

Using Study Group Strategy to Improve Eighth Graders' Narrative Text Reading Skills at SMPN 8 Magelang

Roudhotul Khusna¹, Rini Estiyowati Ikaningrum², Susanti Malasari³

¹English Education Study Program (Roudhotul Khusna),

²English Education Study Program (Rini Estiyowati Ikaningrum),

³English Education Study Program (Susanti Malasari)

Email: ¹Roudhotul Khusna roudhotulkhusna550@gmail.com.

Abstract

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This study investigated the study group strategy to improve students' reading skills in narrative texts. The objectives of this study were (1) to examine how the study group strategy could increase students' motivation in reading narrative texts and (2) to determine the extent to which the study group strategy could improve students' reading skills in narrative texts. The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR), consisting of a pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The participants were 32 students from class VIII F at SMPN 8 Magelang. Data collection methods included observation, questionnaires, documentation, and reading tests.

The findings showed that implementing the study group strategy improved both students' motivation and reading skills. Students' learning motivation increased from 37.7% in the pre-cycle to 65.7% in cycle I and then to 78% in cycle II. The mean reading skills score also increased from 62.47 in the pre-cycle to 74.19 in cycle I and further improved to 80.06 in cycle II. Students became more active during the learning process by participating in group discussions, asking and answering questions, and explaining the content of narrative texts more confidently.

In conclusion, the implementation of the study group strategy improved eighth-grade students' motivation to learn and reading skills in narrative texts at SMPN 8 Magelang. These findings suggest that the study group strategy can serve as an alternative instructional approach to enhance students' reading skills and motivation.

Kata Kunci:

*teks naratif,
kemampuan membaca,
kelompok belajar*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi kelompok belajar untuk meningkatkan keterampilan membaca siswa dalam membaca teks naratif. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah (1) untuk mengkaji bagaimana strategi kelompok belajar dapat meningkatkan motivasi siswa dalam membaca teks naratif dan (2) untuk mengetahui sejauh mana strategi kelompok belajar dapat meningkatkan keterampilan membaca siswa dalam membaca teks naratif. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) yang terdiri dari tahap prasiklus, Siklus I, dan Siklus II. Subjek penelitian adalah 32 siswa kelas VIII F di SMPN 8 Magelang. Metode pengumpulan data meliputi observasi, kuesioner, dokumentasi, dan tes membaca.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan strategi kelompok belajar meningkatkan motivasi dan keterampilan membaca siswa. Motivasi belajar siswa meningkat dari 37,7% pada tahap pra-siklus menjadi 65,7% pada Siklus I, dan kemudian menjadi 78% pada Siklus II. Rata-rata nilai keterampilan membaca juga meningkat dari 62,47 pada tahap pra-siklus menjadi 74,19 pada Siklus I dan meningkat lebih lanjut menjadi 80,06 pada Siklus II. Siswa menjadi lebih aktif selama proses pembelajaran dengan berpartisipasi dalam diskusi kelompok, mengajukan serta menjawab pertanyaan, dan menjelaskan isi teks naratif dengan lebih percaya diri.

Sebagai kesimpulan, penerapan strategi kelompok belajar meningkatkan motivasi belajar dan keterampilan membaca teks naratif siswa kelas VIII di SMPN 8 Magelang. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi kelompok belajar dapat menjadi alternatif pendekatan pembelajaran untuk meningkatkan keterampilan membaca dan motivasi siswa.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the four essential language skills that English language learners need to master. It enables students to acquire information, develop language proficiency, and achieve academic success. Through engagement with books, articles, and online resources, students gain new knowledge and enhance critical

thinking by analyzing and evaluating texts. According to Ramli et al. (2019), reading allows students to access information and scientific knowledge from diverse sources, thereby supporting cognitive and social development. Additionally, reading expands vocabulary, deepens understanding of texts, and exposes learners to various cultures and perspectives. Therefore, fostering students' reading skills is crucial for advancing their overall English proficiency.

In the Indonesian junior high school curriculum, students are expected to apply these reading skills when reading various types of texts. At the junior high school level, students are required to master several text types, including narrative texts. Successful comprehension of narrative texts requires the ability to identify generic structures, recognize language features, determine main ideas, locate specific information, infer implicit meanings, and understand unfamiliar vocabulary. Anderson (2003) states that the primary purpose of narrative texts is to entertain or engage readers through imaginative storytelling and figurative language. Exposure to a variety of stories, whether fictional or based on real events, can stimulate curiosity and increase students' interest in reading. Therefore, students need good reading skills to understand the content and structure of narrative texts effectively. However, many students still struggle to understand narrative texts due to limited vocabulary and inadequate reading strategies.

Despite the recognized importance of reading, observations at SMPN 8 Magelang indicate that many eighth-grade students continue to struggle with reading narrative texts, as reflected in their relatively low English achievement scores. Several factors contribute to these challenges. First, many students exhibit limited reading fluency and tend to focus on pronouncing words rather than understanding the overall meaning of the text. Second, limited vocabulary is a significant obstacle because students frequently encounter unfamiliar words and complex sentence structures, hindering their understanding. Third, the lack of effective reading strategies prevents students from comprehending texts efficiently. These difficulties also affect students' motivation to learn, as

evidenced by their lack of attention, limited participation, and low engagement during reading activities. The challenge of understanding lengthy texts often leads to boredom and frustration, resulting in students' reluctance to actively participate in reading lessons. Therefore, an appropriate instructional strategy is needed to improve students' reading skills.

To address these challenges, an instructional strategy that promotes collaboration and active learning is required. Cole (2008) emphasizes the important role of teachers in meeting students' learning needs through effective instructional practices. In line with this view, Johnson and Johnson (2017) state that cooperative learning enables students to work together and depend on one another to achieve shared academic goals. One cooperative learning approach that can improve students' reading skills is the study group strategy. This strategy encourages students to work in small groups to discuss and review learning materials with minimal teacher supervision. Johnson et al. (1991a) define a study group as "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning." Through group discussions, students can exchange ideas, clarify unfamiliar vocabulary, discuss text content, and construct meaning collaboratively. Such interactions can improve students' vocabulary, reading skills, participation, confidence, and critical thinking.

The study group strategy was implemented to foster a more interactive learning environment by encouraging students to collaborate in small groups. Through discussions and peer interactions, students could exchange ideas, clarify misunderstandings, and support each other in completing reading tasks. These collaborative activities were expected to improve students' reading skills, boost their confidence, and enhance their motivation. By using the study group strategy when teaching narrative texts, this study seeks to address the highlighted issues and enhance the reading abilities of eighth-grade pupils. It is anticipated that this approach will boost students' motivation to read, increase their vocabulary, and improve their narrative text reading skills. As a result, the study group strategy is considered a suitable approach to help students who struggle with reading

narrative texts. The researcher conducted classroom action research entitled "Using the Study Group Strategy to Improve the Eighth Graders' Narrative Texts Reading Skills at SMPN 8 Magelang" as explained above.

METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR), which is a collective self-reflective inquiry conducted by participants in social situations to improve the rationality and justice of their social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2013). The research consisted of three stages: pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II.

The subjects of this study were 32 eighth-grade students of Class VIII F at SMPN 8 Magelang. The class was selected because, based on their previous English grades, the students had not yet achieved the expected standard for English learning. The research was conducted at SMPN 8 Magelang, located on Jl. Beringin V, South Rejowinangun, Magelang Selatan, Magelang City, Central Java Province.

The research was conducted in three stages: pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. In the pre-cycle stage, classroom observations were conducted to identify students' motivation and classroom conditions prior to implementing the study group strategy. A reading test was also administered to assess the students' initial reading skills. Cycle I and Cycle II consisted of four steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. During the acting stage, the study group strategy was implemented in teaching narrative texts. At the end of each cycle, a reading test was administered to measure the students' reading skills after the implementation of the strategy. During the observing stage, students' motivation and the teaching and learning processes were observed. The results of the observations and reading tests were used as the basis for reflection. The reflection on Cycle I indicated that the predetermined success criteria had not yet been achieved. Therefore, the research continued to Cycle II, which followed the same procedures with several improvements based on the results of the reflection in Cycle I.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Improvement of Students' Learning Motivation

Improvements in students' learning motivation at SMP Negeri 8 Magelang during the 2025/2026 academic year were examined using non-test data from classroom observations and questionnaires administered in the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The findings indicate that implementing the study group strategy contributed to a gradual improvement in students' motivation to learn throughout the study.

Pre-cycle results indicated that students' learning motivation was low, as reflected in the observation score of 37.7%, which was categorized as low. Most students were reluctant to ask questions, respond to the teacher's explanations, or participate actively in classroom discussions. They tended to remain passive during the learning process, indicating a lack of confidence and interest in learning narrative texts. Questionnaire findings corroborated this: only 12 of 32 students reported enjoying studying English, while 20 students did not. Additionally, 19 students found reading in English difficult, and 20 students had never experienced a specific strategy for learning narrative texts. These findings indicate a need for a learning strategy that encourages active participation, increases confidence, and creates a more engaging learning environment.

Following the implementation of the study group strategy in Cycle I, students demonstrated increased participation and motivation during the teaching and learning process. The observation score rose to 65.7%, categorized as fair. Students paid closer attention to the teacher's explanations, participated more actively in group discussions, and became more willing to share ideas with peers. The study group strategy enabled students to exchange ideas, ask questions, and solve learning tasks together. Working with peers reduced hesitation in expressing opinions due to encouragement and support from group members. Questionnaire results also reflected this improvement: the number of students who liked studying English increased from 12 in the pre-cycle to 21 in Cycle I. Additionally, 24 students reported understanding the teacher's explanation of narrative texts and believed that the study group strategy improved their reading skills. Furthermore,

20 students reported higher motivation to learn after participating in the study group strategy. These findings indicate that the study group strategy positively influenced students' participation, confidence, and motivation during classroom activities.

Improvement continued in Cycle II, with the observation score increasing to 78%, categorized as good. Students became more enthusiastic, participated actively in classroom discussions, demonstrated greater confidence in expressing opinions, and showed increased responsibility in completing group tasks. Questionnaire findings confirmed this improvement: 23 students reported enjoying studying English, and 29 students reported higher motivation to learn after implementing the study group strategy. Additionally, 26 students believed the strategy improved their reading skills. These results suggest that students responded more positively to the learning process and became increasingly engaged in learning narrative texts. Continuous improvement across the cycles indicates that repeated implementation of the study group strategy gradually developed students' confidence and sustained their motivation. As students became more familiar with collaborative learning activities, their willingness to communicate, contribute ideas, and participate actively increased. This finding aligns with Hennebry-Leung and Lamb (2024), who argue that students' motivation can be enhanced when teachers apply appropriate motivational strategies and create a supportive classroom environment that encourages active participation and meaningful engagement.

The improvement in students' motivation to learn can be further explained through the principles of cooperative learning. During the implementation of the study group strategy, students collaborated in small groups to read narrative texts, discuss ideas, solve reading tasks, and support one another in understanding the material. These collaborative activities enabled students to exchange knowledge, clarify misunderstandings, and learn from each other. According to Slavin (2008), cooperative learning is based on the principle that students achieve better learning outcomes when they work together and share responsibility for each other's

learning. Positive interaction among group members promotes active participation, mutual support, and increased motivation to learn. Consistent with this perspective, Johnson and Johnson (2017) state that cooperative learning enables students to work together and depend on one another to achieve shared academic goals. This principle was evident during the implementation of the study group strategy, as students actively exchanged ideas, supported their peers, and worked collaboratively to complete reading tasks. As a result, students became more confident, participated more actively in classroom discussions, and demonstrated greater motivation throughout the learning process.

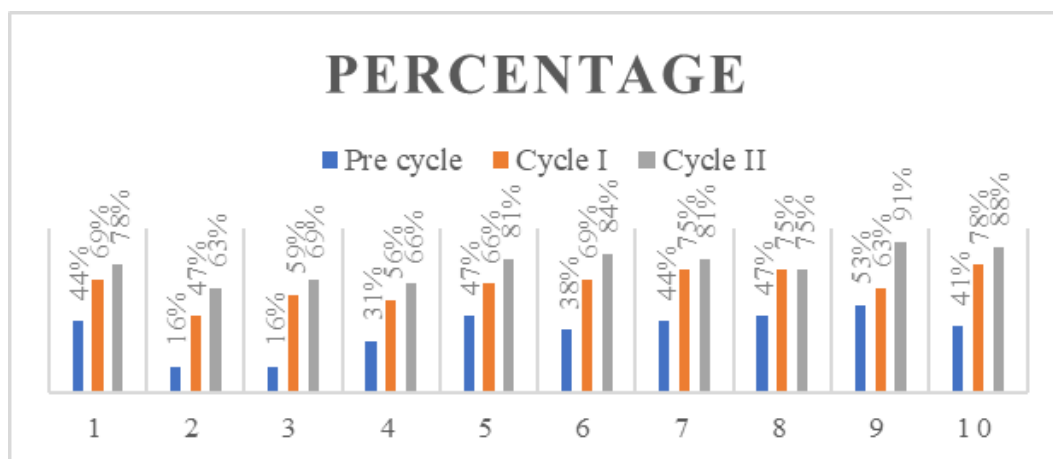
In summary, the findings indicate that implementing the study group strategy improved students' motivation to learn by fostering an interactive, collaborative learning environment. Observations and questionnaire results consistently demonstrated that students became more confident, participated actively in learning activities, and developed more positive attitudes toward learning English. Therefore, the study group strategy can be considered an effective instructional approach for enhancing students' motivation and engagement in learning narrative texts.

Table 1. The Result of Students' Motivation in All Cycles

Student Motivation	Average Score			Improved	
	PC	CI	CII	PC-CI	CI-CII
Averages	37.7%	65.7%	78%	28%	12.3%
Category	Low	Fair	High		

The improvement in students' motivation is also evident in the diagram below, which is based on the results of observations conducted across all cycles:

Diagram 1. The Result of Students' Motivation in All Cycles



The Improvement of the Reading Skills of Narrative Text

To evaluate improvements in students' reading skills in narrative texts at SMP Negeri 8 Magelang during the 2025/2026 academic year, the results of reading tests from the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II were analyzed. The findings demonstrate that implementing the study group strategy contributed to a gradual improvement in students' reading skills throughout the research period. The improvement observed in each cycle is summarized in the following table.

Table 2. The Results of the Reading Test in All Cycles

Students' Reading Score	Average Score			Improved	
	PC	CI	CII	PC-CI	CI-CII
Averages	62.47	74.19	80.06	11.27	5.87
Category	Low	Fair	High		

The data indicate that students' reading skills improved consistently across the three stages of the research. In the pre-cycle, the mean score was 62.47, which was below the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75. This outcome suggests that many students had difficulty understanding narrative texts, particularly in identifying key information, comprehending vocabulary, and grasping the overall content. These results highlight the need for a learning strategy that encourages active participation and supports reading comprehension.

Following the implementation of the study group strategy in Cycle I, the mean score increased to 74.19. Although this result did not yet meet the KKM, it represented a considerable improvement compared to the pre-cycle. Students demonstrated greater engagement in discussing narrative texts, exchanging ideas, and collaboratively solving reading tasks. These activities facilitated more effective comprehension of the texts and enhanced students' confidence in completing reading assignments.

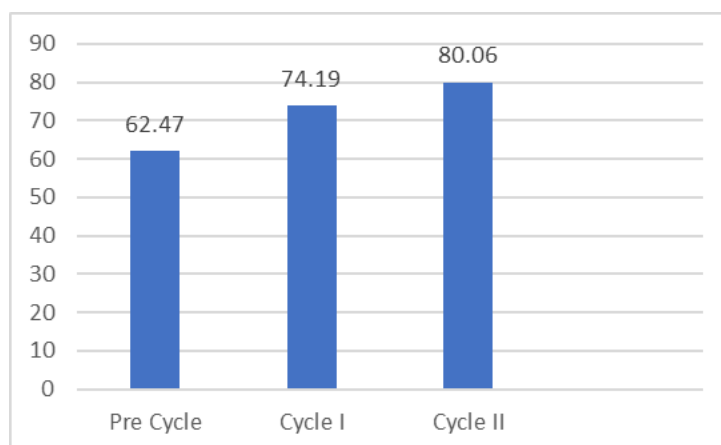
The improvement persisted in Cycle II, with the mean score rising to 80.06, surpassing the KKM of 75. Furthermore, 26 out of 32 students (81.25%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion, indicating that the study's performance indicator was met. The consistent progress across the cycles suggests that repeated use of the study group strategy enabled students to develop stronger reading comprehension through collaborative learning and ongoing practice.

The observed improvement in students' reading skills aligns with the principles of cooperative learning. During the implementation of the study group strategy, students collaborated in small groups to discuss narrative texts, exchange ideas, identify key information, and solve reading tasks together. According to Slavin (2008), cooperative learning fosters collaboration and mutual support among students, leading to improved learning outcomes. Through discussion and peer interaction, students clarified misunderstandings and deepened their understanding of the reading materials. Nunan (2003) states that reading involves comprehending information from a text and constructing meaning. The collaborative activities facilitated by the study group strategy enabled students to

understand narrative texts more effectively, as reflected in improved reading scores across the research cycles.

In summary, the findings indicate that implementing the study group strategy improved students' reading skills in narrative texts. The progressive increase in mean scores from 62.47 in the pre-cycle to 74.19 in Cycle I and 80.06 in Cycle II demonstrates that collaborative learning activities offered students meaningful opportunities to discuss, interpret, and comprehend narrative texts during the instructional process.

Diagram 2. The Result of Reading Scores in All Cycles



CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that implementing the study group strategy improved students' motivation and reading skills in narrative texts. Students' learning motivation increased from 37.7% in the pre-cycle to 65.7% in Cycle I and 78% in Cycle II, indicating a progression from the low to the good category. In addition, students' mean reading score increased from 62.47 in the pre-cycle to 74.19 in Cycle I and 80.06 in Cycle II. By the end of Cycle II, 81.25% of the students achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 75, exceeding the predetermined success indicator.

The improvement suggests that the study group strategy created opportunities for students to collaborate, exchange ideas, discuss narrative texts, and support one another in understanding the learning materials. These activities contributed to greater student participation and confidence during the learning process. Therefore, the study group strategy can be considered an alternative instructional strategy for improving students' motivation and reading skills in narrative texts. Future researchers may investigate the implementation of this strategy in different educational settings, language skills, or text genres to provide broader evidence of its effectiveness.

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