

## Implementing “Escape Room” to Enhance Students' Reading Comprehension of Narrative Texts: A Classroom Action Research

Dhimas Dwyki Atmadja<sup>1</sup>, Dicky Hilman Fauzi<sup>2</sup>, Rosita Izlin<sup>3</sup>

Didih Faridah<sup>4</sup>, Juki Purwaningsih<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1234</sup>Teacher Professional Education Program, Universitas Galuh, Indonesias

<sup>5</sup>SMAN 1 Baregbeg, Indonesia

[dhimasdwykiatmadja@gmail.com](mailto:dhimasdwykiatmadja@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>

[hilman.dicky123@gmail.com](mailto:hilman.dicky123@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>

[rositaizlin12@gmail.com](mailto:rositaizlin12@gmail.com)<sup>3</sup>

[didihfaridah@gmail.com](mailto:didihfaridah@gmail.com)<sup>4</sup>

[jukipurwaningsih98@guru.sma.belajar.id](mailto:jukipurwaningsih98@guru.sma.belajar.id)<sup>5</sup>

Received : June 06<sup>th</sup> , 2025    Accepted : August 07<sup>th</sup> , 2025    Published : August 09<sup>th</sup> , 2025

### Abstract

Reading comprehension, particularly of narrative texts, remains a persistent challenge among Indonesian high school students. Conventional reading instruction often results in passive learning and low student engagement. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the “Escape Room Reading Challenge” as an innovative, gamified instructional strategy to enhance students’ reading comprehension and engagement. This Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted in two cycles involving 33 tenth-grade students at SMAN 1 Baregbeg, Ciamis, Indonesia. The research followed the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. Data were collected through reading comprehension tests, observation checklists, and field notes. The results indicated a consistent improvement in students’ reading comprehension and classroom participation. In Cycle 1, the average post-test score increased from 61.58 to 69.09. Following instructional refinement in Cycle 2, the average post-test score rose significantly to 83.76. Observation data revealed that active participation also improved from 60% in Cycle 1 to 90% in Cycle 2. These findings suggest that the escape room approach effectively promotes critical thinking, teamwork, and student motivation while supporting deeper comprehension of narrative texts. The study concludes that integrating gamified strategies like escape rooms into reading instruction can create a more meaningful, collaborative, and enjoyable learning environment. Further research is recommended to explore its adaptability across genres and its long-term impact on literacy development.

**Keywords :** Gamification, Escape Room, Narrative Text, Reading Comprehension, Classroom Action Research

### INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension, especially narrative texts remains a persistent challenge among senior high school students in Indonesia, a significant number of Indonesian students still face difficulties in comprehending a range of English texts (Nanda & Azmy, 2020). Despite efforts to modernize the education system through the Merdeka Curriculum, which promotes learner autonomy and engagement across six essential language skills (Ramadhianti & Putra, 2022), students frequently demonstrate low comprehension abilities, minimal motivation, and limited engagement in reading activities. These issues are particularly evident in conventional reading instruction, which typically involves passive strategies such as silent reading followed by written comprehension questions.

To address this instructional gap, the present study explores the potential of gamification – particularly through an Escape Room Reading Challenge – as an innovative and engaging instructional strategy. In this activity, student teams collaborate to complete a series of reading-based challenges within a set timeframe in order to "escape" a simulated locked environment before a fictional critical event occurs (Tudela et al., 2020). This interactive format not only fosters teamwork and problem-solving skills but also aims to improve students' comprehension of narrative texts in a dynamic and meaningful way. The central objective of this classroom action research is to evaluate the effectiveness of escape room-inspired reading tasks in enhancing students' reading comprehension performance, engagement, and motivation in an Indonesian senior high school context. Furthermore González-Yubero et al. (2023) emphasize that gamified learning environments incorporating problem-solving tasks are purposefully designed not just to support academic achievement, but also to fulfill students' psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. These needs, when met, are key drivers in promoting intrinsic motivation and fostering a more student-centered, enjoyable learning experience.

This research is significant because it responds to two critical needs. First, the need to align teaching methods with the interactive, student-centered vision of the Merdeka Curriculum. And second, the demand for innovative strategies that can transform reading activities into meaningful and engaging experiences. Prior studies, Nasri et al. (2024) have indicated that escape room techniques can improve student participation and problem-solving skills, yet little empirical evidence exists on their application in English language learning in the Indonesian context.

The "Escape Room" is a gamified instructional technique where students collaboratively solve puzzles and answer content-related challenges under time constraints to "escape" a scenario. Furthermore, Prieto (2020) explained that Escape room-based gamification serves as a motivating educational approach by presenting learning materials in an appealing manner and promoting students' collaborative engagement, empathy, and critical thinking skills. Moreover, this study investigates the effect of this method on two main variables, student engagement which observed through active participation and reading comprehension which measured through pre- and post-tests. The hypothesis is that incorporating this method will lead to significant improvements in both engagement and comprehension outcomes.

A Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, an approach where teachers systematically investigate and improve their classroom practices, was employed, based on

the model by Rochmat et al. (2025, as cited in Kemmis and McTaggart 1997) consisting of two iterative cycles: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The participants were 33 tenth-grade students from SMAN 1 Baregbeg, Ciamis, Indonesia. Data were collected through tests, observation checklists, and field notes. Moreover, Latifah & Safrida, (2025) argue that the main purpose of Classroom Action Research (CAR) is to provide practical solutions to genuine problems arising in the classroom setting while simultaneously fostering the improvement of teaching practices through continuous professional development.

Previous research, Mecía-Montenegro, (2021) has found that students perceive educational escape rooms as both enjoyable and effective for improving reading abilities. (Strousopoulos et al., 2024) also supports their application across disciplines, suggesting they improve learning and explore more about long term impact and technological advantages. However, most of these studies are situated in STEM or higher education contexts, leaving a gap in English as a Foreign Language high school classrooms, particularly in narrative reading.

In this study, preliminary findings indicate that students who participated in the escape room activities showed significant improvements in both reading comprehension and classroom engagement. The interactive and immersive nature of the method successfully fostered collaboration, critical thinking, and intrinsic motivation—three essential components aligned with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum. These outcomes point to the potential of escape room-based learning as a promising and contextually relevant approach for enhancing secondary English education in Indonesia, particularly in encouraging active, meaningful, and autonomous learning experiences.

The study concludes that the escape room strategy offers an effective and innovative pedagogical tool that can be integrated more widely into language instruction. Nevertheless, the research also opens up several important avenues for future inquiry. For instance, how might this strategy be adapted for different types of texts, such as expository or argumentative genres? What are the sustained impacts of gamification on students' literacy development over time? Addressing these questions through further research will be crucial to unlocking the full potential of game-based learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and beyond.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The research used Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on the model proposed by Kemmis & McTaggart, (1988) which includes four cyclical steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. This model allows teachers to systematically investigate and improve their classroom practices to enhance student learning outcomes—in this case, the reading comprehension of narrative texts. This action research design was selected because it enables a reflective and iterative process, making it suitable for continuously improving the teaching strategy and learning outcomes. This model also allows for adjustments to be made based on real-time feedback from both students and the teacher.

### **Participants**

The research was conducted at SMAN 1 Baregbeg, targeting tenth-grade students of class X-E4 in the academic year 2024/2025. The class consists of 33 students. This class was selected based on preliminary observations and initial reading comprehension tests, which indicated low levels of understanding and motivation in reading activities.

### Data Collection Procedures

The research was carried out in two cycles, and each cycle followed the steps below:

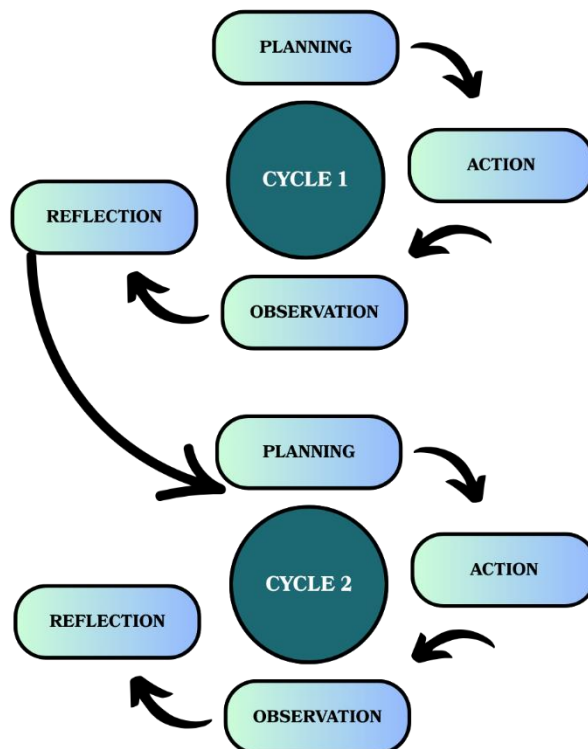


Figure 1: Cycle of Classroom Action Research

**Planning:** In this stage, the researcher identified key problems affecting students' reading comprehension, particularly focusing on student disengagement and low motivation. The teaching strategy was planned by integrating gamification through the Escape Room Reading Challenge, including designing lesson plans, preparing narrative texts, tasks, media, and evaluation instruments (observation checklists, tests, and field notes). The teaching strategy was designed to enhance engagement and improve comprehension through interactive activities.

**Action:** The teacher implemented the lesson plan in the classroom. Students were divided into small groups and given Escape Room-themed reading challenges. They worked collaboratively to solve puzzles based on the narrative texts by answering comprehension questions and completing tasks that led them to unlock the next clue. The Escape Room activities were designed to foster teamwork and promote active participation, encouraging students to read carefully and think critically about the narrative content.

**Observation:** During the teaching and learning process, observations were conducted to monitor students' engagement, participation, collaboration, and reading performance

using observation sheets and field notes. Additionally, students' responses to the Escape Room challenges were recorded to assess how well they understood the texts and engaged with the activities.

Reflection: After each cycle, the results were analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation. Revisions were made to improve the next cycle based on test results and qualitative data.

This reflective process ensured that the instructional approach was constantly refined to suit the students' learning needs (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

### Instruments

Data were collected through reading comprehension tests (pre-test and post-test), observation checklists, and field notes. The tests measured students' improvement in understanding narrative texts. Observation checklists were used to monitor student engagement and participation during the Escape Room activities. Field notes were taken to document classroom atmosphere, student behavior, and responses throughout the learning process.

### Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data from pre-tests and post-tests were analyzed by comparing the mean scores to see students' progress. Meanwhile, qualitative data from observation checklists and field notes were analyzed descriptively to support the test results and provide insights into student engagement and the overall effectiveness of the activity.

The Research Methodology section describes in detail how the study was conducted. A complete description of the methods used enables the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of the research methodology.

## FINDINGS

This classroom action research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the Escape Room Reading Challenge in improving students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. The research was conducted in two cycles, and each cycle included a pretest and a posttest to evaluate students' progress before and after the implementation of the learning strategy.

**Table 1 : Cycle 1 Result**

Test Type	Lowest Score	Highest Score	Average Score
Pretest	44	84	61.58
Posttest	60	88	69.09

In Cycle 1, the pretest was administered prior to the application of the Escape Room Reading Challenge. The results showed that the average score was 61.58, with the lowest score being 44 and the highest score reaching 84. These figures reflect the students' initial reading comprehension ability, which was generally below the expected standard for tenth-

grade students. Most students encountered difficulties in identifying main ideas, understanding character traits, and drawing inferences from the narrative texts provided.

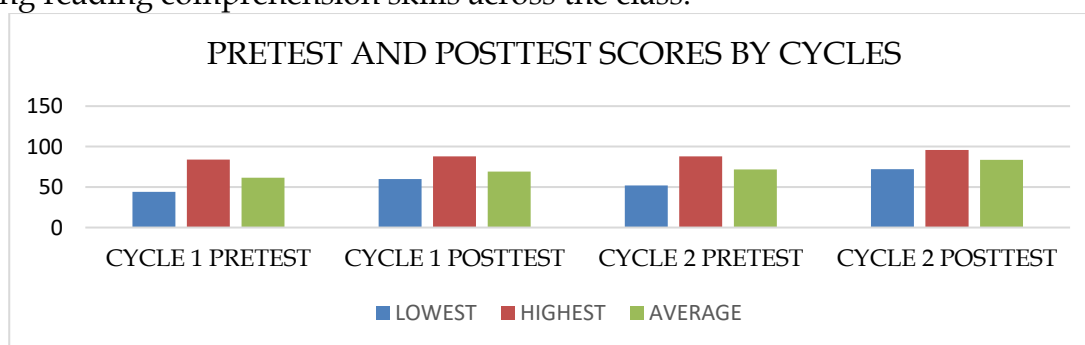
After the first round of the Escape Room activities – which consisted of interactive, gamified reading tasks designed to promote collaboration and deeper engagement – the students took the posttest. The results indicated a measurable improvement. The average score increased to 69.09, while the lowest score improved to 60 and the highest score reached 88. This outcome suggests that the Escape Room approach had a positive influence on students’ engagement and reading comprehension performance. Although the improvement was moderate, it demonstrated the potential of game-based learning to stimulate student interest and enhance understanding.

**Table 2 : Cycle 2 Result**

Test Type	Lowest Score	Highest Score	Average Score
Pretest	52	88	71.76
Posttest	72	96	83.76

Moving into Cycle 2, further refinement was made to the design of the reading challenges based on the reflection from Cycle 1. The reading materials were more focused on encouraging critical thinking, and the puzzles were adjusted to better align with comprehension indicators. Before the second intervention, a pretest was conducted to assess students’ comprehension level after Cycle 1. The average score increased to 71.76, with a lowest score of 52 and a highest score of 88. This shows that the knowledge gained during the first cycle was retained and even slightly improved before the second cycle began.

Following the implementation of the second Escape Room Reading Challenge, the posttest was carried out once again. The average posttest score rose significantly to 83.76, with the lowest score reaching 72 and the highest score improving to 96. These results indicate a substantial improvement not only in terms of average performance but also in the range of scores. Fewer students were in the low-achievement category, and more students were able to achieve high scores, suggesting that the second cycle was highly effective in boosting reading comprehension skills across the class.



**Figure 2: Pretest and Posttest Scores by Cycles**

Overall, the data from both cycles display a positive and consistent trend in students' reading comprehension development. The difference between pretest and posttest scores in each cycle illustrates that the Escape Room Reading Challenge was an effective instructional

strategy. Students were not only more engaged during the reading process, but they also demonstrated improved ability in understanding narrative texts, including identifying key ideas, interpreting events, and analyzing characters. The steady increase in minimum, average, and maximum scores across both cycles serves as strong evidence of the success of this approach in the classroom context.

In addition to the quantitative data, the findings from observation checklists and field notes further illustrate the impact of the Escape Room method:

- Cycle 1: Observation checklists indicated that 60% of students were actively engaged during the activities, although 40% of students exhibited minimal participation and relied on more active peers to complete tasks. Field notes noted that students faced challenges with the complexity of the puzzles, and more time was required for task completion than anticipated.
  - ❖ Engagement Issues (60%): Although some students participated actively, 40% relied heavily on their peers. Field notes describe several students as "observing more than doing," particularly when the puzzles required sequencing events or interpreting implicit meanings. For example, in one task, students had to arrange parts of a fragmented narrative to unlock a digital lock. Many hesitated or waited for stronger readers to lead.
  - ❖ Puzzle Complexity & Time Issues: Tasks in Cycle 1 included multi-step puzzles, such as deciphering character motivations hidden within dialogue and matching them to moral values. While stimulating, these were time-consuming and cognitively demanding. Some groups couldn't finish within the allocated time, which led to frustration. One field note mentions: "Students seemed confused by Task 3, which required connecting three different clues from the text – this delayed their progress significantly."
  
- Cycle 2: In Cycle 2, observation checklists showed an increase in active participation, with 90% of students engaging in the reading tasks. The puzzles were better aligned with the comprehension objectives, and field notes indicated that the students were more confident, demonstrating improved collaboration and better time management.
  - ❖ Improved Participation (90%): After refining the materials, nearly all students showed active involvement. They asked more clarifying questions, delegated roles, and checked answers collaboratively. In one session, students used colored sticky notes to track progress and ensure everyone contributed – a sign of increased ownership and group dynamics.
  - ❖ Better Puzzle Design & Alignment: In Cycle 2, the puzzles were simplified and directly linked to key reading comprehension indicators like identifying the plot, character development, and cause-effect relationships. One task asked students to match textual evidence with character actions to "unlock" the next challenge, which students completed enthusiastically and faster.
  - ❖ Improved Confidence & Collaboration: The field notes highlight a shift in group behavior – students became more vocal and willing to negotiate answers. One entry says: "Group 4 completed all tasks without teacher intervention. They strategized time allocation and checked each other's work, showing deeper engagement."

- ❖ Time Management: Teachers reported that students completed the tasks within the allocated 30–35 minutes, a big improvement from Cycle 1. One group even had time to reflect on which clues were easiest or hardest—an indication of metacognitive development.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this classroom action research indicate that the Escape Room Reading Challenge was effective in improving students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. Throughout the two research cycles, data collected through pretests, posttests, observation checklists, and field notes consistently demonstrated positive developments in both cognitive outcomes and classroom dynamics.

In the first cycle, students showed moderate improvement in reading comprehension, with the average posttest score increasing from 61.58 to 69.09. This initial gain, though encouraging, revealed some limitations in the implementation. Observation data highlighted that only around 60% of students were actively engaged in the activities, while the remaining students tended to rely on their more dominant peers. The design of the Escape Room tasks, while innovative, appeared to present challenges related to complexity and time management. Many students found the puzzles demanding, and they struggled to complete tasks within the allocated timeframe. These observations underscored the need for refinement in both the instructional materials and the pacing of activities.

Responding to these findings, several adjustments were made in the second cycle to enhance the learning experience. The Escape Room tasks were revised to better align with students' reading abilities, and instructions were clarified to ensure students could engage more effectively with the content. As a result, the second cycle showed substantial progress. The average posttest score rose to 83.76, indicating a significant improvement in students' comprehension skills. Furthermore, the lowest score increased from 60 to 72, and the highest from 88 to 96, reflecting a more balanced and inclusive achievement across the class. Notably, engagement levels improved markedly, with 90% of students participating actively in the group-based reading challenges. Field notes from this cycle recorded greater collaboration, improved confidence, and more efficient time management among students.

These outcomes suggest that the gamified learning approach, when thoughtfully adapted to the learners' context, can create an engaging environment that supports deeper reading comprehension. The interactive nature of the Escape Room challenges promoted not only individual accountability but also collaborative problem-solving. This aligns with existing studies asserting that game-based learning enhances student motivation and facilitates active learning (Gee, 2003; Surendeleq et al., 2014). Moreover, the observed shift in classroom dynamics—from passive reception to active involvement—illustrates how experiential and participatory strategies can transform students' attitudes toward reading.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to find out whether the Escape Room Reading Challenge could help improve students' understanding of narrative texts. Through two cycles of Classroom Action Research, the results showed clear improvement in students' reading comprehension. The average posttest scores increased in both cycles, and classroom

observations showed that students became more active, more involved, and worked better in groups.

Using game elements in learning made the classroom atmosphere more engaging and interactive. In the Escape Room activities, students were challenged to read carefully, solve puzzles, and complete tasks as a team. This activity promoted students' critical thinking and deeper textual understanding. After the first cycle, some adjustments were made—such as simplifying tasks and giving clearer instructions—which led to better outcomes in the second cycle.

The reflection process after each cycle allowed the teacher to improve the learning strategy based on students' needs. Overall, the Escape Room Reading Challenge proved to be an effective and enjoyable method for improving reading skills. It also created a positive learning environment. This strategy can be a useful alternative for teachers who want to make reading activities more meaningful, collaborative, and fun for their students.

## REFERENCES

- Antonio García-Tudela, P., Del Mar Sánchez-Vera, M., & Solano-Fernández, I. M. (2020). *Mejoras y necesidades de una escape room educativa en la formación inicial de docentes* *Improvements and needs of an educational escape room in initial teacher training*.
- Gee, J. P. (2003). What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy. *Computers in Entertainment*, 1(1), 20–20. <https://doi.org/10.1145/950566.950595>
- González-Yubero, S., Mauri, M., Cardoso, M. J., & Palomera, R. (2023). Learning through Challenges and Enigmas: Educational Escape Room as a Predictive Experience of Motivation in University Students. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 15(17). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151713001>
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The Action Authors Planner*. Deakin University.
- Latifah, I., & Safrida, I. (2025). Improving Students' Language Skills with Punakawan Wayang Media at RA Mansyaul Huda: A Classroom Action Research. *Journal of Indonesian Primary School*, 2(1), 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.62945/jips.v2i1.415>
- Mecía-Montenegro, A. M. (2021). ESCUELA, FAMILIA Y COMUNIDAD ESCENARIO ESTRATÉGICO PARA LA GESTIÓN EDUCATIVA EN CONTEXTOS RURALES. *Prohominum*, 3(1), 25–38. <https://doi.org/10.47606/ACVEN/PH0022>
- Nanda, D. W., & Azmy, K. (2020). POOR READING COMPREHENSION ISSUE IN EFL CLASSROOM AMONG INDONESIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: Scrutinizing the causes, impacts and possible solutions. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 8(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v8i1.6771>

- Nasri, N. F., Ahmad Zaidi, N. N., Kamarudin, S., Hanafi, M., & Nasir, Z. A. (2024). Digital Escape Room: Students' Perceptions as an Educational Tool in Learning Reading Skills. *International Journal of Education*, 16(2), 21. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ije.v16i2.21752>
- Prieto Andreu, J. M. (2020). A systematic review about gamification, motivation and learning in high school. In *Teoria de la Educacion* (Vol. 32, Issue 1, pp. 73–99). Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca. <https://doi.org/10.14201/teri.20625>
- Ramadhianti, A., & Putra, M. M. S. A. (2022, February 17). *Increasing Students' Reading Comprehension through Students' Reading Habit*. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.28-10-2020.2315344>
- Rochmat, C. S., Huwaida, J., Hayati, N., & Qolbi, S. N. (2025). *18022-Article Text-62350-89661-10-20250301*.
- Strousopoulos, P., Troussas, C., Krouska, A., & Sgouropoulou, C. (2024). The Gamification Advantage: Innovating Education through Engagement. *Proceedings - 2024 9th South-East Europe Design Automation, Computer Engineering, Computer Networks and Social Media Conference, SEEDA-CECNSM 2024*, 204–208. <https://doi.org/10.1109/SEEDA-CECNSM63478.2024.00045>
- Surendeleg, G., Murwa, V., Yun, H.-K., & Kim, Y. S. (2014). The role of gamification in education—a literature review. *Contemporary Engineering Sciences*, 7, 1609–1616. <https://doi.org/10.12988/ces.2014.411217>