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Evaluating The Effectiveness of Buddy Reading Strategy for Reading Comprehension in Inclusive Education

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of the Buddy Reading strategy in improving reading comprehension within an inclusive English classroom at SMPN 2 Langke Rembong, Manggarai. With English functioning as a global language, inclusive education requires instructional methods that support diverse learners, including students with special needs. Buddy Reading, a peer-assisted technique in which students alternate as reader and listener, is considered beneficial for promoting literacy skills, cooperation, and social interaction. A quantitative experimental design was applied involving two eighth-grade classes: an experimental group using Buddy Reading and a control group receiving conventional instruction. Both groups completed pre-tests and post-tests containing 25 multiple-choice items measuring reading comprehension. Data were analyzed using SPSS 24 through descriptive statistics, normality and homogeneity tests, and an independent samples t-test. Results showed that the experimental group achieved a higher post-test mean score (70.48) than the control group (60.51). Students with special needs in the experimental class also demonstrated clear progress. The t-test results (Sig. 0.000 < 0.05) confirmed that Buddy Reading had a significant positive impact on students' reading comprehension. Overall, the study concludes that Buddy Reading is an effective strategy for inclusive classrooms, supporting academic improvement, vocabulary development, and positive peer interaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a central role in human communication, enabling individuals to exchange ideas, share information, and express thoughts. Among the world's languages, English has developed into a global lingua franca used across international contexts. In the current era of globalization, proficiency in English has become essential for cross-cultural communication and for participation in global networks involving technology, politics, education, and economics [1]. As a result, English competence is an increasingly important skill for students who must navigate these interconnected domains.

Interestingly, the teaching of English has expanded beyond mainstream classrooms to include students with special needs. These learners differ from typically developing students in terms of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or social characteristics, and therefore require tailored instructional approaches. Although not all children with special needs experience learning difficulties, many face communication challenges that must be addressed through appropriate support systems. For example, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) commonly exhibit delays in language comprehension, expressive communication, and early literacy development [2].

ASD is characterized by persistent deficits in social interaction and communication, along with restricted and repetitive behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Children with ASD often struggle to initiate or maintain peer relationships, which limits their opportunities to develop social competence. Their tendency to avoid social engagement can lead to isolation in school settings Because of these challenges, teaching English or any other subject to students with ASD requires careful planning, collaboration, and the use of inclusive and adaptive methods [3].

In Indonesia, inclusive education is gaining momentum, including in Manggarai Regency where several schools, such as SMPN 2 Langke Rembong, have adopted inclusive classroom practices. Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 70/2009 defines inclusive education as a system that provides equal learning opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities, special talents, or exceptional abilities. This policy emphasizes that every child deserves equal access to quality education without discrimination.

However, implementing inclusive classrooms presents significant challenges. Teachers must work with a highly diverse student population, including students who are gifted, students with learning difficulties, emotional disorders, social impairments, or physical disabilities, and students from different socio-economic backgrounds Teachers in inclusive settings must manage classrooms effectively while differentiating instruction to meet each learner's unique needs [4]. Furthermore, students with disabilities may struggle to adapt to regular classroom environments, making it difficult for them to participate fully in cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of learning [5]. In the context of teaching English in inclusive classrooms, teachers must understand how students learn, recognize individual differences, and apply techniques that accommodate diverse learning styles. Students with special needs often require specific instructional approaches because their challenges differ widely across cognitive, emotional, social, and physical domains. To address these varied needs, teachers must adopt strategies that promote both language development and social interaction. One promising technique for inclusive English instruction is Buddy Reading, a structured peer-assisted reading strategy. Buddy Reading pairs two or three students to read together, alternating roles as reader and listener. The listener follows the text closely and provides corrective feedback when necessary [6]. This strategy not only enhances reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension but also strengthens students' social interaction skills. Research indicates that Buddy Reading benefits students with disabilities by promoting reciprocal peer relationships and improving social behaviors [7].

Several previous studies support the effectiveness of Buddy Reading. Buddy Reading improved literacy outcomes in a resource-limited rural school and contributed to enjoyable learning experiences [8]. [9]reported that monitoring behaviors during Buddy Reading such as questioning, attention to content, and negotiating meaning were linked to improved vocabulary and critical thinking. [10] similarly concluded that Buddy Reading significantly enhanced students' reading comprehension.

Despite these positive findings, previous research has not examined Buddy Reading in inclusive classroom settings, particularly those involving students with special needs. This gap highlights the need for studies that explore how Buddy Reading functions within inclusive education environments. Therefore, the present study investigates the effectiveness of Buddy Reading for teaching reading comprehension in an inclusive classroom at SMPN 2 Langke Rembong, Manggarai, Flores Nusa Tenggara Timur, where students with disabilities learn alongside their peers. The researcher's motivation also stems from the concern that few studies address strategies suitable for helping students with special needs, including those with visual impairments, in inclusive English learning contexts.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the effectiveness of the Buddy Reading strategy in enhancing reading comprehension among second-grade students in an inclusive classroom setting. Quantitative research, as defined by Creswell (1994) in [11], involves the systematic testing of objective hypotheses through the examination of relationships between measurable variables using statistical procedures. In line with this approach, the present study applied an experimental methodology involving two groups: an experimental class taught through the Buddy Reading strategy and a control class that received no treatment. Both groups completed a pre-test prior to the intervention and a post-test afterward to identify any significant improvement attributable to the strategy. The experimental class included students with typical development as well as three students with visual impairments who were integrated into the regular classroom. The Buddy Reading strategy was implemented as the instructional treatment for this group, whereas the control class received conventional teaching without exposure to the

strategy. The research design structure consisting of pre-test (O1), treatment (X), and post-test (O3) for the experimental group, and pre-test (O2) and post-test (O4) for the control group. The population of the study consisted of all eighth-grade students of SMPN 2 Langke Rembong, totaling 270 learners distributed across ten classes of 27 students each. From this population, the researcher selected two classes as the sample, resulting in a total of 54 students. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that the selected classes met specific criteria, particularly the inclusion of students with visual impairments in the experimental class [12].

Data collection relied on objective testing in the form of multiple-choice reading comprehension assessments consisting of twenty-five items constructed according to established comprehension indicators. Both the pre-test and post-test employed identical test items to measure changes in students' reading comprehension performance following the intervention. The pre-test served to identify the baseline ability of both groups, while the post-test measured the effectiveness of the Buddy Reading strategy after the instructional period. In addition, classroom procedures included administering the pre-test to both groups, implementing Buddy Reading in the experimental class and conventional teaching in the control class, and finally administering a post-test to compare learning gains.

The data analysis process utilized SPSS Version 24 to determine whether the Buddy Reading strategy produced a statistically significant improvement in reading comprehension. Descriptive statistics were first employed to calculate the mean scores of each group. Subsequently, a normality test using the Shapiro–Wilk method assessed whether the data were normally distributed, with significance values above 0.05 indicating normal distribution. A homogeneity test using Levene's test examined whether the variances of both groups were equal, also applying the 0.05 significance threshold. Once assumptions of normality and homogeneity were met, an independent samples t-test was conducted to evaluate differences between the experimental and control groups. The decision rule established that if the Sig. (2-tailed) value was below 0.05, the null hypothesis would be rejected, indicating that the Buddy Reading strategy had a significant effect on students' reading comprehension. Through this systematic approach, the study sought to determine the instructional value of Buddy Reading within inclusive educational settings**.**

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Buddy Reading strategy in enhancing reading comprehension within an inclusive classroom environment. Using a pre-test–post-test design involving an experimental group and a control group, the research sought to determine whether the collaborative nature of Buddy Reading could support diverse learners, particularly students with special needs. Two purposively selected classes participated, each meeting the criteria established for the study. The experimental class received instruction through the Buddy Reading strategy, while the control class learned through conventional teacher-centered methods.

Both groups underwent a pre-test on 25 March 2024 to measure their initial reading comprehension levels using a 25-item multiple-choice test. Following this, the experimental class received four sessions of treatment integrating Buddy Reading, each lasting 2 × 40 minutes. During the second meeting on 26 March 2024, students in the experimental group were introduced to narrative texts, including their types, generic structures, linguistic features, and key elements such as plot, characters, and vocabulary. These foundational concepts were intended to prepare students for more interactive activities in subsequent sessions. On 3 April 2024, the third meeting emphasized deeper engagement with narrative texts through peer collaboration. Students were arranged into mixed-ability groups that included learners with special needs. Buddy Reading was employed to support students with visual impairments by pairing them with peers who read the text aloud and guided comprehension. After listening to the stories, students demonstrated their understanding by retelling the narrative. This process encouraged not only comprehension but also oral expression and cooperative learning.

The fourth meeting on 4 April 2024 reinforced the same collaborative framework. Students again worked in peer groups to explore narrative texts, identify vocabulary, and retell stories. These repeated interactions provided structured opportunities for students to internalize narrative structures while benefiting from peer assistance. The inclusive nature of Buddy Reading proved particularly valuable, as students with visual limitations received consistent support, allowing them to participate actively in the learning process. In contrast, the control group received instruction without the Buddy Reading strategy, although the timing and duration of lessons mirrored the experimental group. After the initial pre-test, students in the control class were introduced to narrative texts through direct instruction. They read texts independently, asked

questions when necessary, and received explanations from the teacher regarding narrative structures and linguistic features. During the third and fourth meetings, students continued learning through teacher-led discussions and individual reading tasks. This method focused on comprehension through traditional classroom practices but lacked the interactive support systems inherent in the Buddy Reading approach. On 15 April 2024, both groups completed a post-test using the same format as the pre-test to evaluate improvements in reading comprehension. The results of these assessments were analyzed using statistical procedures to determine whether Buddy Reading produced a significant difference in students' performance. The comparison of pre-test and post-test scores from both groups served as the basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the strategy.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students in the experimental group, who engaged in structured peer-assisted reading activities, showed greater improvement in reading comprehension compared to those in the control group. The collaborative, inclusive nature of Buddy Reading supported students in understanding narrative texts more effectively, particularly those with special needs. These outcomes provide empirical evidence that Buddy Reading is a beneficial instructional strategy for inclusive classrooms, fostering not only comprehension but also interaction, engagement, and peer support among learners.

Table 1. Score of students' pre-test and post-test in Experimental class

No	Students Name	Pre-test	Post-test	N-Gain score
1.	AJ	60	76	16
2.	AM	52	64	12
3.	BJ	56	64	8
4.	FCI	52	68	16
5.	FMT	56	64	8
6.	FPM	52	60	8
7.	FRS	56	64	8
8.	GAJ	52	68	16
9.	GSB	56	68	12
10.	GVS	52	76	24
11.	HJT	52	68	16
12.	KARB	60	76	16
13.	KRF	64	76	12
14.	MGTN	64	80	16
15.	MIL	60	76	16
16.	MES	52	72	20
17.	MSG	56	72	16
18.	NRM	52	72	20
19.	ORJ	60	80	20
20.	PGBA	52	64	12
21.	**RP**	64	72	8
22.	**SN**	56	68	12
23.	VAS	60	80	20
24.	VOS	52	64	12
25.	**YSM**	52	75	23
26.	YMSJ	52	64	12
27.	YAA	52	72	20
	∑	=1.504	= 1.903	= 399
	Average Score	55.70	70.48	

The data presented in Table 1. illustrates the distribution of pre-test and post-test scores obtained by students in the experimental class. The table clearly indicates a notable improvement in students' performance following the implementation of the treatment. The experimental class consisted of 28 students, with an average pre-test score of 55.70. Individual pre-test scores ranged from 52 to 64. After the treatment, the average post-test score increased to 70.48, with scores spanning from a minimum of 52 to a maximum of 80. These results demonstrate a measurable enhancement in students' achievement from the pre-test to the post-test phase. Furthermore, the experimental class included three students with special needs who experienced visual impairments, namely RP, SN, and YSM. An examination of their individual score progress reveals variation in their levels of improvement. Student RP achieved a pre-test score of 64,

which increased to 72 in the post-test, reflecting an 8-point improvement. Student SN recorded a pre-test score of 56 and subsequently attained a post-test score of 68, marking a 12-point increase. Meanwhile, student YSM showed the most substantial progress, improving from a pre-test score of 52 to a post-test score of 75, resulting in a 23-point increase. Overall, these findings confirm that the treatment positively influenced the students' performance, including those with special needs, as evidenced by the consistent score improvements observed across the experimental group.

Table 2. Score of students' pre-test and post-test in Control class

No	Students	Pre-test	Post-test	Gained score
1.	APD	52	58	4
2.	ATDM	76	76	0
3.	AI	52	52	0
4.	ASSI	52	56	4
5.	AHDS	40	52	12
6.	CFD	48	64	16
7.	DEH	52	56	4
8.	EMBK	68	72	4
9.	EFA	52	56	4
10.	HPL	40	44	4
11.	LRB	56	60	4
12.	LCM	52	56	4
13.	MAKG	64	72	8
14.	MCJ	44	52	6
15.	MGS	56	60	8
16.	MMAH	80	80	0
17.	PBC	52	56	4
18.	RYB	44	52	8
19.	RPS	52	52	0
20.	SMPJ	64	72	8
21.	SGS	44	56	12
22.	VAB	56	56	0
23.	YNM	68	72	4
24.	YMJ	56	60	4
25.	YCH	48	60	12
26.	YEP	60	76	16
27.	YVJ	52	56	4
	∑	1.480	1.634	260
	Average Score	54,81	60,51	

Table 2 presents the pre-test and post-test results for the control group. The data indicate that, following the administered treatment, the experimental group demonstrated a higher mean score than the control group. Furthermore, the table illustrates the progression of student achievement within the control class. The mean pre-test score for this group was 54.81. After the post-test was administered, student scores ranged from a minimum of 44 to a maximum of 80, yielding an average post-test score of 60.51. These findings show a modest increase of 8.18 points from pre-test to post-test performance. Overall, when comparing the results displayed in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, it is evident that students in the experimental class achieved substantially higher outcomes than those in the control class, with a post-test mean of 70.48 compared to 60.51 (70.48 > 60.51).

3.1.1 Normality Test

The normality test was employed to determine whether the distribution of the research data met the assumption of normality. Establishing normal distribution is essential because it influences the selection of appropriate statistical analyses. In this study, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was applied using the International Business Machines (IBM) Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0, with a predetermined significance level of 0.05 ($\alpha = 0.05$). Data are considered normally distributed when the significance value exceeds 0.05. The results of the normality assessment for both the experimental and control groups in the pre-test and post-test phases are presented in Table 1.

Table 3. Normality test result of pre-test and post-test in experimental class and control class

Tests of Normality

	Kelas	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Hasil Belajar reading	Pre-Test Experiment	.288	27	.027	.793	27	.039
	Post-Test Experiment	.162	27	.066	.922	27	.045
	Pre-Test Control	.204	27	.005	.919	27	.038
	Post-Test Control	.226	27	.005	.890	27	.040

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Based on the results displayed in Table 1, the significance value for the pre-test in the experimental group was 0.027, while the post-test yielded a significance value of 0.066. The post-test value exceeds the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the post-test data in the experimental group were normally distributed. Although the pre-test value (0.027) is below 0.05, the Shapiro–Wilk test shows a marginally higher significance value (0.039), suggesting that the distribution approaches normality. In the control group, both pre-test and post-test significance values were 0.005, which falls below the required threshold. Despite these values being low, they remain within the acceptable range for small-sample educational research. Nonetheless, strictly speaking, these results indicate that the control group data do not meet the assumption of normality.

3.1.2 Homogeneity Test

Following the normality analysis, the researcher proceeded with a homogeneity test to determine whether the sample groups drawn from the population possessed equal variances. Essentially, this test examines whether the datasets under investigation share similar characteristics. In this study, the homogeneity test was applied to the post-test scores from both the experimental and control groups to ensure that no significant variance differences existed between them. Levene's Test was employed using the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) version 24.0, with a significance level (α) set for evaluating data homogeneity. The criteria for decision-making are as follows:

If the significance value is greater than 0.05, the data are considered homogeneous.

If the significance value is less than 0.05, the data are considered not homogeneous.

By confirming homogeneity, the researcher ensures that further statistical comparisons between the two groups can be conducted appropriately and reliably.

Table 4. Homogeneity test of pre-test and post-test in both classes

Test of Homogeneity of Variance

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Hasil belajar Reading	Based on Mean	4.142	1	52	.047
	Based on Median	1.429	1	52	.237
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.429	1	35.466	s240
	Based on trimmed mean	3.680	1	52	.061

The results of the Test of Homogeneity of Variance using Levene's Test indicate mixed outcomes across the four calculation bases. Based on the mean, the Levene statistic is 4.142 with a significance value of .047, suggesting that the variances between groups are significantly different at the 0.05 level. However, the tests based on the median, the adjusted median, and the trimmed mean yield non-significant p-values (.237, .240, and .061, respectively), indicating no violation of homogeneity. Overall, despite the significant result based on the mean, the majority of indicators suggest that the assumption of equal variances is largely met.

3.1.3 Hypothesis Testing

This study formulates two hypotheses to determine the effectiveness of the Buddy Reading strategy in teaching reading within an inclusive classroom setting. The alternative hypothesis (Ha) proposes that the Buddy Reading strategy has a significant positive effect on students' reading achievement. Conversely, the null hypothesis (H0) states that the strategy does not produce a significant effect. Following the completion of the normality and homogeneity tests, the researchers proceeded with an independent t-test to assess differences between the experimental and control groups. This statistical procedure was conducted using SPSS version 24. The t-test aimed to identify whether the observed differences in the students' reading comprehension scores were statistically significant, thereby providing evidence of the strategy's effectiveness. The decision-making criteria for the t-test are as follows:

1. If the Sig. (2-tailed) value is less than the predetermined significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is accepted.
2. If the Sig. (2-tailed) value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H0) is accepted and the alternative hypothesis (Ha) is rejected
3. and H_a is rejected.

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Hasil belajar Reading	Equal variances assumed	4.142	.047	4.745	52	.000	9.963	2.100	5.749	14.177
	Equal variances not assumed			4.745	44.061	.000	9.963	2.100	5.731	14.195

3.2 Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the Buddy Reading strategy in teaching reading within an inclusive classroom setting. Two groups were involved in the research: an experimental class, which received instruction through Buddy Reading using narrative texts, and a control class, which received conventional instruction without the strategy. The findings demonstrated a substantial difference in achievement between the two groups. Students in the experimental class showed marked improvement from pre-test to post-test. Several students, for instance, increased their scores from 52 to 80, reflecting a gain of 28 points. The total pre-test score of the experimental group rose from 1,504 to 1,903 in the post-test, indicating a cumulative increase of 399 points. In contrast, the control class experienced only modest progress. Some students improved from 60 to 76 (a gain of 16 points) and from 52 to 64 (a gain of 12 points). Overall, the total score increased from 1,480 to 1,634, amounting to a 154-point gain, substantially lower than the 660-point increase observed in the experimental class. These results support the conclusion that the Buddy Reading strategy positively influences reading development in inclusive classroom environments.

The present study reinforces earlier findings regarding the effectiveness of Buddy Reading. [13] reported that the strategy effectively enhances reading outcomes in inclusive settings. Likewise, the higher post-test scores of the experimental group in this study confirm that Buddy Reading provides significant pedagogical benefits. This conclusion aligns with [14], who emphasized that buddy or partner reading is an engaging and productive method for fostering reading fluency. Particularly in inclusive classrooms, the strategy enables students with special needs to learn collaboratively alongside their peers. Students with visual or comprehension difficulties, for example, benefit from peer support when accessing and interpreting texts. Moreover, Buddy Reading promotes interpersonal interaction, especially for learners who require additional assistance in understanding lesson content.

During the implementation of Buddy Reading in the experimental class, students with special needs were paired with regular peers. Regular students read the text aloud while their partners listened attentively. After the reading activity, pairs discussed the content, asked clarifying questions, and exchanged interpretations. This process enhanced both comprehension and communication skills. The teacher played a facilitative role by monitoring student interactions, offering guidance, and ensuring that collaborative exchanges proceeded effectively. In inclusive education, Buddy Reading serves as a bridge that supports meaningful interaction

between students with and without special needs. The cooperative nature of the strategy fosters a positive learning climate in which students can help and learn from one another. Through these interactions, learners develop essential social competencies such as communication, cooperation, and empathy skills that are crucial for successful inclusion. More proficient readers assist peers who may need additional support, creating a collaborative environment that benefits all students.

Furthermore, Buddy Reading supports instructional goals beyond reading comprehension. It encourages students to share information, articulate understanding, and participate actively in peer learning. [15] highlighted that peer interaction in inclusive contexts requires empathy, which in turn nurtures the interpersonal development of children with special needs. Such interactions contribute to broader social–emotional growth, including the formation of friendships, the reduction of isolation, and the enhancement of self-esteem. As noted by [16], [17] students spend considerable time with their peers at school; therefore, peer relationships greatly influence both academic and emotional development, particularly for students with special needs. The results of this study indicate that students in inclusive classrooms regardless of ability level experienced significant improvements in reading comprehension. Buddy Reading contributed to gains in fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition through structured peer interaction. Beyond academic progress, the strategy also promoted a supportive and collaborative classroom atmosphere, which is essential for holistic student development. In summary, the results of the pre-test and post-test across both groups demonstrate that the experimental class achieved greater improvement than the control class. Buddy Reading proved effective not only in enhancing English achievement in inclusive classrooms but also in fostering non-academic competencies such as collaboration and empathy. Thus, Buddy Reading supports both cognitive and socio-emotional aspects of learning, making it a valuable instructional approach for inclusive education.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted at SMPN 2 Langke Rembong, the findings demonstrate that the Buddy Reading strategy is effective in enhancing students' reading comprehension in an inclusive classroom setting. This effectiveness is reflected in the post-test results, where the experimental group taught using the Buddy Reading strategy achieved a higher average score (70.39) compared to the control group taught through conventional methods (60.51). Furthermore, the results of the independent sample t-test indicate a significance value of $0.000 \leq 0.005$, confirming a statistically significant difference between the two groups. These results provide strong evidence that the Buddy Reading strategy contributes positively to students' reading achievement. The study also reveals several pedagogical advantages of implementing Buddy Reading in inclusive classrooms. The strategy enables students to engage more actively with the text, fosters deeper understanding, and encourages learners to recall and process information more effectively. Students reported feeling more motivated and less bored during English lessons when paired with peers, indicating that the collaborative nature of Buddy Reading enhances the overall learning experience. Importantly, the Buddy Reading strategy offers substantial benefits for students with special needs, particularly those with visual impairments. Through peer assistance, these students receive direct support that helps them access the reading material more easily. Additionally, the strategy promotes meaningful social interaction, empathy, and cooperation among students, thereby strengthening peer relationships within the classroom community. The collaborative partnerships formed through Buddy Reading help create an inclusive learning environment where all students can participate and succeed. In conclusion, Buddy Reading serves not only as an effective instructional approach for improving reading skills but also as a valuable tool for fostering inclusivity, peer support, and positive social engagement in diverse classroom settings

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