

**IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION OF ELEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT
MADRASAH ALIYAH NWDI KETANGGA THROUGH CONTEXTUAL TEACHING AND
LEARNING (CTL): A CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH**

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Abstract

Eleventh-grade students at MA NWDI Ketangga struggle with reading comprehension due to limited vocabulary, difficulty identifying the main idea, and low motivation when encountering unfamiliar texts. This two-cycle Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on the Kemmis & McTaggart model tested the effectiveness of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) using the local folktale "The Legend of Putri Mandalika" on the reading comprehension of 16 students, using pre-tests, post-tests, and observation checklists as instruments. The results showed a significant improvement: the average score rose from 53.06 to 80.31 (an increase of 27.25 points), while the percentage of students who met the minimum passing score (≥ 75) increased from 25% to 81.25%. A paired-sample t-test confirmed the significance of this increase ($p = 0.000$). The implementation of CTL increased from 66.67% in Cycle 1 to 100% in Cycle 3, accompanied by an increase in student participation from a score of 10 to 17. An N-Gain score of 0.58 indicates moderate effectiveness. These findings demonstrate that CTL, implemented through action research with consistent reflection and integration of local culture, is effective in improving students' reading comprehension in the context of an EFL madrasah, particularly for beginner-level students.

Keyword: *Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), Reading Comprehension, Classroom Action Research (CAR), Local Folklore, Madrasah.*

Abstrak

Siswa kelas XI MA NWDI Ketangga mengalami kesulitan pemahaman membaca akibat kosakata terbatas, sulit menemukan gagasan utama, dan rendahnya motivasi terhadap teks yang asing. Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) dua siklus model Kemmis & McTaggart ini menguji efektivitas Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) menggunakan cerita rakyat lokal "The Legend of Putri Mandalika" terhadap pemahaman membaca 16 siswa, dengan instrumen pre-test, post-test, dan ceklis observasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan: rata-rata nilai naik dari 53,06 menjadi 80,31 (kenaikan 27,25 poin), sementara persentase siswa yang mencapai KKM (≥ 75) meningkat dari 25% menjadi 81,25%. Uji paired sample t-test mengonfirmasi signifikansi peningkatan ini ($p = 0,000$). Implementasi CTL meningkat dari 66,67% pada Siklus 1 menjadi 100% pada Siklus 3, diiringi peningkatan partisipasi siswa dari skor 10 menjadi 17. Skor N-Gain sebesar 0,58 menunjukkan efektivitas sedang. Temuan ini membuktikan bahwa CTL yang diterapkan melalui PTK dengan refleksi konsisten dan integrasi budaya lokal efektif meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa dalam konteks madrasah EFL, terutama bagi siswa tingkat pemula.

Kata Kunci: *Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), Pemahaman Membaca, Penelitian Tindakan Kelas, Cerita Rakyat Lokal, Madrasah*

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is one of the most important skills in the English language learning process since it helps learners to acquire information, think critically, and succeed in academic performance. Unfortunately, many learners, especially those in EFL settings, consider reading comprehension as a very difficult cognitive activity. For instance, (Kandisa et al., 2025) state that reading comprehension is a complex mental exercise which includes the interpretation of words, comprehension of grammatical structures, recognizing important points, making inferences, and incorporation of new information into the existing concepts. At the same time, Saidakhmedovna & Suyarkulovna (2026) state that reading comprehension is a process of decoding symbols from the written text and making meaning from the text and its context. The learner is supposed to be able to analyze, interpret and discuss the issue and respond to the knowledge domain.

In spite of its relevance, reading comprehension education in many Indonesian madrasahs encounters many obstacles. According to Molwantoa et al. (2025), many teachers in many countries still use the traditional, teacher-centered teaching approaches that only involve drilling without linking lesson materials with the students' context of life. Local folklore-based materials significantly improve EFL students' reading comprehension and learning engagement (Fauzi et al., 2026). As a result, this leads to failure in building comprehension knowledge and achieving low reading comprehension achievement.

The preliminary observations conducted at MA NWDI Ketangga pesantren-based madrasah in rural Lombok show the same pattern of problems. The 11th graders experienced difficulties in comprehending narrative and descriptive passages because of insufficient vocabulary and difficulties in identifying main idea, and low motivation due to foreignness of the passages. Pretest results have proven that over 70% of the students were below the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) set at 75 by the school. This problem is related to the general concern of Molwantoa et al. (2025) that reading instruction often remains mechanical without meaningful engagement.

To solve these problems, one of the alternatives that may be useful to apply is Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL). Contextualized Teaching and Learning (CTL) has a major impact on student academic performance, increasing positive engagement of learners, and improving learning skills (Baddane & Abdelghanie, 2023). This approach consists of seven components, namely constructivism, inquiry, questioning, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment (Aden et al., 2025). CTL will make it possible for the teacher to close the gap between the reading material and the real-life of the students in order to make comprehension easier for the students.

There are some empirical pieces of evidence showing the efficacy of CTL. First, Kambarova (2025) indicated that the implementation of the context-based reading instruction increased the students' comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and engagement. Yuniar et al. (2024) stated that the combination of CTL with Problem-Based Learning (PBL) had improved the performance in reading comprehension with the score of 66.67 for the experimental group against 49.00 for the control group. Unfortunately, none of those researches explored the implementation of CTL using Classroom Action Research (CAR) in rural madrasahs with pesantren background.

In order to fill the gaps above, this research will conduct CTL through Classroom Action Research (CAR) using the Kemmis & McTaggart model. Through CAR, teachers can gradually enhance their pedagogy through a series of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. According to Ertha et al. (2025) CAR is indeed a successful way of enhancing students' reading comprehension as their test scores improved from 68.37 in the pre-cycle stage to 84.19 in cycle 2. Thus, this research aims at investigating the application of CTL to enhance the reading comprehension ability of MA NWDI Ketangga eleventh-graders utilizing CAR and "The Legend of Putri Mandalika" folklore as the main reading text.

METHOD

This research used Classroom Action Research (CAR) as the research method. Vikasari (2019) successfully used a CAR design to improve students' reading comprehension through the CTL approach, by considering students' motivation level. (Rajiha, 2025) showed that through CAR there was a significant improvement in students' English learning outcomes with the CTL approach, with learning completeness increasing from 74% (Cycle 1) to 87% (Cycle 2). The model used in this research is Kemmis and McTaggart's, which consists of four processes in one cycle: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

The research was carried out at MA NWDI Ketangga, located in Ketangga Village, Selong Subdistrict, East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. The school was chosen based on a preliminary observation in which eleventh-grade students (16 students) had problems understanding reading passages, with most students scoring below the KKM (75). No CTL had yet been implemented in English language teaching at this school. The research took place in the second semester of the academic year 2025/2026 in three cycles; each cycle consisted of one meeting (2×45 minutes). The subjects comprised 16 eleventh-grade students (10 males and 6 females) ranging in age from 16 to 17 years old. Most had low to intermediate English proficiency and stronger familiarity with Arabic vocabulary due to the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) setting. The researcher himself acted as the teacher using the CTL approach, while a collaborating English teacher conducted observations to ensure objectivity.

The independent variable was the use of the CTL approach in teaching reading comprehension, comprising 7 CTL principles and 5 REACT principles. The dependent variables were students' reading comprehension skills, measured through literal and inferential comprehension tests, and student activeness during lessons. Three cycles were carried out, each containing planning (making lesson plans, teaching materials, and instruments), action (implementing CTL using the text "The Legend of Putri Mandalika"), observation (observing teacher and students' activities), and reflection (reflecting on results and making improvements). The selected text was a simplified version appropriate for A1-level students. The data collection process involved two major instruments. The first was a reading comprehension test consisting of 20 multiple-choice questions (10 literal and 10 inferential) based on the narrative text. This test was administered as a pre-test before Cycle 1 and as a post-test after Cycle 3. The second instrument was an observation checklist covering two aspects: the degree of CTL implementation by the teacher (12 items) and the level of student activeness during the learning process (6 items). To ensure instrument quality, the reading test underwent content validity checks by two expert judges (English lecturers) and was pilot-tested on a comparable student group, yielding a reliability coefficient (KR-20) of 0.81, indicating high internal consistency. The observation checklist was also validated through expert review and tested for inter-rater agreement between the researcher and the collaborating teacher, achieving 87% agreement, which confirms its reliability.

Data analysis included mean score calculation, the percentage of students meeting the KKM (≥ 75), and comparison between pre-test and post-test scores. The criterion for success was that at least 75% of students would achieve a score ≥ 75 on the post-test after Cycle 3. In addition, a paired sample t-test was performed to test the significance of improvement, and N-Gain analysis was used to measure effectiveness. Nevertheless, several inherent limitations of the CAR design must be acknowledged. Since this study lacks a non-equivalent control group, employs the researcher as the practicing teacher, and administers the same test format repeatedly across cycles, the observed improvements cannot be unequivocally attributed solely to the CTL approach. Factors such as teacher-researcher bias, the Hawthorne effect, and practice effects from repeated test exposure may have contributed to the positive outcomes. Therefore, the findings are best interpreted as evidence of contextual feasibility and local contribution rather than as definitive causal proof of CTL's superiority over other approaches.

RESULTS

Pre-test Results

Before implementing the CTL intervention, a pre-test was administered to assess students' initial reading comprehension. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Pre-test Results

No.	Aspect	Result
1	Number of Students	16
2	Mean Score	53.06
3	Highest Score	80
4	Lowest Score	26
5	Students Achieving KKM (≥ 75)	4 (25%)
6	Students Below KKM	12 (75%)

The pretest revealed that the first problem was valid, only 25% of the students were able to meet the mastery criteria. Most of the students (75%) had a score below 75, which indicated that their reading comprehension was very low.

Cycle 1 Results

Table 2. Observation Results Cycle 1

No.	Aspect	Score (1-3)	Category
1	Teacher's CTL Implementation (max 36)	23	Sufficiently Implemented
2	Student Activeness (max 18)	10	Sufficiently Active
3	Grand Total (max 54)	33	Sufficient

The observation done during cycle one showed that there were efforts by the teachers to incorporate the components of CTL, but the teachers were still in control of the learning process. There were only 4-5 out of 16 students who were engaged in asking and answering questions.

Cycle 2 Results

Table 3. Observation Results Cycle 2

No.	Aspect	Score (1-3)	Category
1	Teacher's CTL Implementation (max 36)	28	Well implemented
2	Student Activeness (max 18)	14	Active
3	Grand Total (max 54)	42	Good

During Cycle 2, there was an improvement in the aspect of giving examples (models) of sequencing. The act of sequencing sentences created excitement in the classroom. About 10-11 students were actively involved in the class activity. But one group needed some more help.

Cycle 3 Results

Table 4. Observation Results Cycle 3

No.	Aspect	Score (1-3)	Category
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Teacher's CTL			
1	Implementation (max 36)	33	Very Well Implemented
2	Student Activeness (max 18)	17	Very Active
3	Grand Total (max 54)	50	Very Good

In the third cycle, the implementation of all CTL elements was successful. This includes Relating and Transferring. Most students were involved actively (14-15 out of 16) in the class, and the atmosphere was highly motivated.

Post-test Results (After Cycle 3)

Table 5. Post-test Results

No.	Aspect	Result
1	Number of Students	16
2	Mean Score	80.31
3	Highest Score	95
4	Lowest Score	71
5	Students Achieving KKM (≥ 75)	13 (81.25%)
6	Students Below KKM	3 (18.75%)

Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test

Table 6. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test

No	Stage	Mean score	Students Achieving KKM	Presentage	Mean Increase
1	Pretest	53,06	4	25%	-
2	posttest	80,31	13	81,25%	+27.25

Statistical Analysis

Table 7. Paired Sample T-Test Results

No	Variable	Mean	Mean difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Pre-test	53.06	27.25	-10.64	15	0.000
2	Post-test	80.31				

The paired sample t-test showed a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the improvement from pre-test to post-test was statistically significant.

Table 8. N-Gain Analysis Results

No	Score	Value	Category
1	N-Gain	0.58	Moderate

Table 9. CTL Implementation Rate

No	Cycle	Score (teacher)	Components Observed	Implementation Rate (of 12)	Category
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1	Cycle 1	23	8	66.67%	Sufficient
2	Cycle 2	28	10	83.33%	Good
3	Cycle 3	33	12	100%	Very good

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrate that Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) effectively improves reading comprehension among eleventh-grade students at MA NWDI Ketangga. The improvement occurred through three interconnected mechanisms that worked synergistically throughout the three cycles.

Improvement through Systematic CTL Component Implementation

The seven CTL components (constructivism, inquiry, questioning, learning community, modeling, reflection, and authentic assessment) were implemented progressively from Cycle 1 to Cycle 3. Observation data showed CTL implementation increased from 66.67% in Cycle 1 to 100% in Cycle 3. This reflects that the teacher became more skilled at integrating CTL components consistently.

The constructivism component proved particularly effective in encouraging students to build their own understanding of texts. As noted by Hudson and Whisler (2008), learners construct knowledge through the integration of new information into their existing cognitive structures. This was evident in students' shift from answering only literal questions (Who, What, Where) in Cycle 1 to answering inferential questions (Why, How) in Cycle 3. This progression aligns with Kandisa et al. (2025), definition of reading comprehension as a complex thinking process involving interpretation, analysis, and integration of information.

The learning community component, implemented through heterogenous group work (4 groups of 4 students), proved effective in creating peer teaching opportunities where more capable students supported their peers. This was particularly relevant to the MA NWDI Ketangga context, where students are already accustomed to communal living in the pesantren environment. The modeling component helped A1-level students have concrete examples before attempting tasks independently. This finding is consistent with Ertha et al. (2025) who found that CAR with step-by-step approaches effectively improved reading comprehension.

The Role of REACT Principles and Local Context

The REACT principles (Relating, Experiencing, Applying, Cooperating, Transferring) served as the foundation for meaningful and contextual learning. The Relating principle was optimally implemented through the use of "The Legend of Putri Mandalika," a local folklore familiar to students. The teacher connected the story to students' real experiences, such as the Nyale festival, which reduced students' affective filter. Students no longer felt intimidated by English texts, making them more willing to read and ask questions.

The Transferring principle allowed students to connect the story's moral value ("Peace is better than war") to their daily lives. Students were able to write simple sentences expressing opinions about peace, such as "We must not fight" or "Peace makes us happy." This demonstrates that CTL not only improved cognitive aspects (reading comprehension) but also affective aspects (attitudes and values). This aligns with Kambarova (2025) finding that context-based teaching enhances students' comprehension, vocabulary, and motivation.

Continuous Improvement through CAR Reflection Mechanism

The Kemmis and McTaggart CAR model proved essential for continuous improvement. Reflection at the end of each cycle allowed the teacher to identify weaknesses and plan improvements for subsequent cycles. In Cycle 1, reflection revealed student passivity due to limited vocabulary, leading to the addition of matching activities in Cycle 2. In Cycle 2, reflection showed students still struggled with cause-effect questions, resulting in more open-ended questions and inference practice in

Cycle 3. This pattern demonstrates that CAR is not merely a series of actions but a systematic process of diagnosis and improvement.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings support and extend previous research. Consistent with Yuniar et al. (2024), who found that CTL combined with PBL improved reading scores, this study went further by isolating CTL and proving it remains effective without combination with other models, with a 27.25-point score improvement. This addresses the gap identified by Yuniar and Kurniawan that the specific impact of CTL alone could not be clearly identified because it was combined with PBL. In addition, Suhaila et al. (2025) proved the significant influence of CTL method on the mastery of reading comprehension of Class XI students ($t\text{-count } 5,717 > t\text{-table } 1,670$).

Unlike Ertha et al. (2025), who used mind mapping in CAR, this study used CTL and proved it more contextual and holistic, especially with the integration of local wisdom, successfully increasing student participation from 10 to 17. This study extended Kambarova (2025) findings into the Indonesian madrasah context, proving that local wisdom can be a powerful pedagogical resource. The findings also respond to Aden et al. (2025) identification of CTL implementation challenges by demonstrating that CAR is a practical solution for overcoming these obstacles. Utami & Drahati (2024) show that combining CTL with gamification in the English reading e-module effectively improves reading comprehension skills. Finally, this study provides empirical evidence that replacing drill methods with locally-contextualized CTL can effectively address the low literacy rates reported by Molwanto et al. (2025), with classical mastery increasing from 25% to 81.25%. Based on the data collected across three cycles, the following conclusions are drawn.

First, the implementation of CTL was carried out progressively and successfully. Observation results showed a consistent increase in teacher's CTL implementation, from 66.67% (Cycle 1) to 83.33% (Cycle 2), and reaching 100% (Cycle 3). Concurrently, student activeness scores improved from "Sufficiently Active" (10/18) in Cycle 1 to "Very Active" (17/18) in Cycle 3. This indicates that the integration of local folklore texts within the CTL framework successfully created a more engaging and participatory learning environment.

Second, the CTL intervention significantly improved students' reading comprehension scores. The mean score rose from 53.06 in the pre-test to 80.31 in the post-test, marking an increase of 27.25 points. The percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion ($KKM \geq 75$) increased dramatically from 25% (4 students) in the pre-test to 81.25% (13 students) in the post-test, thereby surpassing the predetermined success criterion of 75%. The paired sample t-test confirmed that this improvement was statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), and the N-Gain score of 0.58 indicated a moderate level of effectiveness.

However, the findings of this study must be interpreted with considerable caution due to several inherent limitations. Foremost among these is the small sample size ($n=16$), which consists of only one class from a single madrasah in a specific pesantren context. This small, non-randomized sample severely restricts the generalizability (external validity) of the results to broader populations, such as students in other schools, regions, or proficiency levels. The positive outcomes observed are contextually bound to this particular group of A1-level learners.

Furthermore, other methodological limitations of the CAR design must be acknowledged. The absence of a non-equivalent control group prevents us from ruling out confounding variables. Additionally, the researcher's dual role as the practicing teacher may have introduced performance or observation bias, while the repeated administration of the same test format across cycles could have contributed to practice or familiarity effects (Hawthorne effect). Consequently, while the findings strongly suggest that CTL is a feasible and effective approach in this specific setting, they cannot unequivocally attribute the improvement solely to the CTL approach in isolation from these contextual and procedural factors.

CONCLUSION

This Classroom Action Research demonstrates that Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) effectively improves reading comprehension among eleventh-grade students at MA NWDI Ketangga. The improvement occurred through three interconnected mechanisms: (1) systematic implementation of CTL components from Cycle 1 to Cycle 3, with implementation rates rising from 66.67% to 100%; (2) activation of REACT principles connecting materials to students' local context and real-life experiences, reducing anxiety and increasing motivation; and (3) continuous improvement through reflection in the CAR cycle, allowing systematic identification and remediation of weaknesses.

The research successfully answered the research question: CTL improves reading comprehension through a gradual, contextual, and reflective process that integrates all learning components and utilizes local wisdom as a bridge between English materials and students' real lives. Quantitative results confirmed the improvement, with mean scores rising from 53.06 to 80.31 (increase of 27.25 points), classical mastery increasing from 25% to 81.25% (exceeding the 75% success indicator), paired sample t-test showing $p = 0.000$ (significant), and N-Gain of 0.58 indicating moderate effectiveness. These findings prove that CTL, implemented through CAR, is an effective approach for improving reading comprehension in EFL madrasah contexts, particularly for beginner-level students.

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