

Implementing Reading Instruction on Recount Text in Kurikulum Merdeka: A Preliminary Action Research Study Grade 8th at SMPN 44 Palaran

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Abstract

This research was conducted to assess the implementation of reading teaching in a Grade 8 English classroom at SMPN 44 Palaran, Samarinda, East Kalimantan in the context of Kurikulum Merdeka. During the reconnaissance phase of the Classroom Action Research (CAR), a qualitative descriptive technique was used. Non-participant classroom observation and a semi-structured interview with the English teacher were used to collect data. The results show that the reading teaching is in a task-based sequence where students are guided from the exposure to the text to the worksheet activities (LKPD) without scaffolding vocabulary and discussions about meaning. Many students refused to read aloud, stating incapacity or lack of confidence, and only participated after the teacher encouraged and supported pronunciation. The Modul Ajar and LKPD curriculum texts organize learning objectives around the four language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) without explicitly addressing vocabulary, which leaves pre-reading scaffolding out. The teacher admitted struggles with student motivation and time management in the 80-minute lecture. These results provide a diagnostic framework for constructing a CAR intervention to include vocabulary scaffolding in recount text reading instruction.

Keywords: classroom action research, cooperative learning, EFL, junior high school

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is essential for students' learning. It conveys information that enhances understanding. Reading is the fundamental skill for comprehending materials. Through reading, learners develop vocabulary knowledge, deepen their understanding of text structure, and build the linguistic resources necessary for productive language use (Grabe, 2008; Nation, 2001). The students do not necessarily read the text or passage aloud during the reading process. The primary focus lies in the comprehension of the texts or passages, ensuring that they are understood effectively. Increased engagement with reading materials correlates with enhanced comprehension of the meanings conveyed in texts or passages (Agung et al., 2022). Within the Indonesian educational framework, the limited exposure of students to authentic English predominantly occurs within the classroom setting, thereby rendering reading instruction a crucial mechanism for facilitating language input.

Students read a work in order to comprehend its meaning, grasp its main idea, and gain a wealth of knowledge. The new Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, Nadiem Makarim, since issuing a circular letter number 1 of 2020 addressing the Merdeka Belajar policy in determining student graduation has raised pros and cons from various organizations, "Merdeka Belajar" or "Kebebasan Belajar". The notion of "Kebebasan Belajar" involves liberating educational institutions while fostering innovation among students and promoting creative thinking. This concept was subsequently embraced in light of the future vision and mission of Indonesian Education, aimed at fostering quality individuals capable of competing across diverse areas of life.

The implementation of Merdeka Belajar fosters students who excel not only in rote memorization but also possess keen analytical skills and reasoning abilities essential for problem-solving. Students are also anticipated to possess character. In the context of independent learning, it is essential for educators to possess a thorough understanding of the subject matter and to expand it into engaging and enjoyable content for discussion. The integration of technology as a learning medium is crucial, as it fosters high motivation among students, enabling them to enhance their inherent abilities. The growth of students' creativity is contingent upon the teacher's ability to design learning experiences that actively engage them in creative challenges.

As educational policies evolve, it is essential for teachers to adjust to the applicable regulations. According to (Azra & Baiquni, 2024) the role of educators in the learning process is of significant importance. Teachers, as professionals, are tasked with the responsibility of structuring high-quality learning experiences that cultivate an educated generation—one that is equipped to compete on a global scale and uphold strong moral values. Educators are required to adapt the traditional framework by implementing contemporary policies. In the context of the fourth industrial revolution, it is imperative for educators to enhance their pedagogical skills, enabling them to effectively guide and direct students in the optimal utilization of their reasoning abilities. Educators who possess autonomy in their thinking are undoubtedly capable of fostering an environment that encourages students to effectively engage their reasoning skills and express creativity aligned with their individual talents and capabilities.

In the context of Kurikulum Merdeka, which serves as Indonesia's prevailing national curriculum framework, the competencies related to the English language at the junior high school level are systematically structured around four fundamental language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This design, centered on skills, embodies an approach that emphasizes the importance of communication in language learning, focusing on the learners' capacity to utilize language effectively for practical applications. At the Grade 8 level, recount text functions as a significant genre that facilitates the development of reading competencies. The recount text necessitates that learners grasp and articulate past events through the use of temporal sequencing, action verbs, and descriptive vocabulary. This process requires not only reading fluency but also sufficient lexical knowledge.

The Merdeka Belajar program necessitates that educators engage in autonomous and innovative thought processes when crafting learning experiences tailored to the specific requirements of their students. Educators possess the autonomy to select specific components of the curriculum to be tailored in the educational process, aligning with the requirements of their students. The autonomy afforded to educators in selecting curriculum components should facilitate an environment that encourages students to engage in critical thinking when addressing diverse challenges, promotes creative expression, and cultivates strong character in their communication and collaborative efforts with others. Consequently, this investigation seeks to identify the obstacles faced by English educators in the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, as well as to explore the strategies employed by teachers in the instruction of English.

Numerous prior studies have explored the application of Classroom Action Research (CAR) to improve student learning outcomes in various subjects and language skills. The current research aims to enhance biology learning outcomes for eleventh-grade students by tackling issues of low engagement and the constraints of traditional, teacher-centered teaching methods. The study was conducted in two cycles, encompassing planning, implementation, observation, and reflection within a classroom setting. The study revealed that the combination of the STAD model with Kahoot media led to a notable increase in student mastery, rising from 40% in Cycle I to 85% in Cycle II (Lisdayanti et al., 2025). The second study concentrated on improving narrative text writing abilities among eleventh-grade students, with a particular emphasis on addressing challenges related to vocabulary, the application of past tense, and comprehension of text structure. Conducted across two cycles, the data was gathered using observation checklists, field notes, and quantitative essay writing assessments. The findings indicated a notable enhancement in writing skills across various dimensions, with the class completion rate rising from 44.7% to 78.9%, effectively tackling students' previous difficulties with narrative complexity (Kurniasari et al., 2022).

Despite the extensive exploration of Classroom Action Research aimed at enhancing specific subject outcomes and productive English skills such as writing, there remain significant gaps that require attention. This study addresses gaps identified in previous research, specifically regarding the targeted English skill, the genre of text, the context of the educational curriculum, and the primary

focus of the observation. This study shifts the focus from previous work that highlighted productive skills such as narrative writing or the use of specific digital media in non-language subjects, concentrating instead on reading instruction related to recount text. This study is specifically situated within the ongoing implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, necessitating unique pedagogical strategies. This preliminary action research emphasizes the analysis of the teacher's applied methods and the identification of practical challenges that arise during the reading instruction process, rather than merely measuring the improvement of student test scores following an intervention. This study focuses on the eighth-grade students and the English teacher at SMPN 44 Palaran.

This study aims to investigate the methods employed by the English teacher in applying and implementing reading instruction for recount texts within the Kurikulum Merdeka framework. To explore the specific instructional methods employed and the practical challenges that arise during the teaching and learning process, a preliminary action research study was conducted. This investigation concentrated on the actual implementation of reading instruction within the classroom environment for eighth-grade students at SMPN 44 Palaran. Consequently, the preliminary action research was employed as the most effective approach to collect comprehensive, qualitative insights into the teacher's pedagogical decisions, classroom implementation processes, and the challenges encountered during reading instruction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

SMPN 44 Palaran serves as a public junior high school situated in the Palaran District of Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. SMPN 44 Palaran, similar to numerous public schools nationwide, has adopted the Kurikulum Merdeka framework as a component of the national education reform initiative. This study is conducted in the Grade 8 English classroom, focusing on the instruction provided by an English teacher who delivers reading lessons on recount texts utilising the school's Modul Ajar and LKPD. The recount text, which narrates past events in a sequential manner utilising action verbs, temporal connectives, and vivid descriptive language, stands as a fundamental genre within the Grade 8 English curriculum. An initial examination of the classroom indicated a trend where students engaged in reading and worksheet tasks without adequate pre-reading preparation, leading to the recognition of vocabulary scaffolding as a key instructional issue in this investigation.

In EFL contexts, effective reading instruction generally adheres to a structured three-phase sequence that includes pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading activities. Grabe (2008) highlights the importance of the pre-reading phase, noting that it is during this stage that vocabulary preparation, background activation, and the establishment of reading purposes help to alleviate the cognitive load on learners as they engage with the text. Larse-Freeman and Anderson (2011) establish that the effectiveness of learners in post-reading tasks is directly influenced by the quality of meaning-support provided to them in advance. In the absence of this scaffolding, EFL students, particularly those with restricted vocabulary, often resort to guessing instead of understanding, which negatively impacts their reading skill development and diminishes their confidence. Putra et al. (2025) and Wahid et al. (2022) highlight vocabulary deficiency as a fundamental factor contributing to reading anxiety

and avoidance behaviour in EFL classrooms, emphasising that vocabulary scaffolding serves as both an affective and cognitive intervention.

Within the framework of Kurikulum Merdeka, the role of vocabulary instruction remains somewhat unclear. The curriculum's focus on communication allows educators the freedom to create their own learning experiences; however, it does not explicitly require vocabulary to be a learning goal. As a result, vocabulary often lacks consistent emphasis in lesson plans or worksheets (Azra & Baiquni, 2024; Azzahra & Kaniadewi, 2025). CAR provides a systematic approach to tackle these gaps directly within the classroom environment. Burns (2009) and Kemmis et al. (2014) outline CAR as a cyclical process involving planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This process commences with a reconnaissance phase that systematically assesses the current state of practice prior to the design of any intervention. Previous studies on CAR in Indonesian schools have shown that structured interventions can effectively improve student outcomes (Kurniasari et al., 2022; Lisdayanti et al., 2025) however, there has been no focus on reading instruction for recount texts within the Kurikulum Merdeka framework. This investigation addresses that void by focusing on the diagnostic reconnaissance phase as its main contribution.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to detail and explain the current state of reading instruction as it naturally unfolds within the classroom environment. The qualitative descriptive approach focuses on providing a detailed and comprehensive explanation, making it especially appropriate for the initial phase of Classroom Action Research (CAR). This phase serves as a diagnostic stage, as noted by Burns (2009) and Kemmis et al. (2014), aimed at systematically identifying and analyzing current instructional issues prior to the planning of any intervention. The descriptive qualitative technique seeks to address inquiries regarding the who, what, where, and how of reading instruction implementation, with a particular emphasis on eighth-grade students and their English teacher at SMPN 44 Palaran. This investigation employs primary data collected via non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews to examine the pedagogical choices made by the teacher and to pinpoint practical challenges encountered within the Kurikulum Merdeka framework. Utilizing this framework allows for an analysis of the connections between instructional sequences, like task-based activities, and the specific challenges students encounter, such as insufficient vocabulary scaffolding in recount texts. This approach facilitates an in-depth comprehension of classroom dynamics from the perspectives of participants, yielding essential diagnostic insights to develop a future CAR intervention.

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design that falls under the Classroom Action Research (CAR) reconnaissance phase. Before any classroom intervention is planned or carried out, the researcher systematically identifies and analyzes the current problem during the reconnaissance phase of the CAR framework, also known as the pre-cycle or diagnostic stage (Burns, 2009; Kemmis et al., 2014). This study aims to provide an empirically based account of present reading instructional practices as they naturally occur, rather than

evaluating the efficacy of a teaching approach. The researcher can describe, evaluate, and comprehend classroom activities from the viewpoints of people engaged using a qualitative descriptive approach, which does not impose preconceived categories or measurements (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of the current study, which is to comprehend how reading instruction is now conducted and what difficulties teachers face in practice, is especially well-suited to this methodology.

The investigation took place at SMPN 44 Palaran, a public junior high school situated in the Palaran District of Samarinda, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The school has adopted Kurikulum Merdeka as its official curriculum. The site was chosen intentionally as it exemplifies a standard profile of Indonesian public junior high schools undergoing the adoption of Kurikulum Merdeka. Additionally, initial observations in the classroom validated the existence of the reading instruction challenges that prompted this study.

The primary participant is an English teacher tasked with instructing Grade 8 students at the institution. The primary informant for this study was chosen due to their continuous and direct engagement in lesson planning, the delivery of reading instruction, and the assessment of students in the observed class. Purposive sampling was utilized to align with the study's objective of selecting participants capable of offering the most pertinent and information-dense data for the research inquiries (Merriam, 2009).

3.2. Participants of the Study

This inquiry is mostly focused on the English instructor who is responsible for instructing a class of eighth graders at SMPN 44 Palaran. The educator was selected as the primary source of information due to the fact that she participated in the preparation of lessons, the delivery of reading instruction, and the evaluation of students in the classroom that was witnessed repeatedly and directly. The students in eighth grade who were present throughout the class that was observed served as secondary participants, that is, they contributed behavioural data regarding the impact of the current instructional style on student involvement and confidence while reading tasks were being completed. Using purposeful sampling allowed the researchers to select participants who were able to provide the most relevant and informative data for the research questions (Merriam, 2009). This was done in order to match with the study's objective.

3.3. Instruments

This study utilised two instruments for data collection. A non-participant classroom observation was initially carried out throughout an entire English lesson session (07.30–08.50 WITA, lasting approximately 80 minutes). Comprehensive field notes were meticulously documented regarding: (1) the complete instructional sequence utilised during the reading of the recount text; (2) the characteristics and existence or lack of pre-reading and meaning-centered activities; (3) student behavioural reactions, encompassing trends of reluctance, participation, and engagement; and (4) the application of teaching resources, including the class textbook and LKPD. Following the observed lesson, a semi-structured interview was carried out with the English teacher. Additional data were collected through WhatsApp and telephone calls to clarify the emerging

themes. The interview focused on four main aspects: (1) the teacher's views on the challenges students face during reading tasks; (2) the teaching methods and strategies used for reading instruction; (3) the impact of Modul Ajar and LKPD in organising reading activities; and (4) contextual limitations, including time constraints and student motivation, that influence the effectiveness of reading teaching.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis of data was conducted through the qualitative framework established by (Miles et al., 2013), encompassing three simultaneous processes: data condensation, data display, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. The observation field notes and interview transcripts were initially organized thematically in alignment with the two research questions according to Agustin et al. (2025). The coded data were systematically arranged into descriptive narratives corresponding to the three reconnaissance themes (teacher method, curriculum documents, and classroom implementation), followed by the drawing of interpretive conclusions through the cross-referencing of the two data sources.

The reliability of the results was enhanced by employing source triangulation: data from classroom observations and interviews were analyzed in conjunction, and conclusions were considered valid only when both sources aligned. The use of a single-session observation and single-participant design highlights the importance of this triangulation strategy in preventing an overdependence on any single data source. The individual also maintained field notes and verbatim interview records as an analytical audit trail, and adopted a reflexive stance toward potential interpretive biases (Creswell, 2014).

4. RESULTS

The results are structured around three primary themes that emerged during the CAR reconnaissance phase: (1) the teaching approach utilised by the educator in reading, (2) the curriculum and planning materials, and (3) the execution in the classroom and student reactions.

4.1 The Educator's Teaching Approach

The analysis of the classroom observation and the subsequent interview indicates that the reading instruction in the observed Grade 8 classroom adheres to a text-to-task methodology. The instructional sequence follows a systematic approach: the educator introduces the recount text, guides students to engage with it (either through silent reading or aloud), and subsequently assigns the LKPD exercises that align with the text. No organized pre-reading activity, including the activation of prior knowledge, introduction of key vocabulary, or establishment of a reading purpose, was noted before the reading task.

This instructional pattern corresponds with Grabe's (2009) description of a comprehension-focused yet scaffolding-deficient approach, wherein students are anticipated to derive meaning from a text without sufficient preparation. In EFL contexts, this approach puts learners, especially those with limited vocabulary knowledge, at a structural disadvantage. They do not possess the lexical resources needed to process the text meaningfully before being asked to

demonstrate comprehension through written tasks (Nation, 2001; Anderson, 1999).

When asked about her instructional approach during the interview, the teacher stated:

"I have already tried various methods, but the results are always the same. Student motivation to learn in the classroom is still lacking. And even if the method is good, there is still the problem of limited time."

This response suggests that the educator recognises the challenges related to motivation and engagement within her classroom and has previously sought to tackle these issues using diverse approaches. Nonetheless, she recognises that the limited duration of the 80-minute lesson serves as a continual structural obstacle to the execution of more thorough reading instruction.

4.2 Curriculum and Planning Documents

Reading teaching is completely defined in terms of skill-based learning objectives, according to an analysis of the Modul Ajar (lesson plan) and LKPD utilised in the observed class. The capacity of pupils to recognise a recount text's general structure, answer comprehension questions, and write similar writings are all considered competencies. None of the studied publications include vocabulary as a learning objective, a teaching component, or an assessment criterion. This result highlights a structural aspect of Kurikulum Merdeka's junior high school approach to teaching English: the curriculum framework implicitly positions linguistic elements like vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation as means to skills rather than as targets in and of themselves by structuring competency targets around the four macroskills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Although this approach aligns with the concepts of communicative language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), in the classroom under observation, vocabulary training has no official place in the lesson plan and is therefore unlikely to receive systematic instructional attention.

Only post-reading activities, such as comprehension questions, text structure identification exercises, and brief writing assignments, were included in the LKPD that the researcher examined. The worksheet lacked pre-task language help, a vocabulary dictionary, and a "Before You Read" section. In order to absorb the lexical content of the text, this design effectively demands students to participate in comprehension exercises without any document-embedded support. Vocabulary education should be purposefully incorporated into reading lesson design rather than being dismissed as background noise, as Azzahra & Kaniadewi (2025) contends. Even a teacher who is aware of the issue lacks the structural mandate and class time to address vocabulary when it is not included in both the lesson plan and the worksheet.

4.3 Classroom Implementation and Students Response

The classroom observation yielded clear insights into the impact of the existing reading instruction method on student engagement and self-assurance. Upon the teacher's request for students to read the recount text aloud, a significant portion of the students expressed clear refusals or indicated their inability, frequently stating that they were unsure how to read the text or felt they could not accomplish the task. This behavioural pattern aligns with findings on

emotional obstacles in EFL reading, highlighting limited vocabulary knowledge as a key factor contributing to reading anxiety and avoidance behaviour among foreign language learners (Putra et al., 2025; Wahid et al., 2022). Instead of progressing without these students, the teacher exhibited a nurturing and adaptive approach: she shifted the reading task to an eager student while concurrently engaging with the hesitant student, providing direct pronunciation assistance and personal encouragement, saying 'ayo ibu bantu pengucapannya' ('come on, I will help you with the pronunciation'). With this individualised support, the student committed to engaging with the reading material.

This moment highlights the teacher's authentic commitment to fostering student engagement and demonstrates a proficient application of emotional support strategies to alleviate the student's immediate anxiety barrier. However, the support offered was restricted to pronunciation and the mechanics of oral reading, without addressing comprehension. The reading attempt was not accompanied by any discussion regarding the content of the text, the meanings of the key terms, or the significance of the events described, either before or after the attempt. Consequently, although the student engaged in the superficial task of reading aloud, the necessary cognitive involvement for understanding the text was not adequately facilitated. After the oral reading activity, the teacher moved seamlessly into the LKPD exercises. Participants were instructed to respond to comprehension inquiries and engage in text structure activities related to the recount text they had recently analyzed. The text's content was not discussed as a whole class, unfamiliar expressions were not clarified, and there was no consolidation of meaning between the reading and the task phase.

The lack of a meaning-making bridge, which Grabe (2009) refers to as the 'consolidation' stage of reading instruction, represents a significant structural gap in the observed lesson. Studies on reading comprehension consistently show that learners' success in completing post-reading tasks is directly dependent on their support in forming an accurate mental representation of the text during and after reading Larse-Freeman & Anderson (2011). In the absence of this support, students with inadequate vocabulary knowledge struggle to independently understand the text, leading them to guess answers for comprehension tasks. This approach fails to enhance their reading skills or expand their vocabulary.

The observed sequence — text exposure → oral reading → LKPD tasks, without any mediation of meaning in between — can be illustrated as follows:

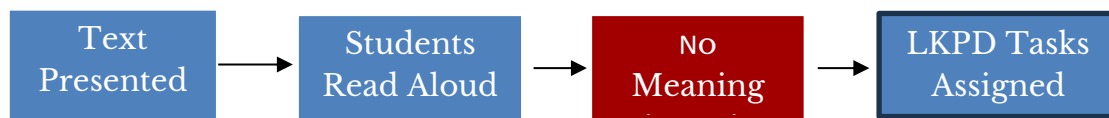


Figure 1. Observed instructional sequence in the Grade 8 Reading lesson
(The red phase represents the absent meaning-making stage).

The absent phase — meaning-making — is exactly where vocabulary scaffolding would seamlessly fit into a more organized reading lesson. The absence observed does not indicate a deficiency in teacher competence; instead, it arises from a combination of factors: time constraints, the lack of vocabulary scaffolding structures in the LKPD, and the omission of a formal vocabulary component in the Modul Ajar.

Throughout the course of the observation and the interview, it became abundantly clear that time was a persistent limitation in the process of the instructor making decisions regarding the instructional process. Despite the fact that the lesson duration of eighty minutes is very average, it is a substantial difficulty for the educator because they are required to complete tasks, engage in comprehension discussions, read the material, and participate in other activities all within the same session. During the course of the interview, the educator made a direct connection between the limitations of time and the deficiencies of the reading instruction approach that she now employs:

"Even if the method is good, there is still the problem of limited time."

It is because of this limitation that the planning of the CAR intervention is directly impacted. Any strategy to reading scaffolding that is offered should make time efficiency a primary consideration as a fundamental requirement. It should be able to be implemented within the existing framework of the lesson without interfering with activities that are essential to the curriculum. According to research conducted on vocabulary pre-teaching and pre-reading tactics, even brief pre-reading sessions that are well-organised and last for five to ten minutes can significantly improve the level of understanding achieved by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners Nation (2001). This indicates that if the structure is purposefully built, it is possible to accomplish effective scaffolding within a limited amount of time without sacrificing effectiveness.

The table below consolidates the findings from the three CAR reconnaissance themes:

CAR Theme	Expected/Ideal Condition	Actual Condition (SMPN 44 Palaran)
Teacher's Instructional Method	Structured reading instruction with pre-reading scaffolding, meaning-focused discussion, and post-reading consolidation	Text-to-task sequence with no pre-reading phase; reading aloud followed directly by LKPD exercises; scaffolding limited to pronunciation support
Curriculum & Planning Documents	Lesson plan and LKPD include pre-reading vocabulary activities and explicit reading scaffolding aligned with text demands	Modul Ajar and LKPD are skills-focused only; no pre-reading section, no vocabulary component, no meaning-support activity in LKPD design
Classroom Implementation & Students Response	Students engage with text confidently, supported by scaffolded reading activities that build vocabulary and comprehension before tasks	Students frequently refuse to read aloud; low confidence and motivation; avoidance behavior linked to inadequate pre-reading support

Table 1. Synthesis of Findings across CAR reconnaissance themes

5. DISCUSSION

The observation that reading instruction at SMPN 44 Palaran adheres to a text-to-task pattern, lacking structured pre-reading preparation, aligns with Grabe (2008) characterisation of a comprehension-focused but scaffolding-deficient methodology. This model requires students to extract meaning from a text without the necessary vocabulary preparation or background activation that would facilitate such understanding. For EFL learners, this presents a structural disadvantage: Nation (2001) indicates that readers must recognise at least 95–98% of the words in a text to attain sufficient comprehension, a benchmark that most Indonesian junior high school students are unlikely to reach without specific pre-reading assistance. The instructional sequence prioritises comprehension performance by guiding students from text exposure straight to worksheet tasks, rather than addressing the lexical conditions required for comprehension to take place.

The educator's identification of time limitations as the main obstacle to enhanced teaching underscores a significant structural conflict within the existing lesson framework. The 80-minute session should include text reading, comprehension activities, task completion, and any additional activities mandated by the Modul Ajar. Nevertheless, studies on pre-reading vocabulary intervention indicate that this tension does not have to be a barrier: Innocent et al. (2025) along with Nation (2001) show that organised pre-reading sessions lasting just five to ten minutes can lead to significant improvements in EFL reading comprehension. This suggests that efficient vocabulary support does not necessitate a complete overhaul of the lesson, but instead involves a thoughtful and time-saving addition of a meaning-preparation phase at the beginning of the reading sequence.

The lack of vocabulary as a distinct element in the Modul Ajar and LKPD exacerbates the instructional gap. Azzahra and Kaniadewi (2025) contend that vocabulary should be intentionally integrated into the design of reading lessons instead of being regarded as mere background noise. In the absence of official curriculum documents, even an educator who acknowledges its significance may find themselves without the necessary structural mandate and allocated class time to approach it in a systematic manner. This finding highlights the underlying tension within the communicative skills framework of Kurikulum Merdeka: by structuring competency targets solely around the four macroskills, the curriculum effectively obscures vocabulary instruction, resulting in a lack of formal guidance for individual educators on how to incorporate it into their daily lessons (Azra & Baiquni, 2024).

The documented student behavior—extensive reluctance to read aloud, indications of incapacity, and minimal engagement—cannot be solely attributed to motivational factors. Putra et al. (2025) and Wahid et al. (2022) highlight that a restricted vocabulary knowledge serves as the primary factor contributing to reading anxiety and avoidance behaviour in EFL classrooms, indicating that the students' hesitance is an emotional manifestation of a deeper cognitive shortcoming. The educator's reply, offering explicit pronunciation assistance, tackled the observable behaviour efficiently and with sincere concern; nonetheless, it failed to address the underlying comprehension obstacle that contributes to it. Larse-Freeman and Anderson (2011) assert that the ability of

learners to effectively complete post-reading tasks is contingent upon the quality of meaning-support offered prior to and during the reading process. In the absence of this support, students resort to guessing answers instead of showcasing true understanding, which fails to enhance reading skills or broaden vocabulary in the long run.

The findings from all three reconnaissance themes suggest that the challenges identified in the Grade 8 reading classroom at SMPN 44 Palaran cannot be linked to a single cause. Instead, they stem from a combination of issues related to curriculum design, lesson planning, and gaps in instructional sequencing, which together hinder the meaning-making phase of the reading lesson. This diagnostic picture offers a clear and evidence-based foundation for developing a future CAR intervention—one that integrates structured, time-efficient vocabulary scaffolding into the pre-reading phase of the instructional sequence in a way that aligns with Kurikulum Merdeka's existing frameworks and the practicalities of the classroom environment.

The present findings, which reveal a text-to-task instructional pattern with limited scaffolding and low student engagement, are broadly consistent with prior studies emphasizing the need for structured and adaptive pedagogy in EFL contexts. For instance, the absence of vocabulary and meaning-making stages contrasts with the Delphi-based framework proposed by Fadhly et al. (2026), which highlights the importance of integrating pedagogical innovation and AI-informed strategies to enhance academic literacy, suggesting that current practices remain pedagogically traditional and underdeveloped in responding to contemporary learning demands. Similarly, the observed reliance on teacher-led reading and limited student confidence echoes Fauzan's (2014) emphasis on the necessity of carefully designed materials to support learners' communicative competence, indicating that instructional materials in the present study have not yet fulfilled this facilitative role. In terms of technology integration, the findings diverge from Khoudri et al. (2024), who demonstrate that AI-supported learning environments can foster greater engagement and autonomy among EFL students, whereas the current classroom shows minimal technological or interactive support. Furthermore, the lack of pre-reading scaffolding and autonomous learning opportunities contrasts with Saeheng's (2017) findings that blended and e-learning approaches significantly enhance learner motivation and independence, suggesting that the observed classroom remains largely teacher-centered. Finally, the students' difficulties in comprehension and participation align with Saragih et al. (2022), who found that limited linguistic resources hinder students' ability to construct meaning in writing tasks, reinforcing the argument that vocabulary and comprehension support are foundational for both receptive and productive skills. Taken together, these comparisons indicate that the challenges identified in this study are not isolated but reflect a broader gap between current classroom practices and research-informed, innovative EFL pedagogy.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the reading instruction for recount texts at SMPN 44 Palaran is presently characterized by a "text-to-task" sequence, which emphasizes the fulfillment of worksheets rather than the genuine construction of meaning. The existing instructional flow, which transitions directly from text

exposure to oral reading and subsequently to LKPD tasks, fails to provide adequate scaffolding. This approach places students in a position where they are expected to extract information without the essential lexical tools needed for comprehension. The study reveals that without structured pre-reading activities, students face a significant disadvantage, as they do not possess the necessary linguistic tools to engage with texts in a meaningful way. Moreover, the consistent reluctance of students to read aloud, along with their diminished self-assurance, transcends mere motivational concerns. These challenges are affective barriers intricately linked to reading anxiety, which stems from insufficient vocabulary knowledge. The situation is further complicated by the structural limitations present in Modul Ajar and LKPD, which focus solely on macro-skills and make vocabulary instruction "invisible" within the formal curriculum, resulting in a lack of clear guidance for teachers to tackle this aspect. Although educators show a genuine dedication to enhancing student engagement via emotional support, the limitation of an 80-minute lesson frequently necessitates a pragmatic compromise between thorough understanding and the completion of tasks. This reconnaissance phase acts as a diagnostic framework for future Classroom Action Research (CAR), illustrating that enhancing reading outcomes requires a thoughtful redesign of the instructional sequence to incorporate time-efficient vocabulary scaffolding. By addressing the overlooked "meaning-making" phase, educators can elevate reading from a mere decoding exercise to a significant instrument for language development and student empowerment.

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