

Management Improving Seventh Grade Students' Short Story Reading Skills Through Inquiry Based Learning: Classroom Action Research at SMP Negeri Satap 3 Gunung Bintang Awai

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-01-29	<i>This classroom action research examined the use of inquiry-based learning to improve the short-story reading skills of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri Satap 3 Gunung Bintang Awai. The study involved seven students and was conducted in two cycles, each comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through short-story reading tests, classroom observation, and documentation. For consistency, short-story reading skill was treated primarily as the ability to understand a story and analyze its intrinsic elements, while oral reading behaviors were used as supporting process observations. The action was considered successful when at least 80% of the students achieved the minimum mastery criterion of 70 and classroom activity reached the predetermined criterion. The mean score increased from 64.29 in the pre-cycle to 69.86 in Cycle I and 80.29 in Cycle II. The mastery percentage rose from 28.57% to 42.85% and then to 100%, while the minimum and maximum scores in Cycle II were 70 and 86. Classroom observations also indicated improved participation, confidence, attention, and engagement after the instructional adjustments made in Cycle II. These findings show that inquiry-based learning supported progressive improvement in both the learning process and reading achievement within this classroom context.</i>
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1. Introduction

Literary works provide a medium through which human experiences, ideas, emotions, and social realities are represented. Their educational value arises not only from aesthetic form but also from the opportunities they provide for interpretation, reflection, and the development of sensitivity toward human experience (Damono, 2018; Semi, 2017). Among the literary genres taught in schools, the short story is especially suitable for classroom reading because it presents a relatively concise and unified narrative while still containing characters,

setting, plot, conflict, point of view, theme, and other intrinsic elements that require careful interpretation (Abduh & Masruddin, 2023; Nurgiyantoro, 2019).

Reading a short story therefore involves more than pronouncing written words or identifying explicitly stated information. Reading is an active meaning-making process in which readers connect textual information, infer relationships, evaluate details, and construct an integrated understanding of the text (Tarigan, 2018). Indonesian studies have shown that carefully designed instructional approaches can improve specific reading outcomes, including reading fluency and narrative-text reading performance (Ar et al., 2024; Masruddin, 2016). In Indonesian language education, literary reading is expected to support language development, imagination, appreciation, and critical thinking (Depdiknas, 2017; Rahmanto, 2018). Effective instruction should consequently guide students to interpret the story as a whole rather than merely memorize isolated definitions of intrinsic elements.

Preliminary classroom observation at SMP Negeri Satap 3 Gunung Bintang Awai indicated that the seventh-grade students experienced difficulty understanding short stories in depth. They tended to identify only explicit information, waited for the teacher to provide an interpretation, and participated passively during lessons. They also had difficulty identifying implied meanings, explaining the relationships among intrinsic elements, and supporting their interpretations with evidence from the text. These conditions suggested that the classroom process did not yet provide sufficient opportunities for students to investigate a text, propose interpretations, test ideas, and formulate conclusions independently.

Inquiry-based learning was selected as the instructional response to this problem. Inquiry-oriented instruction positions students as active participants who formulate questions, collect and examine information, test possible answers, and draw conclusions with appropriate teacher guidance (Hosnan, 2019; Sanjaya, 2020). It is consistent with broader principles of active, contextual, and student-centered learning described by Kurniasih and Sani (2020), Majid (2018), Rusman (2021), and Trianto (2020). Related Indonesian evidence indicates that discovery-oriented learning can improve reading comprehension and students' perceptions of reading instruction (Damayanti et al., 2023). When applied to short-story reading, the stages of inquiry can encourage students to ask interpretive questions, locate textual evidence, connect intrinsic elements, discuss alternative meanings, and justify conclusions.

Previous Indonesian studies have examined reading boxes, language-experience instruction, and discovery learning in English reading contexts (Ar et al., 2024; Damayanti et al., 2023; Masruddin, 2016). However, these studies did not address inquiry-based interpretation of Indonesian short stories in the present seventh-grade classroom or explain how the instructional action was refined through repeated observation and reflection. The practical gap addressed in this

study was therefore the absence of an instructional process in this specific classroom that systematically engaged students in inquiry while reading short stories. The study contributes contextual classroom evidence concerning how inquiry-based learning can be implemented with a small seventh-grade class and how the action develops across cycles. Its contribution is primarily pedagogical and context-specific rather than broadly generalizable.

The study addressed two consolidated questions: (1) How can inquiry-based learning improve the quality of the classroom process in short-story reading? and (2) How can inquiry-based learning improve students' short-story reading achievement, particularly their understanding and analysis of intrinsic elements? Accordingly, the study aimed to improve both the learning process and the students' short-story reading achievement through two cycles of classroom action research.

2. Method

The study employed classroom action research because it was designed to improve an identified instructional problem through planned action, systematic observation, and reflection. Classroom action research is conducted collaboratively and cyclically so that the weaknesses of one cycle can inform improvements in the next cycle (Arikunto et al., 2021). The study was conducted at SMP Negeri Satap 3 Gunung Bintang Awai, Barito Selatan Regency, during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, from July to September 2025. The participants were all seven students in Grade VII, consisting of four male and three female students. The Indonesian language teacher assisted the study as a classroom observer. The small number of participants reflected the actual composition of the class and was retained throughout the action research.

The study was implemented in two cycles. Each cycle included planning, action, observation, and reflection, following the cyclical structure commonly used in classroom action research (Arikunto, 2019; Arikunto et al., 2021). During planning, the researcher prepared the lesson plan, short-story reading activities, observation sheet, and reading test. During action, instruction followed the inquiry stages of orientation, problem formulation, hypothesis formulation, data collection, hypothesis testing, and conclusion drawing. In the literary-reading context, students were guided to identify a reading problem, propose an interpretation, locate evidence in the story, examine the relationship among intrinsic elements, and formulate a supported conclusion. Observation documented the learning process, and reflection was used to identify weaknesses and determine the revisions required for the next cycle.

Data were collected through a short-story reading test, classroom observation, and documentation. The test was administered before the action and after each cycle to measure the students' achievement. Based on the content reported in the original manuscript, the main outcome assessed was the students' ability to understand a short story and analyze its intrinsic elements by providing

appropriate evidence and reasons. Classroom observation focused on process-related behaviors described in the study, including attention, enthusiasm, participation, confidence in responding, willingness to ask questions, cooperation, and engagement in reading activities. Oral reading fluency and intonation were treated as supporting observations rather than as the principal achievement construct.

The observational data were analyzed qualitatively to describe changes in the classroom process across the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. Test data were analyzed quantitatively using the class mean, minimum and maximum scores, and the percentage of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion. The class mean was obtained by dividing the total student score by the number of students, while the mastery percentage represented the proportion of students who achieved a score of at least 70. These descriptive procedures are consistent with the use of quantitative and qualitative evidence in educational research (Sugiyono, 2021). The action was predetermined to be successful when at least 80% of the students achieved the minimum mastery criterion of 70 and classroom activity reached at least 70% during the core learning activities.

3. Results

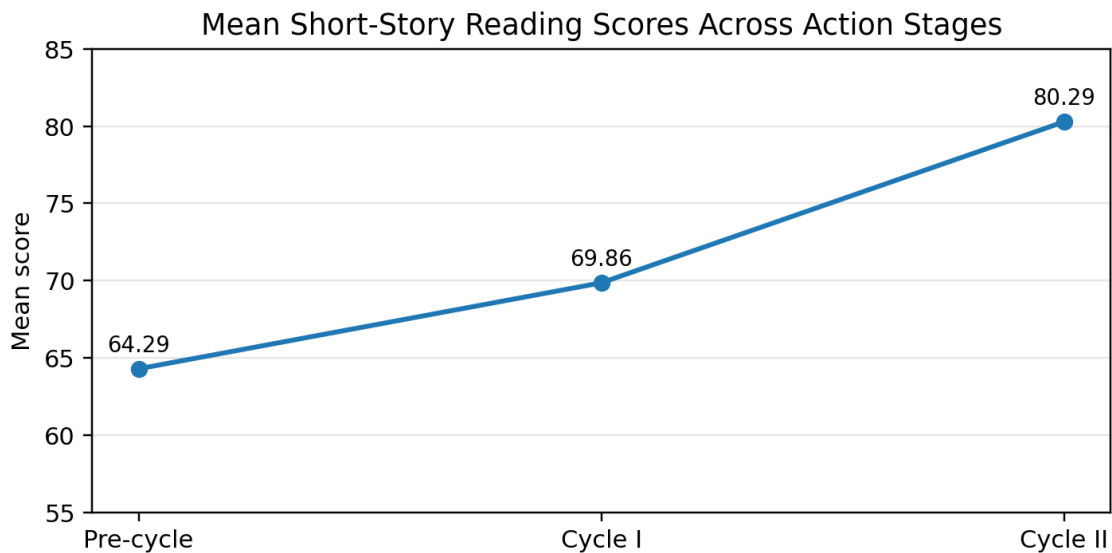
a. Improvement in the Learning Process

The pre-cycle observation showed that students tended to wait for the teacher's interpretation and participated minimally in discussing the short story. During Cycle I, inquiry-based activities increased students' interest and enthusiasm, and some students began to identify and discuss intrinsic elements. However, the observation and reflection also revealed several continuing problems. Some students were distracted, lacked confidence when reading or answering questions, and remained reluctant to participate. These findings showed that the first cycle had improved the classroom atmosphere but had not yet produced consistent engagement across the class.

The Cycle I reflection guided several instructional adjustments in Cycle II. The researcher provided more intensive guidance to students who required additional reading support, encouraged students to ask questions, provided motivation and reassurance, used repeated reading practice, and promoted peer support. During Cycle II, students were described as more attentive, confident, and willing to participate. They asked questions more readily, supported classmates, and engaged more seriously in reading and interpreting the story. Improvements in fluency and intonation were also observed as supporting indicators of increased confidence and practice.

Table 1. Short-Story Reading Achievement across the Action Stages

Stage	Mean	Mastery (%)	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-cycle	64.29	28.57	60	70
Cycle I	69.86	42.85	60	70
Cycle II	80.29	100.00	70	86

**Figure 1. Mean short-story reading scores from the pre-cycle to Cycle II****Table 2. Reported Process-Related Attitude Scores**

Stage	Mean attitude score
Cycle I	68.86
Cycle II	81.86

b. Improvement in Short-Story Reading Achievement

As shown in Table 1, the class mean increased progressively across the action stages. The pre-cycle mean was 64.29, with 28.57% mastery, a minimum score of 60, and a maximum score of 70. At the end of Cycle I, the mean increased to 69.86 and the mastery percentage rose to 42.85%; however, the class had not yet reached the predetermined mastery criterion. The minimum and maximum scores remained 60 and 70.

After the instructional revisions in Cycle II, the class mean reached 80.29 and all students achieved the minimum mastery score, producing a mastery rate of 100%. The minimum score increased to 70 and the maximum score to 86. The original manuscript also reported that the mean process-related attitude score increased from 68.86 in Cycle I to 81.86 in Cycle II. Together, the test results and classroom observations indicate that the strongest improvement occurred after the

second-cycle adjustments.

The achievement findings also indicate that students became more capable of identifying intrinsic elements, providing textual evidence, and explaining their interpretations. Because individual student scores, item-level results, and a detailed observation rubric were not included in the original report, the present results are appropriately interpreted at the class level and within the boundaries of the reported descriptive data.

4. Discussion

The study found progressive improvement in the learning process and short-story reading achievement after inquiry-based learning was implemented across two cycles. The pre-cycle and Cycle I results showed that initial exposure to inquiry activities increased interest but was insufficient to ensure active participation and mastery for most students. Cycle II produced stronger outcomes after the researcher intensified guidance, motivation, questioning opportunities, peer support, and repeated practice. This pattern illustrates the central logic of classroom action research: instructional improvement results not only from applying a method but also from reflecting on its implementation and modifying the action in response to observed classroom needs.

Inquiry-based learning may have supported the improvement because its stages required students to move beyond receiving the teacher's explanation. Formulating questions and possible interpretations encouraged them to identify a reading problem, while collecting and testing textual evidence required closer attention to the story. Drawing conclusions required students to connect plot, character, setting, conflict, and theme rather than treat each intrinsic element as an isolated label. These processes are consistent with inquiry-oriented instruction, which emphasizes active investigation, evidence, reasoning, and guided independence (Hosnan, 2019; Sanjaya, 2020). The interpretation also accords with Damayanti et al. (2023), who reported improved reading comprehension through discovery learning, and Ar et al. (2024), who found improved narrative-text reading performance following a structured reading intervention. These studies involved different interventions and contexts, so they provide comparative support rather than direct confirmation of the present classroom action.

The process findings further suggest that instructional scaffolding was important. The students' limited confidence and participation in Cycle I indicate that inquiry should not be interpreted as the withdrawal of teacher support. In Cycle II, guidance, encouragement, and repeated practice helped students participate more actively and reduced their hesitation. Motivation and supportive classroom interaction can influence attention, persistence, and willingness to engage in learning tasks (Hamalik, 2020). Related work by Masruddin and Munawir (2022) likewise illustrates how an interactive and collaborative task can support language-learning outcomes among seventh-grade students. The

improvement in the reported attitude score and the qualitative observation of greater cooperation and confidence support this interpretation, although confirmation of the exact observation scale remains necessary.

The improvement in reading achievement is also educationally relevant because literary reading requires an integrated understanding of a narrative. Nurgiyantoro (2019) emphasizes that the elements of fiction operate as an interconnected structure, while Rahmanto (2018) and Semi (2017) position literary instruction as a means of developing appreciation and interpretation. The structural analysis described by Abduh and Masruddin (2023) similarly highlights the relationships among theme, plot, character, setting, point of view, and style in narrative texts. The reported ability to identify intrinsic elements, cite evidence, and explain reasons indicates movement from surface-level recognition toward a more analytical reading process. This is compatible with Tarigan's (2018) view of reading as an active language skill that involves constructing meaning rather than merely recognizing words. Masruddin's (2016) study of reading fluency also underscores the importance of distinguishing specific reading outcomes; in the present study, fluency and intonation were treated as supporting observations, whereas comprehension and intrinsic-element analysis constituted the main achievement outcome.

The study's contribution is nevertheless bounded by its classroom context. It involved only seven students in one school, used two action cycles, and did not include a comparison group. The original manuscript also did not provide individual score distributions, detailed instrument specifications, validation evidence, or a fully quantified classroom-activity record. Consequently, the findings should not be generalized beyond the class without further evidence. Their principal value lies in showing how an inquiry approach, combined with cycle-based reflection and additional scaffolding, was associated with improved participation and achievement in this particular short-story reading class. Future work should use verified instruments and engage with a broader body of recent empirical research focused specifically on inquiry and literary reading in Indonesian secondary education.

5. Conclusion

This study describes the management of extracurricular Arabic language learning through student organizations and Arabic Language Week at two higher education institutions in Pekanbaru. The reported management pattern consisted of participatory planning, division of responsibilities, student-led implementation, lecturer and faculty supervision, and post-activity and monthly evaluation. Arabic Language Week provided a practical setting for conversation, vocabulary use, competitions, public performance, and peer interaction.

Participants perceived the program as supporting motivation, confidence, speaking practice, vocabulary development, social relationships, and the formation

of an Arabic-speaking environment. These findings indicate the potential of structured student-organization programs to complement classroom instruction. They should not be interpreted as verified causal evidence of proficiency improvement because the study did not include direct language assessment or longitudinal measurement.

The study is limited by unresolved inconsistencies in the reported participant total and respondent codes, insufficient detail about data collection and analysis, limited institution-specific comparison, and the absence of documented proficiency measures. Confirmation of these methodological details is required before publication. Subject to these corrections, the study offers a useful account of how student leadership and institutional support can be combined in the management of extracurricular Arabic language learning.

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