

Research Article

Improving Literacy Skill of Eighth-Grade Students through Music-Based Learning Methods

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the comprehension skills, information absorption, and critical thinking abilities of middle school students through the implementation of music-based literacy learning (vocal and instrumental). The research subjects were 22 eighth-grade students from Class VIII A at SMP Negeri 4 Bajawa, Ngada Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, consisting of 12 male and 10 female students. The research employed a classroom action research method using the McTaggart Kemmis & Nixon model, which involves two cycles comprising four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. In the pre-cycle phase, students' literacy skills averaged 51.59. After implementing the intervention in Cycle I, their average literacy skills increased to 62.5. Further improvement was observed in Cycle II, where the average literacy score reached 74.09. The results from each cycle indicate consistent improvement in students' literacy skills. As a result, music-based literacy learning (vocal and instrumental) effectively enhances students' abilities in reading comprehension, information absorption, expressing opinions, and critical thinking in middle school.

Keywords: Comprehension Skills; Literacy Learning; Music

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2018 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) report ranked Indonesia quite low, with reading skills in Indonesia placing 72nd out of 77 countries. This result shows that many students in Indonesia still struggle to comprehend complex texts and draw conclusions from reading material. Additionally, the AKSI (Assessment of Indonesian Student Competence) survey by the Ministry of Education and Culture, which measures literacy among elementary and junior high school students, indicates that many students still do not meet the minimum literacy standards expected for their age group. This report suggests that there is a significant problem regarding the quality of education in schools, particularly in terms of understanding and interpreting reading texts. The subsequent World Bank report: *Improving Learning Outcomes in Indonesia (2019)*, shows that although Indonesia has made progress in terms of access to education, the quality of student learning outcomes remains a major challenge. Many students, especially in rural areas, do not receive sufficient instruction to improve their literacy skills. The report recommends reforms in the education system that focus more on student learning outcomes.

Literacy is generally defined as the ability to read, write, and process information for life skills (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). Literacy can also be understood as knowledge or skills in a particular field or activity. However, literacy is not limited to reading or writing skills, but also encompasses communication comprehension, critical thinking, as well as analyzing, interpreting, and absorbing information from any reading or text effectively (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). Literacy skills are crucial as they enhance and empower the quality of human resources on an individual level. In literacy skills, students need to have adequate understanding abilities to effectively digest the information and meaning of any reading material. Achieving proficiency in literacy requires extensive support in literacy learning.

In practice, many middle school students have not fully developed reading skills, or the ability to understand and absorb information from texts. Many students still struggle to comprehend the content of texts, even when the reading material is relatively simple. During classroom observations in class VIII A at SMPN 4 Bajawa, several issues were identified: 1) When answering the teacher's questions, students often provide answers that do not align with the context of the question; 2) Students have difficulty retelling the content of the text they have read; 3) Students find it hard to identify important information from the text; 4) Students are unable to draw conclusions from the text. These problems indicate that students require specific strategies or teaching methods that could improve the effectiveness of learning and, ultimately, enhance their literacy skills.

In relation to literacy skills, the teaching strategy that needs to be implemented is adjusting teaching methods that align with the students' learning development in the classroom, as well as their interest in the material being taught. The use of varied methods, media, and learning resources can also increase students' enthusiasm in participating in the learning process (Wijayanti & Utami, 2022).

Music is something enjoyable, bringing joy, and has rhythm, melody, and timbre (sound quality) that helps the body and mind work together (Marwi, A. S., 2023). Music is also one of the methods or tools that can be used to support the learning process in the classroom, particularly in improving literacy. Research by Lamb & Gregory (1993) found that children's ability to recognize patterns in pitch and rhythm in music is closely related to their ability to recognize patterns in sounds and words. This contributes to phonological awareness, which helps children's reading and comprehension abilities. This skill allows children to quickly identify word and sentence structures while reading. Research by Rainey & Larsen (2002) also suggested that music can help improve memory, which is a crucial element in understanding and absorbing information from texts. In their study, they concluded that students who learned with rhythm and melody were better able to remember the content of their readings than those who did not use music. Standley (2008), in her meta-analysis, showed that the use of music in teaching activities helped students in understanding written texts. Her study found that students who used a music-based approach achieved better comprehension of the reading material. Activities like singing and studying song lyrics can help improve vocabulary, language structure recognition, and narrative comprehension. Kusuma (2021) also conducted research on the impact of music-based learning on text comprehension in junior high school students. Her study showed that singing and learning song lyrics related to the lessons significantly enhanced students' understanding of texts and allowed them to absorb information more quickly. Music and singing have a positive impact on students' concentration and help improve their character values (Handayani & Mayar, F., 2022).

Given these issues, this classroom action research aims to improve the literacy skills of students in class VIII A at SMPN 4 Bajawa through music-based learning. Music-based literacy instruction will create a unique perspective and increase students' interest in learning, enhancing their concentration (Diyah Ayu, 2019). Using a music-based teaching method is an excellent choice for improving literacy skills in junior high school students.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research will focus on how music can improve students' literacy skills in terms of reading, understanding text content, and absorbing information through the use of music as a learning tool. The subjects of this study are 22 students from class VIII A at SMP Negeri 4 Bajawa, consisting of 12 male students and 10 female students. To carry out this research, the researcher will use the classroom action research (CAR) method. Classroom action research is a method developed by a teacher to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process. This research is based on the teaching problems faced by the students (Widayati, 2008). The classroom action research model, according to Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon (1988), is a spiral model that consists of two cycles with four stages: 1) planning (plan); 2) action (act); 3) observation (observe); and 4) reflection (reflect). This cycle continues and will stop when the needs are met. The stages in classroom action research will be explained as follows.

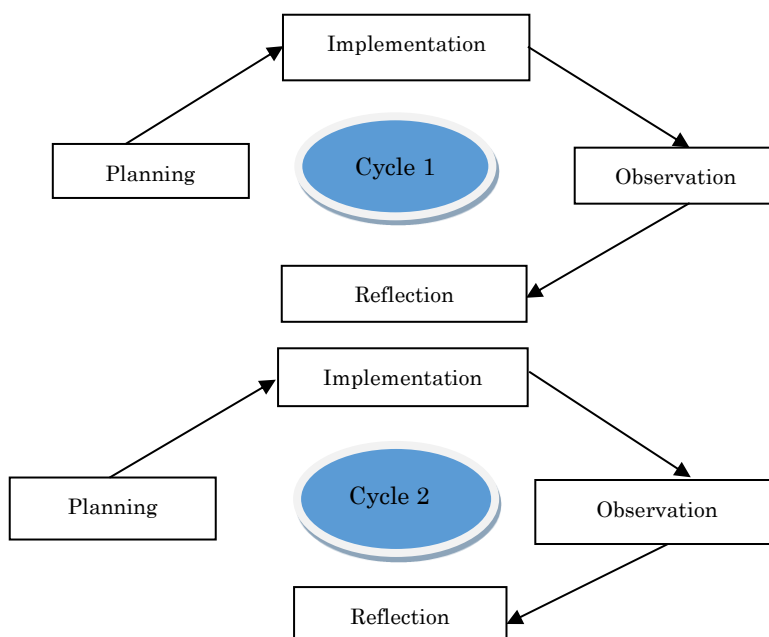


Figure 1. Stages of the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method

1. Planning

In this stage, the researcher plans the research flow and prepares the learning materials needed to collect data.

2. Action Strategy

In this research, the researcher designs music-based literacy learning, where the learning process involves listening to music, singing, and analyzing song lyrics.

3. Implementation/Observation

At this stage, the researcher conducts the learning process according to the plan established during the planning phase.

4. Reflection

Reflection is an overall evaluation step to assess the implementation of the learning process, identify progress achieved, and pinpoint areas for improvement. During this reflection activity, the researcher, together with the homeroom teacher, discusses shortcomings that need to be addressed in the next cycle. Regarding this research, the test used takes the form of evaluation questions to be completed by students at the end of each learning cycle. The test results are then analyzed to test the established hypothesis. The prepared questions are in the form of AKM (Assessment of Minimum Competency) questions aimed at measuring students' literacy skills, specifically reading comprehension. Ultimately, the test data is presented using statistical methods. The benchmark for this research is that the average classical score of students' literacy skills must be equal to or above the school's minimum passing grade (KKM), which is 70. If this benchmark is achieved, the cycle will stop. Students' literacy ability data is obtained using an instrument with the following formula:

$$\text{Learning Outcome} = \frac{\text{Score earned}}{\text{Maximum Score}} \times 100$$

Table 1. Student Literacy Ability Criteria

Category	Value Range
Very good	90 – 100
Good	80 – 89
Enough	70 – 79
Not Enough	< 70

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

In the initial condition, the students demonstrated low learning outcomes, lack of interest and motivation in participating in learning activities, hesitancy to ask questions, difficulty understanding the context of reading materials, reluctance to express opinions, and low engagement in the learning process. These factors became the benchmarks for improving students' interest and motivation to achieve better learning processes and outcomes, particularly in enhancing student literacy.

1. Pre-Cycle

In the pre-cycle phase, the researcher observed the learning process in Class VIII A at SMPN 4 Bajawa. This activity aimed to observe the teaching strategies employed by the teacher, the resources and media used in the learning process, and the students' conditions during the learning activities. The pre-cycle activities were conducted to obtain accurate information regarding the learning process and students' conditions (Wibawa, 2003). Hence, during the pre-cycle observation, the researcher did not take any actions toward the research subjects (i.e., the students). The observation revealed several key points:

- 1) When the teacher asked questions, the students' responses were often irrelevant to the context of the questions.
- 2) Students expressed their opinions using language that was not precise.
- 3) Students struggled to comprehend the content of reading materials effectively.
- 4) Students were unable to absorb or interpret the meaning of the reading content.
- 5) Students were not yet capable of summarizing the content of the reading material effectively.

To gain more accurate information about the students' literacy levels, a pretest was conducted. The pretest used was a classroom AKM (Assessment of Minimum Competency) test, where the questions given to the students were AKM-type questions. Classroom AKM tests are used by teachers as a diagnostic tool to help assess each student's learning ability (Purwati & Widiatmoko, 2021). The results of the classroom AKM pretest were as follows:

Table 2. Results of the AKM literacy pre-test for class SMPN 4 Bajawa

Category	Value Range	Number of Students
Very good	90 – 100	0
Good	80 – 89	0
Sufficient	70 – 79	4
Poor	< 70	18
Total Score	1.135	
Average Score	51,59	

With the following student completion.

Table 3. Category of completion pre-cycle students

Category	Presentation	Number of Students
Completed	18,18%	4
Not Completed	81,81%	18

Based on data on students' literacy skills in **Table 2** and **Table 3**, it is evident that students achieved an average score of 51.59, with a completion rate of 18.18%. This indicates the need for actions to improve students' learning outcomes, particularly those directly related to enhancing literacy skills in the next cycle.

2. Cycle I

The activities in Cycle 1 followed the stages of classroom action research implementation as outlined below:

a) Initial Planning

The initial plan for this cycle involved selecting the type of songs to be used in the learning process, ensuring they were relevant to the learning content. The songs chosen were in the Indonesian language, with lyrics that were not commonly known to the students. Additionally, a scoring rubric and questions were prepared to facilitate the learning interpretation, critical thinking, and ability to extract information from the text.

b) Action Strategy

The strategy for this activity process. The assumption was that music-based literacy learning would improve students' comprehension, involved implementing music-based literacy learning using Indonesian song lyrics. The lyrics were selected to provide sufficient content for student study. Students were also given opportunities to listen to the instrumental version of the songs, enabling them to better process and interpret each rhythm and tempo. This approach helped students understand the meaning and context of the lyrics more effectively.

c) Implementation and Observation

The implementation phase took place within the allocated time set by the school: 15 minutes before regular learning activities (KBM) and during extracurricular hours (2 lesson periods, 2x45 minutes). The observation results from this session indicated that students showed a strong interest in learning and were highly enthusiastic about studying the song lyrics and singing. Furthermore, students demonstrated a better understanding of the song lyrics because the singing activity engaged their emotions and facilitated deeper comprehension of each word in the lyrics.

d) Reflection

During the reflection phase, the researcher evaluated the learning outcomes achieved during this cycle. The reflection involved reviewing the results of the classroom action conducted in Cycle 1.

e) Revision

In this phase, the researcher identified areas that needed improvement and aspects that should be further developed for the next cycle. Below are the literacy skill test results for students in Cycle I:

Tabel 4. Results of the literacy ability of class VIII A students at SMPN 4 Bajawa

Category	Value Range	Number of Students
Very good	90 – 100	0
Good	80 – 89	3
Sufficient	70 – 79	7
Poor	< 70	12
Total Score	1.375	
Average Score	62,5	

With the following student completion.

Table 5. Student Completion Categories Cycle 1

Category	Presentation	Number of Students
Completed	45,45%	10
Not Completed	54,54%	12

The students' literacy skills in Cycle 1 can be seen in **Table 4** and **Table 5**. The students achieved an average score of 62.5, with a completion rate of 45.45%. The students showed progress in understanding the content of texts, interpreting their meaning, and absorbing information. However, 54% of the total students had not yet reached the minimum passing criteria (KKM). Therefore, further actions, improvements, and development in the learning process are needed to enhance the students' outcomes.

3. Cycle II

The follow-up cycle, or Cycle II, in classroom action research is necessary to further optimize the learning process conducted in the previous cycle to achieve better results. The activities in Cycle II focus on improvement, refinement of methods, and further development based on the reflections from the previous cycle. The steps taken in Cycle II are as follows:

a) Initial Planning

In this activity, the researcher prepared the learning materials needed for the classroom learning process. The materials were adjusted and improved based on the reflections from the previous cycle and tailored to the students' conditions and situations in the classroom. Additional materials included a speaker for listening to songs and the introduction of activities that required students to actively seek information from the song lyrics and compete with one another to earn points. This was done to foster a sense of competition among students, encouraging them to strive harder to achieve better results.

b) Updated Action Strategy

The classroom action strategy was revised based on the reflections from the previous cycle.

c) Implementation/Observation

The implementation phase involved carrying out all the initial plans established. At the end of this cycle, students were given reading texts to assess their progress in literacy skills.

d) Reflection

During the reflection phase, the researcher analyzed the continuity of the actions based on the implemented learning strategy, which was music-based literacy learning. This strategy aimed to improve students' ability to understand, interpret, think critically, and effectively absorb information from texts. To test the students' literacy skills, a posttest for classroom AKM (Assessment of Minimum Competency) was conducted using different questions from those in the pretest. The results of the classroom AKM literacy posttest were as follows:

Table 6. Results of the AKM post-test for class VIII A SMPN 4 Bajawa

Category	Value Range	Number of Students
Very good	90 – 100	2
Good	80 – 89	5
Sufficient	70 – 79	10
Poor	< 70	5
Total Score	1.630	
Average Score	74,09	

With the following student completion.

Table 7. Student Completion Categories Cycle 1

Category	Presentation	Number of Students
Completed	77,27%	17
Not Completed	22,72%	5

3.2 Discussion

Based on the research conducted across the applied cycles, it was found that students experienced improvement at each stage. Starting from the pre-cycle, followed by Cycle I, and Cycle II, there was consistent progress in the students' literacy learning. The results of this study provide an indication that music-based literacy learning can enhance comprehension, information absorption, and critical thinking among students.

The pre-cycle results showed that the literacy level of Class VIII students at SMPN 4 Bajawa was still very low, with an average score of 51.59 and a completion rate of 18.18%. This is a concerning issue, as middle school students are expected to have a higher literacy level compared to elementary school students. These findings highlight the need for new methods or approaches by teachers to improve student literacy. The next step was the implementation of Cycle I, where the students' average score increased to 62.5, with a completion rate of 45.45%. This result demonstrated a significant improvement

compared to the pre-cycle. Subsequently, in Cycle II, the students' average score rose further to 74.09, with a completion rate of 77.27%. Thus, the results of Cycle II concluded the cycle period, as the average score had met the target achievement of 70. Throughout the process, it was evident that each cycle showed progress. This improvement in students' literacy skills can be attributed to various factors, one of which is the implementation of music-based literacy learning using song lyrics and accompanying instruments in Class VIII A at SMPN 4 Bajawa.

According to Lauren and Puspasari (2020), low student engagement in learning is often caused by monotonous teaching methods and the way teachers present materials without incorporating anything engaging. Therefore, efforts are needed to make the learning process more appealing to students. The learning strategy utilizing song lyrics and instruments helps stimulate students' understanding of the reading material. The role of music and songs in education becomes an essential part of designing and implementing effective and comprehensive learning. This is because music and songs have a positive effect on students by creating a welcoming atmosphere when students begin the learning process. Literacy serves as a medium for students to recognize, understand, and apply the knowledge they acquire through various learning activities, such as reading, listening, formulating, asking questions, giving suggestions, expressing opinions, discussing, and more. The improvement in literacy among students at SMPN 4 Bajawa serves as a benchmark for how music can become a new medium for enhancing students' literacy skills. By selecting appropriate media and learning resources, it is expected that the overall abilities of students can be developed and improved. The effective use of media and learning resources can assist teachers in enhancing the effectiveness of the learning process (Ani, 2019).

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn from this research is that there was an improvement in students' literacy through the implementation of music-based learning methods in Class VIII A at SMPN 4 Bajawa. Initially, it was observed that students had very low interest and motivation in understanding text content, absorbing information, and expressing their opinions. After the implementation of the music-based learning method, significant differences were evident in each cycle. In the pre-cycle, the average score completion percentage of students was 18.18%. In Cycle I, the average score completion percentage increased to 45.45%, and in Cycle II, it further improved to 77.27%. Thus, the actions taken during these two cycles were deemed effective in enhancing students' literacy. The students' improved comprehension during this process is expected to enhance their ability to understand text content, absorb information, think critically, and actively participate in every stage of the learning process.

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