International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science
https://e-journal.citakonsulindo.or.id/index.php/IJEVSS
E-ISSN : 2963 4954
IJEVSS

The Implementation of the Drilling Method to Improve Basic English Literacy Skills of a Seventh-Grade Student with Reading Difficulties

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Abstract

One of the problems encountered in basic English literacy instruction in Grade VII at SMP Negeri 1 Malinau Selatan Hulu was the presence of a student with reading difficulties who required a specialized instructional method to achieve the expected learning competencies. This study aimed to improve the basic English literacy skills of a seventh-grade student with reading difficulties through the implementation of the drilling method (repetitive practice). This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design conducted in two cycles. Each cycle consisted of the stages of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. The research subject was one seventh-grade student who experienced reading difficulties. The study focused on English language learning with the topic Family Tree. Data were collected through tests, observations, documentation, and interviews. The research instruments included oral tests, written tests, observation sheets, and interview guidelines. The data were analyzed using a 0–1 scoring technique (dichotomous scoring). The pre-cycle results indicated that the student's average score was only 50, which was below the Minimum Learning Achievement Criteria (KKTP) of 71. In Cycle I, instruction was conducted using the drilling method without technological or internet support, focusing on direct practice guided by the teacher. The reflection results were not yet optimal, as reflected in the oral test score of 67, the first written activity test score of 60, and the second written activity test score of 40. In Cycle II, instructional improvements were made by integrating the drilling method with digital learning media, namely an Interactive Flat Panel (IFP) and educational games. The findings demonstrated a significant improvement, with the oral test score increasing to 80, the first written activity test score reaching 80, and the second written activity test score reaching 100. In addition to improved learning outcomes, the student also showed

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progress in classroom participation, self-confidence, and the ability to understand and read English vocabulary. Research findings demonstrate that the implementation of the drilling method supported by digital learning media improves the basic English literacy skills of seventh-grade students experiencing reading difficulties.

Keywords: Drilling Method, Basic English Literacy, Student with Reading Difficulties, Classroom Action Research.

INTRODUCTION

Basic English literacy at the junior high school level plays an important role in equipping students to face the challenges of global development and the rapid flow of digital information. Reading and writing skills are the main foundations that need to be mastered because they affect learning success at the next level of education (Permatasari & Purwandari, 2025). However, students' basic English literacy skills still face various obstacles. Low vocabulary mastery, suboptimal reading interest, and a lack of self-confidence in communicating using English are some of the problems still widely found in schools. This condition also impacts the development of students' critical thinking skills and until now remains a challenge in the implementation of education in Indonesia (Komari, Yulianingsih, Haryono, Syathroh, & Sanulita, 2025). In the learning process, teachers are also faced with a diversity of student characteristics and learning abilities. Some students are able to follow the learning process well, while others still experience obstacles, especially in reading skills. A frequently encountered difficulty is students' lack of fluency at the spelling stage, resulting in a less than optimal reading comprehension process. These problems not only affect the learning achievement of individual students but also require teachers to design learning that is more inclusive, flexible, and in accordance with the learning needs of each student so that literacy competencies can develop evenly.

Improving English literacy requires a continuous process through directed reading activities and the provision of consistent learning experiences. One effort that can be made is to utilize reading materials relevant to students' lives so that they can more easily understand the reading content while enriching their English vocabulary mastery (Fitrah, Retnaningdyah, & Mustofa, 2025). Thus, the mastery of basic English literacy at the junior high school level becomes a very important provision for students to continue their education to a higher level and prepare themselves to face various challenges in the global era.

Field conditions indicate that SMP Negeri 1 Malinau Selatan Hulu is located in a 3T

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(Underdeveloped, Frontier, and Outermost) area. Limited facilities and infrastructure remain a challenge in the implementation of education at the school. Electricity availability is not yet supported by the PLN grid, so the school's electricity needs still rely on a diesel-fueled generator set (genset) which is only capable of operating a few electronic devices. Internet access at the school is obtained through the Starlink service. In addition, the school's location, which is approximately a three-hour drive from Malinau City with land route access in the form of dirt roads to Tanjung Nanga Village, also poses a challenge in the implementation of learning.

This research focuses on one seventh-grade student at SMP Negeri 1 Malinau Selatan Hulu who experiences basic reading difficulties in English learning. This difficulty is apparent in the student's ability to recognize new vocabulary and pronounce English words accurately (Khafidhoh & Hikmah Abdullah, 2022). This condition indicates an obstacle in English reading skills, which is one of the basic competencies that students must master.

Specifically, the student demonstrates obstacles in reading English texts, reflected in low vocabulary mastery, pronunciation accuracy, and comprehensive understanding of the reading content (Khafidhoh & Hikmah Abdullah, 2022). This limitation in basic reading skills impacts the student's low achievement of English competencies. This obstacle is influenced by various factors, both internal and external. Internal factors include low learning motivation and anxiety when pronouncing English vocabulary, while external factors include limited relevant reading materials and a lack of opportunities to practice reading, whether in the school, family, or community environment. As a result, the development of the student's English literacy tends to be stagnant and has not yet reached the expected level (Wulandari & Purwaningsih, 2025).

Based on this description, it can be concluded that the basic English reading skills of the seventh-grade student at SMP Negeri 1 Malinau Selatan Hulu have not yet reached the expected level. This condition is characterized by low vocabulary mastery, pronunciation accuracy, and reading comprehension. These problems are influenced by a combination of internal factors, such as low learning motivation and anxiety in speaking practice, as well as external factors in the form of a lack of continuous practice opportunities, both at school and in the family and community environment.

At SMP Negeri 1 Malinau Selatan Hulu, the learning process is still dominated by conventional teacher-centered learning methods, so students more frequently listen to explanations and take notes without active involvement in learning. Learning activities tend to use lecture methods and monotonous exercises without adequate adjustment to student needs. As a result, students who experience reading difficulties have not received learning support

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appropriate to their characteristics and needs (Panggabean & Misykah, 2025). Furthermore, the limited use of interactive learning media, educational technology, and collaborative activities causes the learning atmosphere to be less engaging and less able to accommodate the diversity of students' learning styles (Mondong, 2025).

These findings indicate that low reading literacy skills at the junior high school level are not only influenced by individual student factors but also by learning approaches that are still insufficiently adaptive and lack innovation. Therefore, more active, inclusive, and differentiated learning strategies that suit student needs are required. Teachers need to develop learning approaches capable of creating a conducive learning environment so that reading competencies can develop optimally and continuously.

One alternative that can be used is the drilling method or repetitive practice. The drilling method is viewed as a learning approach capable of helping students master language skills gradually through systematically and repetitively conducted exercises. Exercises starting from letter recognition, words, to phrases provide opportunities for students to build more automatic language habits. This repetition process not only strengthens long-term memory but also helps students recognize and process texts more quickly, making reading activities more fluent (Masirri & Purwanta, 2025). When basic skills are well-established, students can focus more attention on understanding the reading content rather than just recognizing words or spelling.

The benefits of the drilling method are not only visible in the improvement of technical reading skills but also in the psychological development of students, especially those experiencing reading obstacles. Exercises provided gradually, directedly, and conducted continuously allow students to obtain positive learning experiences through small successes achieved during the learning process. These experiences can foster self-confidence, reduce learning anxiety, and encourage students to be more active in participating in classroom activities (Mahendra & Wulandari, 2024). Compared to instruction that provides less structured practice, the drilling method offers a more directed learning atmosphere so that students' learning needs can be better facilitated, and the development of basic literacy can occur continuously.

The selection of the drilling method in this research is based on the theoretical foundation stating that planned repetition can strengthen basic language skills while simultaneously forming automatic learning processes. A number of studies report that the implementation of this method contributes to improving articulation skills, speaking fluency, as well as reading and speaking skills as the foundation of English mastery (Abrar & Widiati, 2024). Other research also shows that the drilling method has the potential to improve basic literacy skills and reading comprehension in

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junior high school students, particularly for students who still experience reading difficulties (Yudha, Jamaludin, & Hilaliyah, 2025). Nevertheless, studies specifically testing the effectiveness of this method on improving vocabulary mastery and basic reading skills still need continuous development to obtain more comprehensive empirical evidence.

In addition, the drilling method has been widely used as a learning strategy for students experiencing learning obstacles. This approach emphasizes repetitively and structuredly conducted exercises so that students have the opportunity to strengthen memory, master basic skills, and build faster responses to the studied material. The results of various studies indicate that the consistent implementation of the drilling method can improve expressive language skills while enriching students' vocabulary mastery, thus serving as an effective alternative instruction to support literacy skill development. The effectiveness of the drilling method will be more optimal if accompanied by adjustments to exercise intensity, variation in learning activities, adequate teacher assistance, and the utilization of relevant educational technology (Shofa, Sudarman, & Husadani, 2025).

Based on this description, this research is designed in the form of Classroom Action Research (CAR) to empirically test the effectiveness of the drilling method in improving the basic English literacy skills of a seventh-grade student at SMP Negeri 1 Malinau Selatan Hulu. An evidence-based education approach is used as a foundation so that the implemented learning strategies are supported by measurable empirical data (Abrar & Widiati, 2024). Theoretically, this research is expected to strengthen studies on language acquisition through repetitive practice mechanisms. Practically, the results of this research are expected to provide recommendations for teachers in designing instructional interventions that improve students' basic English literacy skills (Miao, Tian, Zhang, Zhang, & Ma, 2025). Thus, this research aims to prove that the drilling method not only has a strong theoretical foundation but also empirically improves the basic English literacy skills of junior high school students experiencing reading difficulties.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used is Classroom Action Research (CAR). CAR is a form of research conducted systematically and reflectively on actions implemented by teachers who simultaneously act as researchers. The research process starts from the planning stage, action implementation, observation, up to the evaluation of actions taken in classroom learning activities. The main objective of CAR is to continuously repair and improve the quality of the process and learning outcomes (Sari, et al., 2025).

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International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science
https://e-journal.citakonsulindo.or.id/index.php/IJEVSS
E-ISSN : 2963 4954
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Classroom Action Research can also be understood as research focusing on real problems faced by teachers in instructional practice. CAR is implemented to find solutions to various obstacles arising in the classroom through actions that are systematically planned, implemented, observed, and reflected upon. The term action research originates from the English phrase "action research," meaning action research or operational research. The selection of this research design is based on the limited condition of the research subjects at SMP Negeri 1 Malinau Selatan Hulu, making the ideal use of a control group impossible. Therefore, the research is focused on efforts to understand and improve basic English literacy skills in one seventh-grade student experiencing reading difficulties through continuously provided instructional actions.

The implementation of Classroom Action Research is generally conducted in several cycles. The model used in this research refers to the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which is an extension of the action research model introduced by Kurt Lewin. The Kemmis and McTaggart model consists of four main stages occurring cyclically, namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. These four stages are interrelated and form a cycle serving as a continuous learning improvement process (Machali, 2022).

Through the application of the Kemmis and McTaggart model, researchers can identify learning problems more deeply, implement corrective actions suited to student needs, observe the impact of the provided actions, and reflect to determine corrective steps in the next cycle. Thus, the research process not only yields data regarding the improvement of student skills but also provides a description of the effectiveness of the actions implemented in learning.



Figure 1. Research Design Scheme

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Cycle I

Cycle I is the initial stage in classroom action research aimed at implementing instructional actions as an effort to correct problems found in the initial conditions. This cycle consists of four stages: planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection:

Planning At the planning stage, the researcher makes various necessary preparations before the action is implemented, including: The researcher identifies the learning problem to be fixed. Designing the strategy or method to be used, including teaching materials, media, and observation instruments.

Action / Implementation At this stage, the researcher implements learning according to the formulated plan, namely: The formulated plan is applied in the classroom using the drilling method without the use of Interactive Flat Panel (IFP) digital learning media and educational games. The teacher/researcher implements learning according to the plan.

Observation Observation is conducted during the ongoing learning process to obtain data regarding action implementation and student development. Observation activities include: Observing student activities while participating in learning. Observing student involvement, motivation, and response to the drilling method. Collecting data through observation sheets, test results, documentation, and interviews.

Interview The researcher analyzes the observation results. Identifies the success or obstacles of the implemented actions. Evaluates the effectiveness of the implemented drilling method. The results of this reflection become the basis for improvement in the next cycle.

Cycle II

Cycle II is implemented based on the reflection results in Cycle I. The goal is to correct deficiencies found in the previous cycle based on reflection results so that learning outcomes can improve optimally. Stages in Cycle II include planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection.

Revised Planning At this stage, the researcher refines the action plan based on the Cycle I reflection results, among others: Improving learning strategies deemed lacking based on Cycle I reflection results. Adjusting learning materials and media to student needs. Adding the use of technology-based learning media, such as Interactive Flat Panel (IFP), the internet, and educational games. Refining research instruments if necessary.

Action / Implementation At this stage, the revised actions are applied in learning, namely: Implementing learning using the drilling method combined with Interactive Flat Panel (IFP) digital

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learning media and educational games. Providing more varied and contextual exercises. Guiding the student intensively in reading activities, pronunciation, and the use of simple sentence structures.

Observation Observation is conducted to determine the effectiveness of the improved actions. The activities conducted include: Observing student activities and development during learning. Collecting data from test results, observations, documentation, and interviews. Comparing the obtained results with the results in Cycle I.

Interview At the reflection stage, the researcher conducts a final evaluation of all implemented actions, including: Analyzing the improvement of the student's basic English literacy skills. Assessing the achievement of research objectives and success indicators. Concluding the effectiveness of implementing the drilling method in improving the basic English literacy skills of the student experiencing reading difficulties. Determining whether the research has achieved the set objectives or requires follow-up actions.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This Classroom Action Research (CAR) aims to improve students' basic English literacy skills on the Family Tree topic through the implementation of the drilling method. Before implementing the action in Cycle I, the researcher first conducted preliminary observation (pre-cycle) to identify the basic English literacy skills of the seventh-grade student at SMP Negeri 1 Malinau Selatan Hulu on the Family Tree topic. This research was conducted in two cycles, each encompassing four stages, namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The research was conducted in April 2026. Cycle I was conducted on April 23, 2026, while Cycle II was conducted on April 30, 2026.

This classroom action research was conducted based on problems found in a seventh-grade student experiencing reading difficulties in English learning. Therefore, this research was conducted to improve basic English literacy skills through the implementation of the drilling method. The research subject is one seventh-grade student at SMP Negeri 1 Malinau Selatan Hulu experiencing reading difficulties.

In this research, the collected data consists of qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data were obtained through observation, interviews, teacher reflection, student reflection, and learning documentation. The data provide a description regarding the implementation of the drilling method, student activities during learning, and the learning process conducted by the teacher. Meanwhile, quantitative data were obtained through oral tests and written tests used to measure the student's basic English literacy skills in each cycle. Tests were given at the end of each

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cycle to determine the development of the student's skills after receiving instructional actions. The research results at each action implementation stage are presented below.

Pre-Action Data

Before implementing the action in Cycle I, the researcher first conducted pre-action activities to identify the initial basic English literacy skills of the seventh-grade student at SMP Negeri 1 Malinau Selatan Hulu on the Family Tree topic. Pre-action activities were conducted in April 2026 through three data collection techniques, namely observation during the learning process, interviews with the student, and the administration of a diagnostic test (pre-test) consisting of oral and written tests.

Based on the diagnostic test results, the student obtained a score of 50. This score is still below the Minimum Learning Achievement Criteria (KKTP) set by the school, which is 71. This result indicates that the student's basic English literacy skills still need to be improved. Based on these findings, the researcher deemed it necessary to have systematic instructional actions to help the student improve reading skills, pronunciation, and vocabulary mastery. Therefore, the drilling method was selected as the action implemented in Cycle I.

Cycle I

The action implementation in Cycle I was conducted in one meeting held on Thursday, April 23, 2026. This research using the drilling method was applied to the Family Tree topic. Learning activities were conducted in the classroom with the teacher presenting material in front of the class and providing direct guidance to the student without using digital media (IFP) and educational games.

Based on the evaluation results of the learning process in Cycle I, several weaknesses still needing correction in Cycle II were found. Teacher and student activities during learning showed fairly good development, but the research success indicators were not optimally achieved. Action success is determined when teacher and student activities are in the good or very good category. Therefore, improvement is needed in the next cycle.

Cycle II

The implementation of Cycle II in Classroom Action Research (CAR) is based on the Cycle I reflection results indicating that research success indicators were not optimally achieved. Evaluation results indicate that there are still several aspects needing improvement, both related

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to the implementation of learning by the teacher and student involvement during the learning process. Although development has been seen compared to initial conditions, the achieved results are still not in accordance with the predetermined targets.

Based on the reflection results, it can be concluded that learning in Cycle II experienced a significant increase compared to Cycle I. All research success indicators were achieved with good and very good categories. Thus, the implementation of the drilling method is proven to be able to improve learning activities, English literacy skills, and student learning outcomes on the Family Tree topic. Therefore, the learning objectives and research objectives in Cycle II have been achieved in accordance with the established success indicators.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the drilling method in this research was conducted through Classroom Action Research (CAR) starting with a pre-action stage, then followed by two learning cycles comprising planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection stages. In Cycle I, learning was implemented through the drilling method with direct guidance without using digital media (IFP) and educational games. The obtained reflection results indicate that the student's basic literacy skills began to experience improvement, although not yet reaching the established success indicators. Based on the reflection results in Cycle I, improvements were made in Cycle II through the implementation of a more intensive drilling method with repetitive vocabulary pronunciation exercises, reading simple words and sentences, strengthening comprehension of the Family Tree topic, and the utilization of digital learning media in the form of an Interactive Flat Panel (IFP) and educational games. A structured, repetitive learning process supported by interactive media provides an opportunity for the student to practice consistently so that basic literacy skills develop gradually.

Research results indicate that the implementation of the drilling method improves the basic English literacy skills of the student experiencing reading difficulties. At the pre-action stage, the student obtained a score of 50 and had not yet reached the Minimum Learning Achievement Criteria (KKTP) set by the school, which is 71. After the action was given, the student's learning outcomes showed a distinct improvement. In Cycle II, the student obtained an oral test score of 80, a first written activity test score of 80, and a second written activity test score of 100. Besides the improvement in learning outcomes, the student also showed development in the ability to pronounce vocabulary, recognize and understand simple sentence structures, read English vocabulary better, and possess higher self-confidence and participation during the learning

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process. Thus, the research objective has been achieved, namely obtaining a description of the drilling method implementation process and the improvement of the student's basic English literacy skills before and after the action was given.

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