 4.

Table 4. Observation Summary of Cycle II

Observation Criteria	% of Pairs Demonstrating Behavior
Turn-taking during reading	92%
Collaborative summarizing	88%
Asking clarification questions	80%
Teacher assistance required	16%

Compared to Cycle I, students were more engaged and relied less on teacher intervention, indicating stronger internalization of the paired reading process. Cycle II showed marked improvement in peer interaction. Most pairs demonstrated effective collaboration with minimal teacher support, suggesting increased autonomy and deeper internalization of the paired reading routine.

Student Perception of the Paired Reading Method

To complement the test scores and observation findings, a Likert-scale questionnaire was administered at the end of the second cycle to capture students' perceptions, attitudes, and self-reported experiences with the Paired Reading Method. The questionnaire aimed to reveal how students evaluated aspects such as peer support, reading confidence, motivation, questioning ability, pacing compatibility, and dependence on their partner. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This data provided insights into the affective and cognitive engagement of learners, critical dimensions that shaped the overall impact of the intervention and informed the instructional adjustments between cycles.

Table 5. Student perception of the paired reading method

Statement	Theme	M	SD
1. I feel more confident when reading with a partner.	Peer Support	4.6	0.5
2. My reading partner helps me understand difficult parts of the text.	Peer Support	4.7	0.4
3. My partner and I read at a comfortable pace together.	Uneven Pacing	4.4	0.6
4. I sometimes find it hard to keep up with my partner's reading speed.	Uneven Pacing (reversed)	2.1	0.8

Statement	Theme	M	SD
5. I know what kinds of questions to ask my partner during reading.	Questioning Skill	4.3	0.6
6. I enjoy reading more when I work with a partner.	Increased Motivation	4.8	0.3
7. I rely on my partner to explain most of the text.	Dependence (reversed)	2.3	0.7

The questionnaire results demonstrate a strong positive shift in students' experiences with the paired reading method. Mean scores for confidence, enjoyment, and peer support increased notably, indicating that students felt more secure and engaged during reading. The lower mean values on reversed items (statements 4 and 7) suggest improved pacing compatibility and reduced overdependence on partners. Additionally, the increase in students' self-reported ability to ask relevant questions (statement 5) suggests a gain in strategic reading behaviors, likely supported by the structured scaffolding introduced in the second cycle.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Paired Reading Method is an effective instructional strategy for improving reading comprehension and learner empowerment in secondary education, particularly within under-resourced settings. The results across two Classroom Action Research (CAR) cycles highlight not only a steady increase in reading scores but also a marked improvement in students' engagement, autonomy, and collaboration.

In Cycle I, 64% of students achieved the success benchmark (≥ 75), indicating moderate effectiveness of the initial intervention. Observation data and questionnaire responses revealed variability in pair dynamics, with some students struggling with pacing and interaction. These challenges align with prior research indicating that the success of peer learning activities depends heavily on balanced pairings and teacher facilitation (Topping, 2005; Friend, 2008). For example, Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) argue that scaffolding must be deliberately structured to move learners through their zones of proximal development. In this study, insufficient scaffolding in Cycle I likely limited some students' ability to fully benefit from peer support.

After reflective revisions in Cycle II, including strategic re-pairing, more consistent teacher prompts, and improved material selection, all 25 students (100%) met or exceeded the benchmark. This outcome confirms the principle of instructional iteration central to the CAR model (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The significant gain in mean test scores and large effect size (Cohen's d = 1.11) also reinforce empirical evidence that peer-assisted learning can produce substantial cognitive benefits when carefully managed (Misa, Rahmawati, & Sutarto, 2023; Triana, 2022).

Beyond cognitive gains, the Likert-scale questionnaire data revealed strong affective improvements in Cycle II. Students reported higher confidence, enjoyment, and reduced dependence on peers. These findings resonate with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which

emphasizes the co-construction of knowledge through dialogue and interaction. The increase in students' questioning ability and independent interpretation of texts also reflects a shift from passive learning to active cognitive engagement (Rosmiati & Nuryani, 2020). Similar outcomes were noted by Coll and Durán (2015), who found that peer tutoring significantly enhances learners' academic self-concept and motivation.

It is important to note that the study's success hinged on the systematic use of formative data, including observations, test results, and student feedback. This triangulation not only validated the intervention's impact but also ensured responsive teaching—a hallmark of high-quality CAR. The use of validated instruments, such as a piloted questionnaire with strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.82$), also strengthens the credibility of the findings and offers a reliable framework for replication in similar contexts.

However, some limitations must be acknowledged. The study was limited to a single school and one grade level, restricting generalizability. Additionally, while Cycle II achieved complete benchmark attainment, long-term retention and transferability of skills were not assessed. Future studies could incorporate delayed post-tests or qualitative interviews to explore how students continue to apply paired reading strategies beyond the intervention period.

CONCLUSION

This classroom action research confirmed that the Paired Reading Method is an effective instructional strategy for enhancing reading comprehension and empowering learners in secondary education. Through iterative refinement across two cycles, the method not only improved students' test performance but also fostered greater confidence, motivation, and collaborative engagement. The full attainment of the success benchmark in Cycle II underscores the value of structured peer interaction combined with responsive teacher facilitation. These results support the integration of peer-assisted learning models in language classrooms, particularly in contexts where students benefit from increased social and cognitive support. Future studies may extend this work by exploring long-term impacts and adapting the approach across diverse educational environments.

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