

Improving students' reading comprehension of narrative text through question answer relationship strategy

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Abstract

This classroom action research (CAR) examined how the Question–Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy supported eighth-grade students' reading comprehension of narrative texts at SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta. The study addressed students' difficulties with identifying narrative elements and answering inferential questions in an EFL context. Two CAR cycles were implemented through collaborative planning, action, observation, and reflection with the classroom teacher. Data were generated from reading comprehension tests, classroom observations, and teacher interviews. The findings indicate a consistent improvement in students' comprehension performance across cycles, accompanied by increased engagement and strategic reading behavior. Qualitative evidence shows that students became more aware of question types and more confident in locating textual evidence and making inferences. Rather than claiming causal effectiveness, this study demonstrates that QAR functioned as a pedagogically useful strategy within a reflective CAR process. The study offers practical insights for EFL teachers seeking to scaffold students' literal and inferential comprehension of narrative texts.

Keywords: narrative text; question answer relationship strategy; reading comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental language skill that enables learners to access knowledge, develop language proficiency, and engage critically with a variety of texts. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, reading is not merely a passive act of decoding symbols but a complex process involving comprehension, interpretation, and reflection (Andika et al., 2021). According to Werberg (2003), reading involves understanding written texts and requires both cognitive processing and perception. Through reading, students are empowered to expand their understanding, gather relevant information, and gain insights that support their overall academic development.

Reading comprehension occurs when students are able to engage meaningfully with texts, drawing connections between ideas and extracting both explicit and implicit information (Hidayat & Rohati, 2020). To do this, learners must possess adequate vocabulary, grasp grammatical structures, and apply various reading strategies. (Pang & Bernhardt, 2003) highlight that reading is a skill that empowers learners, enabling them to benefit from the vast knowledge contained in printed material. Therefore, it is imperative for EFL students to develop strong reading competencies in order to fully understand and internalize the meaning of English texts.

In teaching reading to EFL learners, instructors must consider the students' proficiency levels and their familiarity with the English language system. Nation (2008) distinguishes the learning trajectories of first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) readers. L1 learners are

generally exposed to language through storytelling and interactive experiences from an early age, entering school with a substantial vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. In contrast, L2 learners such as students at SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta often struggle with reading due to limited vocabulary, unfamiliarity with English grammar and phonology, and the need to navigate a different writing system from their mother tongue. These challenges underscore the importance of differentiated instructional strategies in reading pedagogy.

Reading comprehension remains a persistent challenge for many learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, particularly at the junior high school level. Although reading is a core skill for accessing academic content, students often struggle to move beyond surface-level understanding, especially when dealing with narrative texts that require both literal comprehension and inferential reasoning. Preliminary classroom observations and discussions with the English teacher at SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta indicated that eighth-grade students experienced difficulty identifying narrative elements, interpreting implicit meanings, and responding to comprehension questions strategically. These difficulties were reflected in low reading achievement and limited classroom engagement.

From the researcher's position as a collaborator working alongside the classroom teacher, this study was grounded in practitioner inquiry rather than external evaluation. To manage potential bias, instructional decisions were jointly planned, the teacher retained primary responsibility for classroom instruction, and data were collected from multiple sources, including tests, observations, and interviews. This collaborative and reflective stance aligns with the principles of Classroom Action Research (CAR), which prioritizes instructional improvement within a specific context rather than generalizable causal claims.

Although reading comprehension has been widely discussed in the literature, much existing instruction in EFL classrooms continues to emphasize product-oriented outcomes such as answering questions correctly rather than the cognitive processes students use to derive meaning from texts. Narrative texts, while familiar in form, pose particular challenges because students must integrate textual information, recognize story structure, and make inferences based on both textual clues and prior knowledge. In the observed classroom context, reading activities were largely teacher-centered, and students were rarely guided to consider how different types of questions require different reading strategies.

This gap between students' reading difficulties and the lack of explicit strategic instruction highlights the need for an approach that scaffolds students' thinking during reading. The Question–Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy offers such a framework by explicitly linking question types to sources of information, whether located directly in the text or constructed through the interaction between text and reader knowledge. Rather than treating comprehension as a uniform skill, QAR helps students recognize the relationship between questions, texts, and cognitive processes.

The relevance of QAR in this study lies in its potential to integrate three key constructs—reading comprehension, narrative text, and strategic questioning—within a single instructional approach. Reading comprehension is viewed not merely as decoding or recall, but as an active and metacognitive process. Narrative texts serve as an appropriate medium because they require students to understand structure, sequence, and implied meaning. QAR functions as the connecting strategy that guides students in navigating narrative texts through purposeful questioning and evidence-based reasoning.

However, observations at SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta revealed that many eighth-grade students encounter difficulties in comprehending narrative texts. Students frequently struggle to identify key elements such as the setting, main characters, conflict, and resolution, as well as to interpret

the moral value embedded in the story. Interviews with English teachers indicate that these difficulties stem from limited vocabulary knowledge and the absence of effective reading strategies. In practice, reading instruction has often been teacher-centered, with the teacher reading the text aloud and students answering literal questions without deep engagement. As a result, students demonstrate low levels of reading comprehension and limited analytical skills.

In response to these challenges, there is a need for an instructional approach that promotes active reading, critical thinking, and metacognitive awareness. One such approach is the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy, which helps students differentiate between types of questions based on the source of the answer. Raphael (2020) describes QAR as a strategy that enables students to determine whether answers can be found directly in the text (*In the Book*) or require background knowledge and inference (*In My Head*). The strategy categorizes questions into four types:

- (1) *Right There*: literal questions whose answers are located in a single sentence in the text.
- (2) *Think and Search* questions: that require synthesizing information from multiple parts of the text.
- (3) *Author and Me*: inferences based on textual content and the reader's prior knowledge.
- (4) *On My Own*: questions that can be answered without reference to the text, relying entirely on the reader's experiences.

Each type of question serves a pedagogical function at different stages of reading instruction. *On My Own* and *Author and Me* questions are effective during pre-reading to activate prior knowledge. *Right There* and *Think and Search* questions support during-reading activities by focusing on vocabulary, information structure, and textual coherence. Post-reading activities benefit from all four types, particularly in guiding students to reflect on the text's message and apply it to real-life situations.

The implementation of QAR in reading instruction has been shown to improve students' comprehension abilities, particularly in understanding text structure, vocabulary, and implicit meaning. Research by Gaffar & Maulana (2024) has demonstrated that QAR not only enhances students' cognitive engagement with texts but also increases their confidence and participation in classroom discussions. By enabling students to understand the nature of questions and the strategies needed to answer them, QAR fosters independence, critical thinking, and a more active reading stance.

In the context of SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta, where students face ongoing difficulties in comprehending narrative texts, the integration of the QAR strategy offers a promising solution. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the implementation of the QAR strategy can improve students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. The study is guided by the following research question: Can Question Answer Relationship (QAR) Strategy improve students' understanding of narrative text at the eighth grade of SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta?

METHOD

Research design

This research was conducted in SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta, students of the eighth grade, class VIII H SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta. The study was conducted in the 2024/2025 academic year. The class consists of 29 students in total, comprising 15 female and 14 male students. This research used classroom action research. The writer conducted this research in improving students' reading comprehension in narrative text through QAR strategy.

The researcher worked collaboratively with the English teacher. To manage potential bias, instructional decisions were discussed jointly, the teacher led classroom instruction, and multiple data sources were triangulated. Reflection after each cycle informed instructional adjustments in the subsequent cycle.

Techniques of data collection

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy in improving reading comprehension among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta. The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, while the quantitative data were obtained through reading comprehension tests. The interview process involved two sessions with the English teacher, conducted before and after the Classroom Action Research (CAR) implementation. The pre-interview aimed to explore students' reading challenges, instructional practices, and the materials used in the classroom. The post-interview, on the other hand, focused on the teacher's perceptions of the QAR strategy, including its effectiveness, observed benefits, limitations, and its impact on student engagement and performance.

To document classroom dynamics during the intervention, an observation sheet consisting of 12 descriptive items rated on a five-point scale was used. This instrument was completed by the English teacher, who served as an observer. The observation sheet was designed to capture various aspects of the teaching and learning process, including the teacher's instructional behavior and the students' participation during the reading activities using the QAR strategy.

In addition, reading comprehension was assessed through pre-tests and post-tests to measure students' progress before and after the QAR implementation. The test items were multiple-choice questions based on narrative texts and assessed students' understanding of main ideas, text structure, vocabulary, and inferential comprehension. All test instruments were developed in alignment with curriculum standards and were validated for content and clarity. Through this combination of interviews, observation, and testing, the study aimed to provide a well-rounded evaluation of the instructional process and the students' learning outcomes following the use of the QAR strategy.

Data analysis

In conducting this research, the writer employed the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method with the aim of addressing issues related to students' low participation and difficulties in reading comprehension. The identified problems included: (1) challenges in understanding narrative texts, (2) limited vocabulary, (3) difficulty in identifying structural elements within narrative texts, and (4) a lack of knowledge regarding effective reading comprehension strategies. The study was carried out over two cycles, each consisting of four phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This cyclical approach allowed for continuous improvement of instructional practices and the adaptation of strategies based on observed outcomes and student responses in each cycle.

Cycle 1

The implementation of Cycle I was carried out in two meetings on March 3 and March 5, 2025, in Class VIII H of SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta. The researcher conducted the classroom instruction, while the English teacher served as an observer, using observation sheets to document the teaching process and student engagement. The initial session aimed to introduce the concept of narrative text and the QAR (Question-Answer Relationship) strategy. The lesson began with greetings and attendance, followed by a discussion to activate students' prior knowledge through guiding questions. The teacher then explained the definition, purpose, and structural elements of narrative texts. Next, the QAR strategy was introduced, detailing its four question types: *Right There*, *Think and Search*, *Author and You*, and *On My Own*.

To illustrate the strategy, a sample narrative text was used, and the teacher modelled how to answer different QAR question types. Students received a worksheet containing a short narrative and five QAR-based comprehension questions. They read silently and attempted to apply the QAR strategy individually. While some students showed active engagement, others required support. The session concluded with a review of key points, feedback on participation, and encouragement for the next meeting.

The second meeting focused on strengthening students' understanding of the narrative text's generic structure and linguistic features using the QAR strategy. The lesson began with a review of the previous session, followed by a presentation on the elements of narrative texts (orientation, complication, resolution, reorientation) and their associated language features (past tense, time conjunctions, descriptive adjectives). The teacher used the story *Rapunzel* to demonstrate these features and linked the content to relevant QAR questions.

Students were divided into small groups and assigned different fairy tales (e.g., *Cinderella*, *Snow White*). Each group completed a QAR worksheet containing essay-style questions. The teacher facilitated group discussions, clarified instructions, and provided scaffolding. Toward the end of the session, groups presented their answers, identifying the question types and explaining their reasoning. This collaborative activity enhanced peer learning and reinforced the application of QAR in analyzing narrative texts. The session concluded with a summary of key concepts and motivation for future application of the strategy.

Cycle 2

The first meeting of Cycle 2 was conducted in Class VIII H at SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta. The teacher began with greetings, a prayer, and attendance, then introduced the lesson objectives. The narrative text *Cinderella* was used to review narrative elements such as orientation, complication, resolution, and moral value. Students worked in small groups to answer five QAR-based comprehension questions representing all four QAR categories. Each group presented their responses, followed by teacher and peer feedback to reinforce understanding.

In the second meeting, students reviewed the previous material and were introduced to a new text, *Snow White*. After reading the story, students identified narrative components and worked in new groups to complete a QAR worksheet with open-ended questions. Selected groups presented their answers, and the teacher provided feedback. This session aimed to enhance students' reading comprehension through collaborative analysis and application of the QAR strategy.

The result of interview

Following the completion of the two cycles of classroom action research, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview with the English teacher of SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta on Tuesday, March 25th, 2025. The interview aimed to gather qualitative insights regarding the implementation and impact of the Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy on students' reading comprehension. Below is a synthesis of the teacher's responses presented in academic form:

The teacher expressed strong support for the application of the QAR strategy in the Grade VIII H English classroom. She emphasized that QAR provided a structured cognitive framework that helped students distinguish between different types of reading questions—namely “Right There,” “Think and Search,” “Author and You,” and “On My Own.” This framework enhanced students' comprehension by guiding them to focus on relevant textual evidence and apply the appropriate reasoning method for each question type.

In terms of effectiveness, the teacher noted significant improvements in student understanding and confidence. Previously, students had difficulty answering inferential questions.

However, through QAR, they became more adept at identifying question categories and locating textual support, leading to more accurate and thoughtful responses during classroom discussions and assessments. The teacher further stated her interest in continuing the use of QAR in future reading instruction. She observed that QAR not only boosted students' reading comprehension but also enhanced their critical thinking and metacognitive skills. Students began questioning the nature of each task and planning their approach accordingly evidencing deeper engagement and understanding.

The interview revealed that students' achievement levels increased notably across both cycles. Initially, only around 20% of students met the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 80. After the implementation of QAR, this figure rose to over 60% by the end of the second cycle. Even students who did not fully reach the benchmark showed meaningful improvement, with many scoring between 75 and 79. In addition to academic gains, the teacher observed behavioral and cognitive shifts. Participation in discussions increased significantly, with more students actively volunteering answers. Group work became more collaborative and focused, as students used QAR terminology to discuss their thought processes. They also began marking relevant parts of texts independently and discussing interpretations with peers, demonstrating improved classroom dynamics.

Though vocabulary remained a challenge for some, students developed more proactive strategies to address it. They began identifying key terms and seeking definitions in context. The "Think and Search" component of QAR was particularly effective in helping them determine main ideas and synthesize information across paragraphs. According to the teacher, QAR also sharpened students' ability to distinguish between literal and inferential questions. By the second cycle, many students were correctly categorizing question types before attempting answers. This not only improved their comprehension but also accelerated their test-taking efficiency.

Lastly, the teacher confirmed that the texts and questions used during the research were appropriate for Grade VIII students. The narrative texts ranged from 150–200 words and were linguistically accessible. While "Author and You" and "On My Own" questions posed initial difficulties, repeated modelling helped students grasp their demands. Overall, the QAR-based instruction struck a good balance between challenge and attainability. In conclusion, the interview findings confirm that the QAR strategy had a positive impact on both the cognitive and affective dimensions of student learning. It contributed to enhanced comprehension, greater student engagement, and improved academic performance in reading narrative texts.

The result of observation sheet

Observation sheet data were gathered during the implementation of Classroom Action Research (CAR) in both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2. These observations were conducted to monitor the students' engagement, classroom atmosphere, and the teacher's implementation of the QAR strategy throughout the learning activities. In Cycle 1, during the first meeting, most students appeared hesitant and less engaged with the material. Since it was the initial introduction to the QAR strategy, students were still unfamiliar with how to apply it effectively. Many of them remained passive and tended to rely on their peers during group discussions. Some students were reluctant to ask or answer questions, and group collaboration was not yet optimal. Additionally, a few students seemed confused about the structure of narrative texts and the categories of QAR questions.

However, by the second and third meetings in Cycle 1, a slight improvement was observed. Students began to show increased interest in identifying types of questions and were able to follow group tasks more confidently. Although some groups remained dominated by a few active members, others began to involve quieter students in the discussion. The teacher's efforts in

guiding group interactions and giving question cues also helped foster a more participative atmosphere, though it was not yet consistent across the classroom.

In Cycle 2, student engagement increased significantly. In the first meeting, students were more familiar with the QAR strategy and were able to apply it with greater confidence. Group collaboration improved after the teacher reorganized group members to ensure more balanced participation. Students showed greater interest in the narrative texts (e.g., “Cinderella” and “Rapunzel”), which supported their motivation to explore the reading content. Several students who had previously been passive became more involved in answering questions and contributing during group discussions.

By the second meeting of Cycle 2, most students participated actively, demonstrated improved reading comprehension skills, and used the QAR categories accurately. They were more strategic in identifying the type of each question (e.g., “Right There”, “Think and Search”) and used textual evidence to support their answers. Overall, the classroom atmosphere became more dynamic, collaborative, and student-centered, indicating that the implementation of the QAR strategy was increasingly effective.

The result of post-test

Based on students’ pre-test scores, the data showed that only eight (8) students, or 27.59% who have passed the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM), and 21 students were still got scores below the KKM. It means that the students’ reading comprehension achievement of the VIII H class was poor. It could be seen from the chart below:

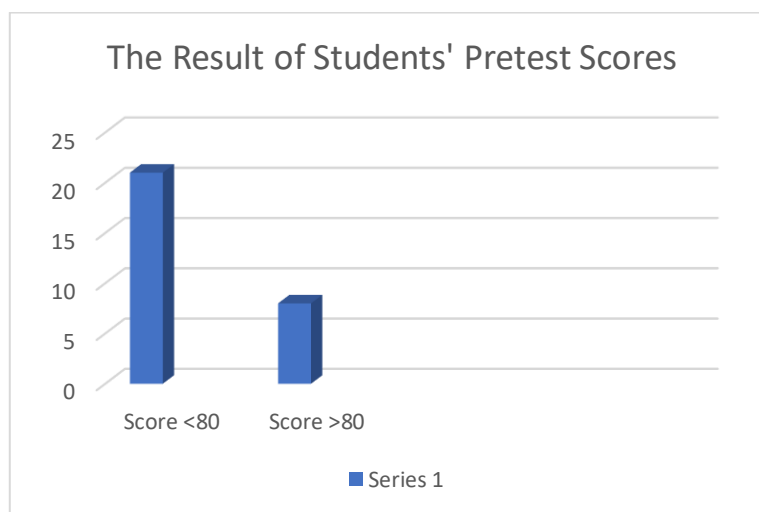


Figure 1. The result of students' pretest scores

Meanwhile, the results of students' post-test (1) scores showed that 17 students, or 58,62%, have passed the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM), which means that there were still twelve students who had not passed the KKM. Then, the researcher needed to continue the second cycle because the students' scores still had not the criteria of the Action Success. The result of students' post-test one could be seen from the chart in Figure 2.

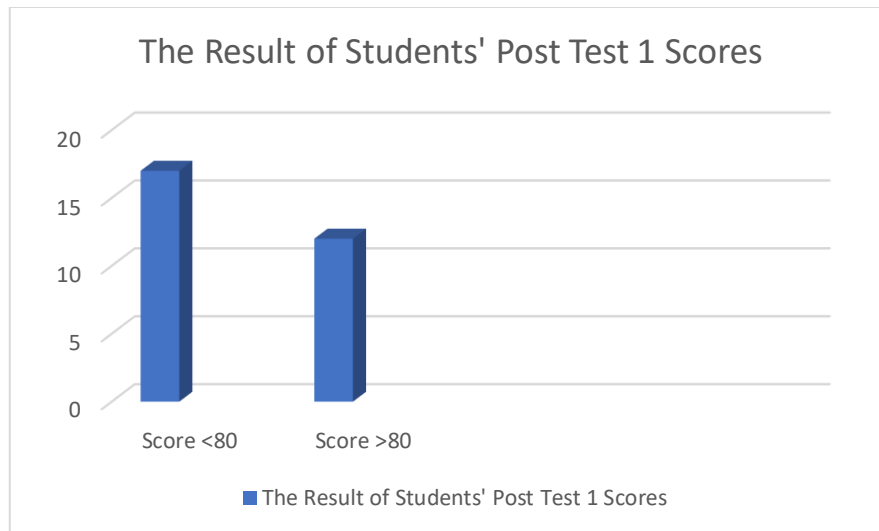


Figure 2. The result of students' posttest 1 scores

Next, the students' post-test (2) scores showed that 82.76% of students scored above the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM). So, it had met the success criterion that 75 % of the students must get a score above the Minimum Mastery Criterion. Then the researcher and the teacher decided that the cycle could be stopped at the end of cycle 2. The student got a better score in the second cycle because the QAR strategy could motivate them in their reading lesson. The result of students' post-test two can be seen from the chart in Figure 3.

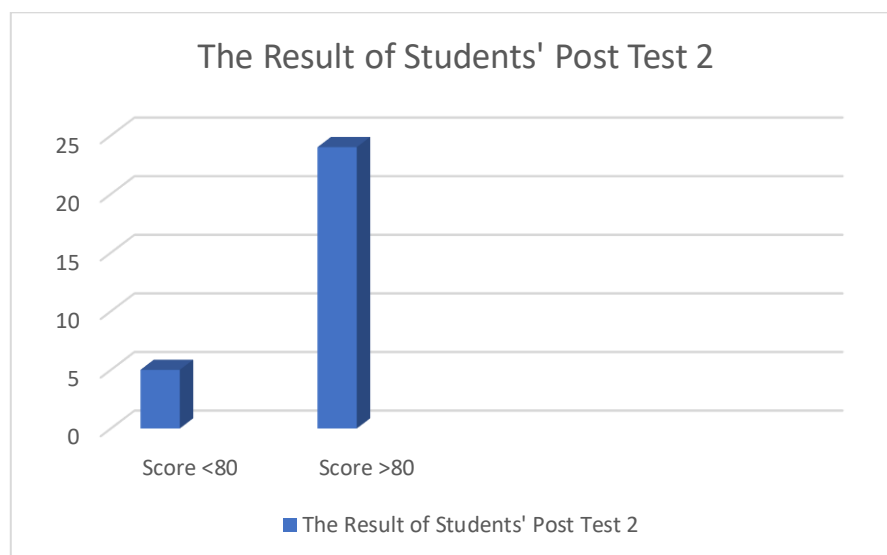


Figure 3. The Result of Students' PostTest 2 Scores

Lastly, from all of the result of scores above, the researcher interpreted the result of pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2. Here the researcher described the results through the chart in Figure 4.

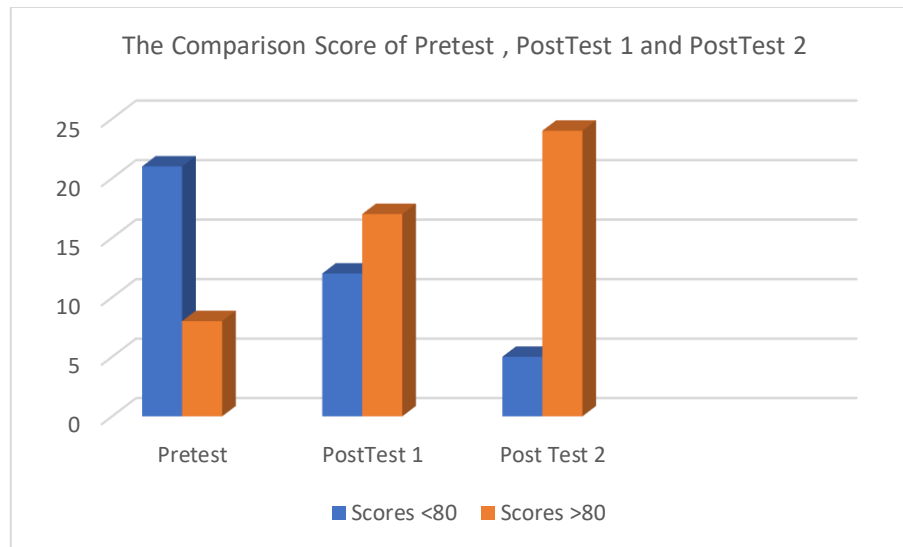


Figure 4. The comparison score of pretest, posttest 1 and posttest 2

Discussion

The implementation of the QAR strategy significantly improved students' reading comprehension across two cycles of Classroom Action Research (CAR). Based on the results from the pre-test, post-test 1, and post-test 2, a steady improvement in students' average scores was evident. The pre-test mean score was 70.48, which indicated that students were below the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) set at 80. Only 8 out of 29 students (27.59%) passed the KKM in the pre-test.

After the first cycle, the mean score rose to 77.99, with 21 students (75.86%) achieving scores above the KKM. This surpassed the success criterion of 75%, suggesting that the majority of students had shown marked improvement. Finally, in post-test 2, students' performance increased even further, with a total score of 2410, resulting in a new average of 83.10. At this stage, 24 out of 29 students (86.2%) met or exceeded the KKM.

This quantitative evidence strongly supports the effectiveness of the QAR strategy in developing students' ability to comprehend narrative texts. These findings are consistent with previous studies such as Anggraini (2021), which also found that QAR facilitated significant improvement in reading comprehension by helping students distinguish between types of questions and refine their comprehension strategies.

The QAR strategy not only contributed to an increase in test scores but also fostered students' cognitive engagement and metacognitive awareness (Butar butar et al., 2022). Observation and interview data revealed that students gradually became more strategic readers. They were able to classify questions into four types—Right There, Think and Search, Author and You, and On My Own—and apply corresponding reading approaches.

Students' ability to engage in inferential and evaluative thinking improved, especially during group discussions (James Ayodele, 2013). According to the post-implementation interview with the English teacher, students who were previously hesitant to answer questions began identifying the types of questions before answering. This shift in behavior suggests a deeper understanding of how texts function and how to interact with them critically (Traina, 2016).

Observation sheets indicated that student engagement and classroom dynamics improved significantly from cycle 1 to cycle 2. In the first cycle, students were still passive and unfamiliar with the QAR strategy. Some groups were dominated by certain students, and teacher assistance

was needed frequently. However, in the second cycle, students began to collaborate more effectively, displayed increased motivation, and demonstrated greater autonomy in identifying question types and discussing answers.

Furthermore, student interviews confirmed that the strategy reduced their anxiety when answering comprehension questions. They felt more confident and motivated because they had a clear framework for interpreting questions. This aligns with (Harmer (2003) assertion that student-centered reading strategies increase learner engagement and reading confidence. The teacher played a crucial role in the successful implementation of the QAR strategy (Rahmadayani et al., 2024). After reflecting on the limitations observed in cycle 1, such as student confusion and group imbalances, the teacher provided additional scaffolding, modified the group structure, and slowed down the instructional pace in cycle 2. These adjustments resulted in improved student understanding and participation. This finding reflects the significance of the reflection stage in action research, where data-driven instructional decisions are made to enhance learning outcomes (Kemmis & Taggart, 2005).

The findings of this study suggest that incorporating structured and metacognitive reading strategies like QAR can lead to substantial improvements in students' reading comprehension. This strategy provides a clear and practical framework that can be adopted by other educators seeking to enhance their students' reading skills, particularly in narrative texts. It also encourages teachers to reflect continuously on their instructional practices and adapt them to students' needs. The implementation of the QAR strategy proved successful in improving the reading comprehension of narrative texts among eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Surakarta. The strategy increased students' average scores, engagement, and critical thinking skills. As 86.2% of students met or exceeded the KKM in post-test 2, the success criterion was met, and no further action cycles were required. These findings affirm the effectiveness of QAR and its potential for broader application in EFL contexts.

CONCLUSION

This classroom action research explored the use of the QAR strategy to support eighth-grade students' comprehension of narrative texts in an EFL classroom. The findings indicate that QAR helped students approach reading tasks more strategically, increased classroom engagement, and supported improvement in comprehension performance across two reflective cycles. Rather than establishing causal claims, this study highlights how QAR can be integrated into reflective teaching practices to address students' reading challenges. For classroom practice, teachers are encouraged to use QAR as a scaffolding tool to guide student

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