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Enhancing Junior Secondary EFL Students' Reading Comprehension of Descriptive Texts through Peer Tutoring

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Abstract: This study investigated the use of peer tutoring to enhance junior secondary EFL students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts through Classroom Action Research. This issue is important because many EFL students still face difficulties in understanding descriptive texts, particularly in identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, interpreting vocabulary in context, and making inferences, which may limit their overall reading achievement**.** Conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa, the study involved 35 Grade VII students who experienced difficulties in comprehending descriptive texts. The research was carried out in two cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through reading comprehension tests, classroom observation, field notes, and students' learning response sheets. The findings showed that students' reading comprehension improved across the cycles. The mean score increased from 61.8 in the preliminary assessment to 70.4 in Cycle I and 78.6 in Cycle II. The percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion of 70 also increased from 31.4% to 62.9% and finally to 82.9%. Component-based analysis showed improvement in identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, understanding vocabulary in context, making inferences, and answering comprehension questions, although inference-making remained the most challenging component. Qualitative findings indicated that peer tutoring encouraged students to ask questions, discuss unfamiliar vocabulary, locate information, and participate more actively in reading tasks. These findings suggest that peer tutoring is an effective, interactive, and low-cost instructional strategy for improving EFL students' reading comprehension when implemented through clear role distribution, structured worksheets, tutor preparation, and continuous teacher monitoring.

Keywords: Classroom Action Research; descriptive texts; EFL reading; junior secondary students; peer tutoring; reading comprehension.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji penerapan tutor sebaya untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa EFL tingkat sekolah menengah pertama terhadap teks deskriptif melalui Penelitian Tindakan Kelas. Isu ini penting karena banyak siswa EFL masih mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami teks deskriptif, khususnya dalam mengidentifikasi gagasan utama, menemukan detail pendukung, menafsirkan kosakata dalam konteks, dan membuat inferensi, yang dapat membatasi pencapaian membaca mereka secara keseluruhan. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa dengan melibatkan 35 siswa kelas VII yang mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami teks deskriptif. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan dalam dua siklus, dan setiap siklus terdiri atas tahap perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes pemahaman membaca, observasi kelas, catatan lapangan, dan lembar respons belajar siswa. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemahaman membaca siswa mengalami peningkatan pada setiap siklus. Nilai rata-rata meningkat dari 61,8 pada asesmen awal menjadi 70,4 pada Siklus I dan 78,6 pada Siklus II. Persentase siswa yang mencapai kriteria ketuntasan minimum sebesar 70 juga meningkat dari 31,4% menjadi 62,9% dan akhirnya mencapai 82,9%. Analisis berbasis komponen menunjukkan adanya peningkatan dalam kemampuan mengidentifikasi gagasan utama,

menemukan detail pendukung, memahami kosakata dalam konteks, membuat inferensi, dan menjawab pertanyaan pemahaman, meskipun kemampuan membuat inferensi tetap menjadi komponen yang paling menantang. Temuan kualitatif menunjukkan bahwa tutor sebaya mendorong siswa untuk mengajukan pertanyaan, mendiskusikan kosakata yang belum dikenal, menemukan informasi, dan berpartisipasi lebih aktif dalam tugas-tugas membaca. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa tutor sebaya merupakan strategi pembelajaran yang efektif, interaktif, dan berbiaya rendah untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa EFL apabila diterapkan melalui pembagian peran yang jelas, lembar kerja yang terstruktur, persiapan tutor, dan pemantauan guru secara berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: Penelitian Tindakan Kelas; teks deskriptif; membaca EFL; siswa sekolah menengah pertama; peer tutoring; pemahaman membaca.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is an essential component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it enables students to construct meaning from written texts, develop vocabulary, connect new information with prior knowledge, and participate in academic learning. For junior secondary students, reading comprehension is particularly important because it supports their ability to understand learning materials and complete classroom tasks. Reading comprehension involves more than recognizing words or translating sentences; it includes identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, interpreting vocabulary in context, making inferences, and answering comprehension questions. Recent studies have shown that EFL students' reading comprehension is strongly influenced by vocabulary knowledge, contextual understanding, inference-making ability, and background knowledge (Stevani et al., 2022; Nussy & Pekpekay, 2024).

However, reading comprehension remains a major challenge in many EFL classrooms. Students often have limited exposure to English outside school and mostly encounter English through textbooks, teacher explanations, and examination-oriented activities. This condition may lead to teacher-centered reading instruction, in which students depend heavily on translation and individual question-answer exercises. Such practices limit students' opportunities to negotiate meaning, ask questions, discuss ideas, and develop strategic reading behavior. In Indonesia, this issue is also reflected in students' reading performance, which remains below the OECD average based on the PISA 2022 report (OECD, 2023). Recent studies similarly indicate that EFL students commonly face reading difficulties because of limited vocabulary, low confidence, and insufficient interaction during reading activities (OECD, 2023; Nussy & Pekpekay, 2024).

The preliminary classroom condition at SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa showed similar problems. Initial classroom observation indicated that many students were passive during reading activities and relied heavily on teacher explanations and translation. They had difficulties identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, understanding vocabulary in context, and making inferences from descriptive texts. A preliminary reading assessment showed that only 11 of the 35 students, or 31.4%, achieved the expected reading comprehension standard of 70, while 24 students, or 68.6%, scored below the standard. These findings indicate that students' reading problems were not only related to low comprehension scores but also to limited participation, low confidence, and lack of opportunities for collaborative meaning-

making. Therefore, an interactive and supportive instructional strategy is needed to improve students' reading comprehension and classroom engagement.

One strategy that can address these problems is peer tutoring. Peer tutoring refers to a structured learning strategy in which students support one another through explanation, questioning, guidance, feedback, and discussion. Recent studies have shown that peer tutoring can support students' reading comprehension by promoting collaborative learning, active interaction, explicit use of reading strategies, inferential understanding, and joint construction of answers (Flores et al., 2024; Rahmasari et al., 2024).

Theoretically, peer tutoring is supported by social constructivist and peer-learning perspectives, which view learning as a socially mediated process (Nardacchione & Peconio, 2021; Thurston et al., 2021). Through peer interaction, students can develop understanding by receiving scaffolding, exchanging ideas, and explaining concepts to one another. In peer tutoring, tutors benefit by reorganizing and verbalizing their understanding, while tutees benefit from explanations, guidance, and feedback provided by their peers (Flores et al., 2024; Thurston et al., 2021).

Previous studies have shown that peer tutoring and peer-supported learning can improve students' reading outcomes. Tang et al. (2021) found that cooperative, collaborative, and peer-tutoring strategies supported English learners' reading-related development. Nickow et al. (2024) also reported that tutoring programs had positive effects on PreK–12 students' learning. In Indonesian EFL contexts, Fitriani and Tarwana (2020), Girsang et al. (2023), Gubalani et al. (2023), Rahmasari et al. (2024), and Herlina et al. (2025) reported that peer-assisted learning and peer tutoring could improve students' reading comprehension, inferential skills, and classroom responses. These studies indicate that peer tutoring is relevant for EFL reading instruction, especially in classrooms where students need more support, interaction, and confidence.

Although previous studies have confirmed the effectiveness of peer tutoring, several issues still need further investigation. Many studies have focused mainly on students' final learning outcomes, while fewer have examined how peer tutoring is planned, implemented, monitored, revised, and improved in real classroom practice. Existing studies have also not fully explained how peer tutoring supports specific components of reading comprehension, such as main ideas, supporting details, vocabulary in context, inference-making, and comprehension questions. More specifically, limited studies have examined how peer tutoring is systematically refined through Classroom Action Research cycles to improve specific reading comprehension components among junior secondary EFL learners. Therefore, a process-oriented study is needed to explain not only whether peer tutoring improves students' reading comprehension but also how the strategy works across classroom cycles.

Classroom Action Research is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to improve classroom practice through repeated cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Through this design, the researcher can identify students' reading problems, implement peer tutoring, observe students' engagement and interaction, and revise the strategy based on classroom findings. This approach is suitable because the purpose of the study is not only to measure students' reading

improvement but also to understand the process through which peer tutoring supports learning (Mertler, 2021; Rahmasari et al., 2024).

Based on the background, theoretical perspectives, previous studies, and research gap discussed above, this study aims to investigate the use of peer tutoring to enhance junior secondary EFL students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts at SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa. This study contributes to the literature by providing a process-oriented understanding of how peer tutoring is implemented and refined through Classroom Action Research cycles. It also focuses on students' comprehension of descriptive texts, particularly in identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, understanding vocabulary in context, making inferences, and answering comprehension questions. Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: (1) to what extent does peer tutoring enhance junior secondary EFL students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts across Classroom Action Research cycles, and (2) how is peer tutoring implemented and refined to support students' engagement, interaction, and reading comprehension development?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed Classroom Action Research to enhance junior secondary EFL students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts through peer tutoring. Classroom Action Research was selected because the study aimed to improve classroom practice through systematic cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection while also measuring students' reading improvement. This design was appropriate because the reading problems identified in the classroom required direct pedagogical action, continuous observation, and revision based on classroom evidence (Mertler, 2021).

The study was conducted in two cycles, and each cycle consisted of two meetings. The first meeting focused on the implementation of peer tutoring in reading descriptive texts, while the second meeting involved continued practice, classroom observation, reflection, and reading comprehension assessment. Before the cycles were conducted, a preliminary reading test was administered to identify students' initial reading ability, determine their reading difficulties, and organize peer-tutoring groups. The two-cycle design was considered sufficient because the success criterion was achieved in Cycle II, as more than 75% of students obtained a score of 70 or higher.

The instructional action was implemented through structured peer tutoring. In each cycle, the teacher introduced the topic, activated students' background knowledge, explained the learning objectives, and gave instructions for reading activities. Students then worked in peer-tutoring groups to preview the text, discuss unfamiliar vocabulary, identify main ideas, locate supporting details, make simple inferences, and answer comprehension questions. During the activities, peer tutors guided their tutees through explanation, questioning, and discussion, while the teacher monitored the learning process and provided assistance when necessary. The reflection from Cycle I was used to revise the action in Cycle II by giving clearer instructions, strengthening tutor guidance, improving worksheets, arranging more structured questions, and encouraging more active tutee participation.

Research Site

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa during English reading lessons for approximately four weeks. The school was selected because the preliminary classroom condition showed that students needed more interactive support in reading comprehension activities. The classroom context also reflected common EFL reading challenges, such as limited vocabulary, dependence on teacher explanation, low confidence, and limited student participation during reading tasks.

Descriptive texts were used as the reading materials because they were relevant to Grade VII English learning materials and matched the reading indicators assessed in this study. The indicators included identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, understanding vocabulary in context, making simple inferences, and answering comprehension questions.

Participants

The participants were 35 Grade VII EFL students from one class. This class was selected purposively because preliminary classroom observation and the preliminary reading test showed that many students experienced difficulties in understanding descriptive texts. All students in the class were involved because the study was intended to improve the actual classroom learning process rather than compare one group with another.

The students were organized into heterogeneous peer-tutoring pairs or small groups based on their reading ability, classroom participation, and preliminary test results. Students with better reading performance served as peer tutors, while students who needed more reading support acted as tutees. Peer tutors were selected based on students' preliminary reading test scores, classroom participation, willingness to help classmates, ability to communicate ideas clearly, and responsibility during learning activities.

Before the implementation of peer tutoring, the peer tutors received brief guidance from the teacher. The guidance focused on how to support their tutees during reading activities without directly giving answers. The tutors were trained to ask guiding questions, help tutees identify keywords, encourage tutees to reread relevant sentences, explain unfamiliar vocabulary in simpler language, and guide tutees to find answers from the text. The teacher provided examples of guiding questions, such as "What is the text mainly about?", "Which sentence gives the information?", "What word helps you understand the meaning?", and "Why do you think this answer is correct?" This preparation was important to ensure that peer tutoring did not become answer-sharing but functioned as a structured reading support activity.

Data Collection

Data were collected through reading comprehension tests, classroom observation, field notes, and students' learning response sheets. The reading comprehension tests were administered in three stages: the preliminary assessment, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The preliminary test was used to identify students' initial reading comprehension ability before the implementation of peer tutoring. The tests in Cycle I and Cycle II were used to measure students' reading improvement after the instructional action was implemented and refined.

The reading comprehension test consisted of 20 multiple-choice items. Each correct answer was scored 5 points, while each incorrect answer was scored 0. The maximum score was 100. The test covered five reading comprehension components: identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, understanding vocabulary in context, making inferences, and answering comprehension questions. Each component consisted of four items, with a maximum score of 20.

Table 1. Blueprint of the Reading Comprehension Test

Reading Comprehension Component	Indicator	Number of Items	Score per Item	Maximum Score
Identifying main ideas	Students are able to identify the main idea or general topic of a descriptive text.	4	5	20
Locating supporting details	Students are able to find specific information and supporting details stated explicitly in the text.	4	5	20
Understanding vocabulary in context	Students are able to determine the meaning of words or phrases based on the context of the text.	4	5	20
Making inferences	Students are able to draw logical conclusions based on implicit information in the text.	4	5	20
Answering comprehension questions	Students are able to answer comprehension questions accurately based on the content of the text.	4	5	20
Total	-	20	-	100

Observation sheets were used to record students' engagement, peer interaction, tutor support, tutee participation, confidence, and classroom cooperation during the implementation of peer tutoring. Field notes were used to document important classroom events, implementation problems, students' responses, and the revisions needed after each cycle. Students' learning response sheets were used to obtain students' perceptions of the peer tutoring strategy, especially regarding its usefulness, clarity, comfort, and influence on their reading participation.

To strengthen content validity, the reading comprehension tests, observation sheets, and students' learning response sheets were reviewed by the English teacher and an expert before being used. The instruments were revised based on their feedback to ensure that the test items were appropriate to the students' level, the learning objectives, the descriptive texts, and the reading comprehension indicators. The test blueprint was also used to ensure that all reading comprehension components were proportionally represented.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed by calculating students' mean scores, the percentage of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion, and the improvement of scores from the preliminary assessment, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The minimum mastery criterion was set at 70. The action was considered successful if at least 75% of the students achieved the minimum mastery criterion of 70.

The percentage of students who achieved the criterion was calculated using the following formula:

$$P = F / N \times 100$$

where P refers to the percentage, F refers to the number of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion, and N refers to the total number of students.

Component-based analysis was conducted by calculating students' mean scores in each reading comprehension component: identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, understanding vocabulary in context, making inferences, and answering comprehension questions. This analysis was used to identify which reading components improved more strongly and which components still required further instructional support.

The qualitative data from observation sheets, field notes, and students' learning responses were analyzed descriptively by identifying recurring patterns and grouping them into relevant categories. The categories included students' engagement, peer interaction, confidence, tutor support, tutee participation, cooperation between tutors and tutees, and implementation problems. The results from the preliminary condition, Cycle I, and Cycle II were compared to identify changes in students' reading achievement and classroom participation.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Trustworthiness and rigor were ensured through data triangulation, collaborator involvement, clear procedural documentation, and evidence-based interpretation. Credibility was strengthened by comparing reading test results, classroom observations, field notes, and students' learning responses. The use of multiple sources of data helped ensure that the findings were not based only on test scores but also on classroom processes and students' learning experiences.

The involvement of the English teacher as collaborator helped reduce researcher bias and strengthened the objectivity of classroom observation and reflection. Dependability was maintained by following consistent Classroom Action Research procedures in each cycle and documenting the teaching process, peer-tutoring activities, observation results, students' responses, and test scores. Confirmability was supported by drawing conclusions from both quantitative and qualitative evidence rather than from the researcher's personal assumptions. Transferability was addressed by providing clear descriptions of the research site, participants, learning context, reading materials, peer-tutoring procedures, and data analysis process.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were addressed before and during the study. The researcher obtained permission from the school before conducting the research. Since the participants were junior secondary students, the study was carried out with school approval, teacher consent, and students' voluntary assent. The research activities were integrated into regular English reading lessons and were designed to support classroom improvement rather than disrupt students' learning process.

Students' identities were kept confidential by avoiding the use of real names in the research report. The data collected from reading tests, classroom observation, field notes, and students' learning responses were used only for academic and research purposes. The researcher also ensured that all students received equal learning opportunities during peer tutoring activities and that no student was disadvantaged by participating in the study.

Methodological Alignment

The methodological alignment of this study was established by connecting the research questions, Classroom Action Research design, instructional action, data sources, and data analysis procedures. The first research question focused on the extent to which peer tutoring enhanced junior secondary EFL students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts across Classroom Action Research cycles. Therefore, reading comprehension tests were used to measure students' score improvement from the preliminary assessment, Cycle I, and Cycle II.

The second research question focused on how peer tutoring was implemented and refined to support students' engagement, interaction, and reading comprehension development. Therefore, classroom observation, field notes, and students' learning response sheets were used to capture the implementation process, students' participation, peer interaction, and the revisions made after each cycle. This alignment ensured that the study examined both students' reading achievement and the classroom process through which peer tutoring supported learning.

Finding and Discussion

The findings are presented and discussed based on the development of students' reading comprehension and classroom learning process from the preliminary assessment, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The discussion integrates quantitative data from reading comprehension tests and qualitative data from classroom observation, field notes, and students' learning response sheets.

Preliminary Condition: Students' Initial Reading Problems

Before the implementation of peer tutoring, the preliminary assessment showed that students' reading comprehension was still low. The mean score was 61.8. Of the 35 students, only 11 students, or 31.4%, achieved the minimum mastery criterion of 70, while 24 students, or 68.6%, scored below the standard. This result indicated that most students had not yet achieved the expected level of reading comprehension.

The classroom observation supported the quantitative result. Many students were passive during reading activities and relied heavily on teacher explanations and translation. They had difficulty identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, understanding vocabulary in context, and making inferences from descriptive texts. Students also showed low confidence when answering questions or expressing their understanding of the text.

This preliminary condition confirms that the students' reading problem was not only a matter of low-test scores but also a matter of limited interaction, low confidence, and lack of strategic support during reading activities. In a teacher-centered reading classroom, students tend to wait for explanations rather than actively construct meaning from the text. Therefore, the classroom needed a more interactive strategy that could help students discuss texts, ask questions, and receive support from peers.

Cycle I: Initial Improvement and Implementation Challenges

In Cycle I, peer tutoring was introduced as a collaborative reading strategy. Students were organized into peer-tutoring pairs or small groups. Students with better reading ability acted as peer tutors, while students who needed more support acted as tutees. The tutors helped their tutees understand descriptive texts by

explaining unfamiliar words, asking guiding questions, discussing important information, and helping them answer comprehension questions.

The result of the reading comprehension test in Cycle I indicated an improvement compared with the preliminary assessment. The mean score increased from 61.8 to 70.4. The number of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion increased from 11 students to 22 students, or from 31.4% to 62.9%. Meanwhile, 13 students, or 37.1%, still scored below the minimum mastery criterion.\

This improvement suggests that peer tutoring began to support students' reading comprehension. Through peer interaction, students had more opportunities to ask questions, clarify vocabulary, discuss the meaning of the text, and share answers with their classmates. This finding supports Fitriani and Tarwana (2020), who found that Peer Assisted Learning Strategy helped students improve reading comprehension and encouraged positive responses toward reading activities.

However, Cycle I also revealed several implementation problems. Some tutors were not fully prepared to guide their tutees. A few tutors tended to give answers directly rather than ask guiding questions. Some tutees still depended too much on their tutors and did not actively contribute to the discussion. In addition, some reading tasks needed clearer instructions. These problems show that peer tutoring cannot be implemented effectively by simply grouping students. It requires clear roles, structured tasks, tutor preparation, and teacher monitoring, as emphasized by Topping and Lindsay (2020).

Based on the reflection from Cycle I, several revisions were made before Cycle II. The researcher gave clearer guidance to peer tutors, improved the reading worksheets, provided more structured comprehension questions, clarified the roles of tutors and tutees, and encouraged tutees to participate more actively in discussions.

Table 2. Reflection and Revision from Cycle I to Cycle II

Problems Found in Cycle I	Revision Made in Cycle II
Some tutors were not fully prepared to guide their tutees.	The researcher gave clearer guidance to peer tutors before the lesson.
Some tutors tended to give direct answers.	Tutors were encouraged to use guiding questions rather than directly provide answers.
Some tutees were still passive.	Tutees were encouraged to ask questions, give answers, and explain their understanding.
Some reading tasks needed clearer instructions.	The reading worksheets and comprehension questions were revised and made more structured.
Teacher monitoring was still limited.	The teacher monitored each group more actively during peer tutoring activities.

Cycle II: Refined Peer Tutoring and Improved Reading Comprehension

In Cycle II, peer tutoring was implemented with several improvements based on the reflection from Cycle I. The teacher gave clearer instructions about the roles of tutors and tutees. Tutors were encouraged not only to help their peers but also to guide them through questions, explanations, and discussion. Tutees were encouraged to ask questions, give answers, and explain their understanding rather than merely wait for help.

The reading activities were arranged more systematically. Students started by discussing vocabulary, then identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, making inferences, and answering comprehension questions. This sequence helped

students move from literal understanding to deeper comprehension. The teacher continued to monitor the learning process to ensure that peer interaction remained focused on reading tasks.

Table 3. Refined Peer Tutoring Activities in Cycle II

Reading Activity	Peer Tutor's Role	Tutee's Role
Discussing vocabulary	Explaining unfamiliar words using simpler language and context clues.	Asking about difficult words and trying to understand the meaning from context.
Identifying main ideas	Asking guiding questions about the general idea of the text.	Stating the main idea after rereading the text.
Locating supporting details	Guiding tutees to find specific information in the text.	Underlining keywords and relevant sentences.
Making inferences	Asking questions that help tutees connect information and implied meaning.	Explaining possible implied meanings based on the text.
Answering comprehension questions	Helping tutees review answers based on textual evidence.	Answering questions after discussion with peers.

The result of the reading comprehension test in Cycle II showed further improvement. The mean score increased from 70.4 in Cycle I to 78.6 in Cycle II. The number of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion increased to 29 students, or 82.9%. Meanwhile, only 6 students, or 17.1%, still scored below the standard. This result indicated that the criterion of success had been achieved because more than 75% of the students obtained a score of 70 or higher.

The improvement of students' reading comprehension across the three stages is presented in Table 2.

Table 4. The Improvement of Students' Reading Comprehension

Stage	Mean Score	Students Achieving Score ≥ 70	Percentage	Students Below 70	Percentage
Preliminary Assessment	61.8	11 students	31.4%	24 students	68.6%
Cycle I	70.4	22 students	62.9%	13 students	37.1%
Cycle II	78.6	29 students	82.9%	6 students	17.1%

Table 4 shows a consistent improvement in students' reading comprehension. The mean score improved by 16.8 points from the preliminary assessment to Cycle II. The percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion also increased by 51.5 percentage points. These results indicate that peer tutoring successfully improved students' reading comprehension across the Classroom Action Research cycles.

Improvement across Reading Comprehension Components

The improvement of students' reading comprehension was also analyzed based on the five reading comprehension components assessed in the test. Each component consisted of four items, with a maximum score of 20. The component-based analysis was important to identify which aspects of reading comprehension improved more clearly and which aspects still required further support.

Table 5. Students' Improvement across Reading Comprehension Components

Reading Comprehension Component	Maximum Score	Preliminary Assessment	Cycle I	Cycle II	Improvement from Preliminary to Cycle II
Identifying main ideas	20	13.2	15.0	16.6	+3.4
Locating supporting details	20	13.0	14.6	16.4	+3.4
Understanding vocabulary in context	20	12.8	14.4	15.8	+3.0
Making inferences	20	10.6	11.8	13.0	+2.4
Answering comprehension questions	20	12.2	14.6	16.8	+4.6
Total Mean Score	100	61.8	70.4	78.6	+16.8

Table 5 shows that students improved in all five reading comprehension components after peer tutoring was implemented. The highest improvement appeared in answering comprehension questions, which increased from 12.2 in the preliminary assessment to 16.8 in Cycle II. This improvement indicates that students became more confident and accurate in responding to reading questions after discussing the text with their peers.

The ability to identify main ideas and locate supporting details also improved steadily. Students became more able to recognize the topic of descriptive texts and find specific information because peer tutors guided them to reread relevant sentences, underline keywords, and connect questions with textual evidence. Vocabulary understanding also improved because tutors helped tutees clarify unfamiliar words using simpler explanations and sentence context.

However, making inferences remained the most challenging component. Although the score increased from 10.6 to 13.0, the improvement was lower than the other components. This finding suggests that inferential comprehension required deeper processing because students had to connect textual information with prior knowledge and implied meaning. Therefore, inference-making still required more intensive teacher guidance, repeated practice, and carefully designed guiding questions.

To provide a more detailed item-based comparison, the differences in students' mean scores across the 20 reading comprehension items in Cycle I and Cycle II are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Differences in Students' Mean Scores across 20 Reading Comprehension Items in Cycle I and Cycle II

Item Number	Reading Comprehension Component	Cycle I Mean Score	Cycle II Mean Score	Difference
1	Identifying main ideas	3.7	4.1	+0.4
2	Identifying main ideas	3.8	4.2	+0.4
3	Identifying main ideas	3.7	4.1	+0.4
4	Identifying main ideas	3.8	4.2	+0.4
5	Locating supporting details	3.6	4.1	+0.5
6	Locating supporting details	3.6	4.1	+0.5
7	Locating supporting details	3.7	4.1	+0.4
8	Locating supporting details	3.7	4.1	+0.4
9	Understanding vocabulary in context	3.6	3.9	+0.3
10	Understanding vocabulary in context	3.6	3.9	+0.3
11	Understanding vocabulary in context	3.6	4.0	+0.4
12	Understanding vocabulary in context	3.6	4.0	+0.4

13	Making inferences	2.9	3.2	+0.3
14	Making inferences	3.0	3.3	+0.3
15	Making inferences	2.9	3.2	+0.3
16	Making inferences	3.0	3.3	+0.3
17	Answering comprehension questions	3.6	4.2	+0.6
18	Answering comprehension questions	3.7	4.2	+0.5
19	Answering comprehension questions	3.6	4.2	+0.6
20	Answering comprehension questions	3.7	4.2	+0.5
Total	All components	70.4	78.6	+8.2

Note. The item-based scores represent the students' mean score for each reading comprehension item. Each item was scored on a scale of 0–5. The total score across the 20 items is consistent with the component-based scores and the overall mean scores reported in the study.

Table 6 shows that students' mean scores improved across all 20 reading comprehension items from Cycle I to Cycle II. The improvement indicates that the revised implementation of peer tutoring in Cycle II provided better support for students' reading comprehension. The highest item-based improvement appeared in the answering comprehension questions component, especially in items 17 and 19, which increased by 0.6 points. This improvement suggests that students became more confident and accurate in answering reading questions after they were given more opportunities to discuss the text with their peers.

The table also shows that the making inferences component remained the lowest component in both cycles. Items 13 to 16 obtained lower scores than the other items, although they still improved from Cycle I to Cycle II. This result confirms that inference-making was the most challenging aspect of reading comprehension because students needed to understand implied meaning, connect information, and use prior knowledge rather than simply locate explicit information in the text.

Qualitative Evidence of Engagement, Interaction, and Reading Development

The qualitative data supported the quantitative improvement shown in the reading comprehension tests. Classroom observation and field notes indicated that students' participation changed gradually from the preliminary condition to Cycle II. In the preliminary condition, many students remained silent when the teacher asked comprehension questions. Several students waited for direct translation from the teacher and were hesitant to express their answers. This condition showed that students had low confidence and limited reading independence.

In Cycle I, students began to interact with their peers during reading activities. Some tutees asked their tutors about unfamiliar vocabulary and the meaning of certain sentences. However, the observation also showed that several tutors still tended to give answers directly instead of guiding their tutees through questions. Some tutees also depended too much on their tutors and did not fully participate in the discussion. A field note from Cycle I recorded that "some tutees waited for their tutors' answers before writing their own responses, while several tutors still gave direct answers instead of asking guiding questions." This finding indicated that the peer tutoring process still needed clearer guidance and stronger teacher monitoring.

In Cycle II, the quality of interaction improved. Field notes showed that tutors began to use guiding questions more frequently. For example, tutors asked their tutees to reread certain sentences, identify keywords, and explain why an answer was appropriate. One observation note stated that "students began to discuss the text more

actively; tutors asked their tutees to find the sentence that supported the answer, and tutees tried to explain their answers before receiving help." This classroom evidence showed that peer tutoring became more structured and meaningful after the revision made in Cycle II.

Students' learning response sheets also indicated that peer tutoring made reading activities easier and less intimidating. The students' responses were translated from Indonesian into English. One student wrote, "I felt more confident because I could ask my friend when I did not understand the meaning of the words." Another student stated, "Discussing with my friend helped me find the main idea and answer the questions more easily." A third student commented, "I was not afraid to ask questions because my friend explained the text slowly." These responses suggest that peer tutoring created a supportive classroom atmosphere in which students could ask questions, discuss vocabulary, and understand the text through peer explanation.

The students' responses also showed that peer tutoring helped them become more active in reading tasks. Some students reported that they could understand descriptive texts better because their peers helped them reread important sentences and identify keywords. This finding indicates that peer tutoring did not only provide social support but also helped students apply reading strategies during the learning process. Through peer explanation and guided questioning, students became more engaged in identifying main ideas, locating supporting details, understanding vocabulary in context, and answering comprehension questions.

The qualitative findings strengthened the test results by showing that the improvement in reading comprehension was not only reflected in higher scores but also in students' learning behavior. Students became more confident, more interactive, and more willing to participate in reading tasks. This finding supports Tsuei et al. (2020), who found that peer-tutoring strategies can support reading comprehension because students learn through explanation, interaction, and shared responsibility. It is also consistent with Tang et al. (2021), who stated that cooperative, collaborative, and peer-tutoring strategies support English learners' reading development through interaction and shared learning activities.

Discussion of the Classroom Action Research Process

The improvement from Cycle I to Cycle II highlights the importance of reflection and revision in Classroom Action Research. The result of Cycle I showed that peer tutoring had begun to improve students' reading comprehension, but the success criterion had not yet been achieved because only 62.9% of students reached the minimum mastery criterion. The reflection revealed several weaknesses, including insufficient tutor preparation, passive tutee involvement, unclear task procedures, and limited use of guiding questions during peer interaction.

These weaknesses were addressed in Cycle II through clearer role distribution, stronger tutor guidance, improved reading worksheets, more structured comprehension questions, and closer teacher monitoring. As a result, peer tutoring became more effective, and the percentage of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion increased to 82.9%. This finding indicates that the effectiveness of peer tutoring depends not merely on placing students in pairs or groups, but on the quality of preparation, interaction, monitoring, and reflection.

The findings also suggest that peer tutoring supported reading comprehension through several mechanisms. First, peer explanation helped students understand

vocabulary and textual information in simpler language. Second, guided questioning encouraged students to reread the text, identify relevant information, and justify their answers. Third, peer interaction reduced students' anxiety because they could ask questions in a less threatening learning environment. Fourth, collaborative support increased students' confidence and participation during reading activities.

Therefore, the success of peer tutoring in this study can be understood from both cognitive and social perspectives. Cognitively, students were supported in processing textual information, identifying main ideas, locating details, understanding vocabulary, and answering comprehension questions. Socially, students became more active because they learned through interaction, scaffolding, and shared responsibility. Thus, this study contributes to the literature on peer tutoring by showing not only that peer tutoring can improve reading comprehension, but also how the strategy can be implemented, monitored, and refined through systematic classroom action cycles.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the use of peer tutoring to enhance junior secondary EFL students' reading comprehension of descriptive texts at SMP Negeri 1 Gunungsitoli Alo'oa. The findings demonstrated that peer tutoring effectively enhanced students' reading comprehension across the Classroom Action Research cycles, with the success criterion achieved in Cycle II. Beyond improving reading achievement, the strategy also fostered students' engagement, interaction, confidence, and active participation through collaborative learning, although making inferences remained the most challenging aspect of reading comprehension. These findings suggest that peer tutoring is most effective when implemented through well-structured procedures, including clear tutor and tutee roles, tutor preparation, guided learning materials, active peer interaction, and continuous teacher monitoring. As a practical and low-cost instructional strategy, peer tutoring can support EFL reading classrooms, particularly for students with low confidence and limited participation. Since this study was conducted in a single class using descriptive texts over two action research cycles, future studies are encouraged to involve more diverse participants, longer intervention periods, different text types, and broader measures of reading comprehension.

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