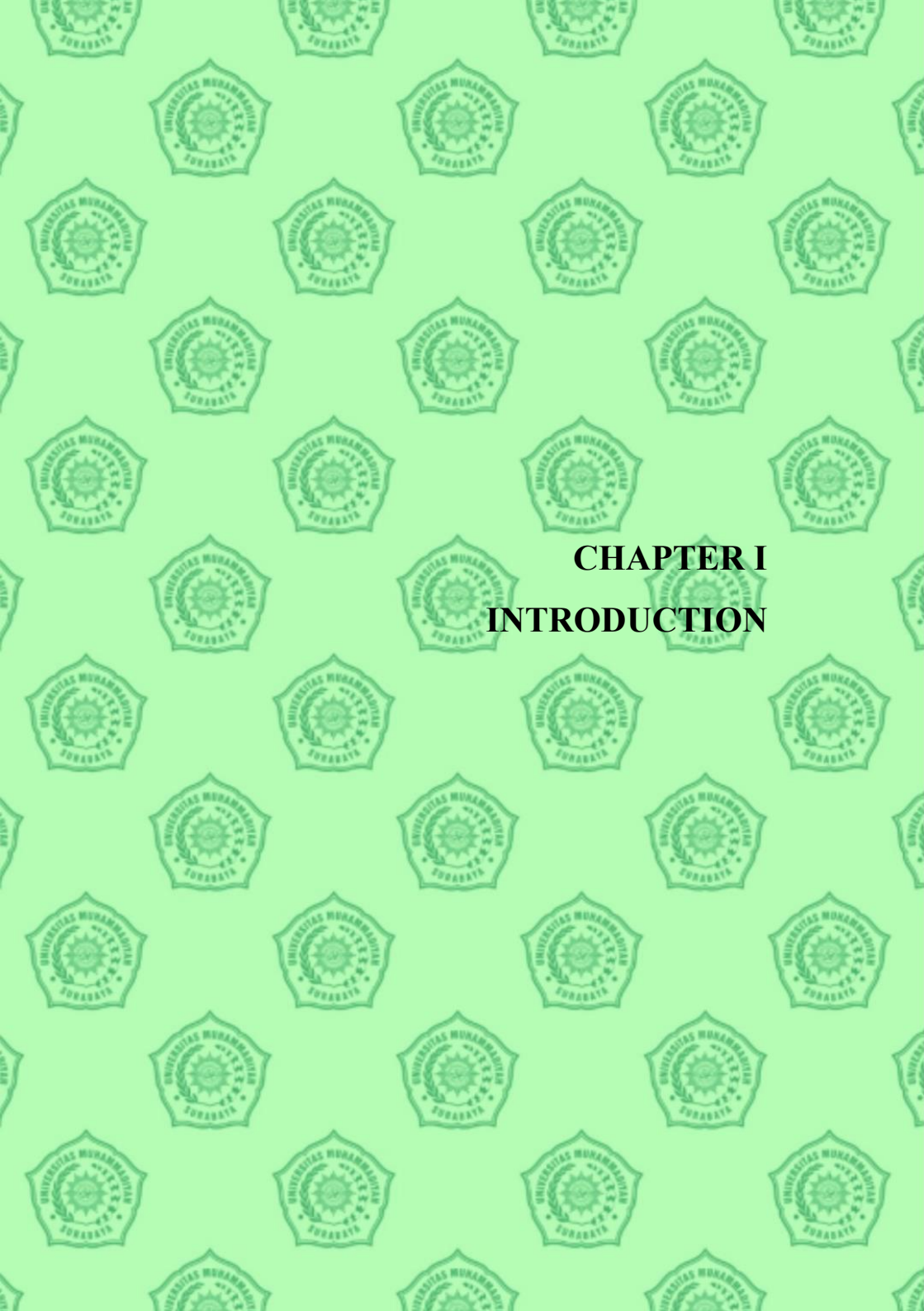




CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Background of the Study

Reading comprehension is one of the most fundamental cognitive skills in language education, involving the active construction of meaning through the interaction between the reader and a written text. It requires readers not only to decode words but also to interpret ideas, identify main concepts, and connect textual information with their prior knowledge (Ruddle, 2019). Without this ability, students are likely to misinterpret the author's intent and fail to grasp the deeper meaning of the texts they encounter. Given its centrality in academic success, reading comprehension has become a critical focus for educators, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning.

In EFL settings, the challenge of teaching reading comprehension is particularly pronounced. Students often lack sufficient vocabulary, background knowledge, and reading strategies to effectively engage with English texts. These limitations create significant barriers to comprehension, making the role of the teacher especially important. Educators must not only deliver content but also equip students with the cognitive tools necessary to navigate and interpret complex written materials. Consequently, the instructional strategies that teachers employ in reading lessons have a direct and meaningful impact on students' ability to understand and process texts (Grabe et al., 2011).

Among the instructional approaches documented in EFL reading research, scaffolding stands out as one of the most theoretically grounded and practically effective. Rooted in Vygotsky et al. (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), scaffolding refers to the temporary, adjustable support that a more knowledgeable other (typically the teacher) provides to enable learners to perform tasks that exceed their current independent ability. Wood et al. (1976) further developed this concept to describe how an adult systematically assists a learner in accomplishing a goal-directed task through contingent and responsive intervention. In the reading classroom, scaffolding may take the form of

vocabulary pre-teaching, contextual clues, guiding questions, visual aids, or explicit modeling of comprehension strategies.

Gibbons (2015) argues that effective scaffolding in the EFL context must be responsive to students' current competence, temporary in nature, and ultimately aimed at fostering learner independence as teachers systematically reduce their support over time. This gradual release of responsibility distinguishes scaffolding from other forms of assistance and makes it a particularly powerful tool for developing reading comprehension in EFL settings where students require structured, stage-by-stage guidance to process English texts meaningfully. Further support is offered by Ahmadi Safa & Rozati, (2017), whose experimental study in an EFL context demonstrated that scaffolding, both expert-peer and coequal forms, significantly outperformed individualistic, non-scaffolded strategies in improving learners' language outcomes, underscoring the practical significance of scaffolding as a classroom instructional approach.

At the national level, Indonesian English teachers are expected to align their instruction with the Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes active student participation, critical thinking, and meaningful language use. To meet these expectations, studies indicate that educators implement organized strategies such as scaffolding, Think Aloud, and QAR, often integrating multiple approaches to accommodate diverse learning styles (Gibbons, 2015). However, the effectiveness of these strategies is contingent on the quality and consistency of their implementation. Understanding how teachers navigate these curricular demands in practice is therefore essential for improving the quality of reading instruction at scale.

At the classroom level, students encounter a wide range of difficulties in reading comprehension that are compounded by the nature of English as a second or foreign language. One of the most frequently reported difficulties is students' inability to identify the main idea of a text, building vocabulary, making logical inferences, recalling specific details, and recognizing underlying text structures. Even academically capable students struggle with this task, particularly when dealing with

inductively structured paragraphs or unfamiliar vocabulary (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Students in EFL contexts face additional barriers because English functions as a second or foreign language rather than their primary medium of communication.

This means that students must simultaneously manage the linguistic demands of decoding an unfamiliar language while also constructing meaning from the text, a dual cognitive burden that significantly limits their reading efficiency (Grabe et al., 2011). Furthermore, students in semi-rural settings such as those at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarnayar typically have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, which means they progress at a comparatively slow pace and receive insufficient practice to consolidate their reading skills independently. Low motivation, limited vocabulary breadth, and unfamiliarity with English text structures further hinder their ability to engage deeply with reading materials. These cumulative challenges reinforce the need for teachers to adopt flexible, responsive, and theoretically informed instructional approaches, particularly scaffolding, which are appropriately calibrated to students' cognitive levels, linguistic backgrounds, and pace of learning. Notably, much of the existing scaffolding research, including studies on online conversational agents (Winkler et al., 2020), online personal learning environments (Korhonen et al., 2018), and technology-enhanced scaffolding in general (Ersani et al., 2021), is situated in online or technology-mediated learning contexts, leaving the enactment of scaffolding by human teachers in face-to-face EFL reading classrooms comparatively underexplored.

A notable gap also persists between teachers' theoretical familiarity with reading strategies and their practical application in the classroom. Many EFL teachers report knowing the principles of common reading strategies but struggle to implement them in ways that are contextually appropriate and pedagogically meaningful (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). This disconnect underscores the importance of examining actual classroom practice rather than relying solely on self-reported data or theoretical models, and highlights the value of professional development initiatives that bridge the gap between strategy knowledge and strategic teaching.

Given this context, the present study focuses on the English teacher at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Banjaranyar, Bojonegoro, which is a public junior high school located in a semi-rural area of East Java where reading comprehension instruction faces both common EFL challenges and unique local constraints. By investigating the scaffolding strategies this teacher uses, the reasoning behind her instructional choices, and the manner in which she enacts these strategies in the classroom, this study aims to generate meaningful, empirically grounded insights for the broader EFL educational community. The findings are intended to benefit teachers, students, curriculum designers, and future researchers committed to enhancing the quality of reading comprehension instruction in Indonesian EFL contexts.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the context of the study described above, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What scaffolding strategies does the English teacher implement to overcome students' difficulties in reading comprehension at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Banjaranyar, Bojonegoro?
2. How does the English teacher implement the scaffolding strategies in reading comprehension to address students' difficulties in the classroom at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Banjaranyar?
3. What do the students' responses to the scaffolding strategies?

1.3 Research Objectives

Aligned with the research questions stated above, the objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the scaffolding strategies employed by the English teacher in teaching reading comprehension to eighth-grade students at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Banjaranyar, Bojonegoro.

2. To describe how the English teacher implements scaffolding strategies in reading comprehension instruction to address students' difficulties in the classroom at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Banjaranyar, Bojonegoro.
3. To examine students' responses toward the scaffolding strategies implemented by the English teacher in reading comprehension learning at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Banjaranyar, Bojonegoro.

1.4 Significance of the Research

Some purposeful research is expected to have benefits on the audience of the research. It is also expected to benefit the writer or researcher himself. Accordingly, the writer wishes this to be significant from both theoretical and practical point of view.

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on EFL reading instruction by providing an in-depth, contextually situated examination of the English teacher's scaffolding strategies and their implementation. It advances understanding of how pedagogical decisions are made and enacted in a real classroom environment, and how these decisions relate to students' reading comprehension outcomes. The study also enriches theoretical discussions on the interplay between instructional approaches, classroom practices, and literacy development in EFL contexts, particularly at the junior high school level in Indonesia.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

For students, this study offers insights that can improve instructional support in reading comprehension, helping learners identify key concepts more effectively and engage with English texts with greater confidence. For teachers, the findings serve as a practical reference for selecting and applying evidence-based scaffolding strategies that respond to students' specific reading difficulties. For future researchers, this study provides a foundation for further investigation into instructional practices,

scaffolding strategy implementation, and literacy development in EFL settings across different educational levels and regional contexts.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

1.5.1 Scope

This study examines how the English teacher at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Banjaranyar, Bojonegoro identifies and responds to students' reading comprehension difficulties, with a focus on the scaffolding strategies she employs and how these strategies are implemented in the classroom. The research is limited to the English teacher at this school who has direct experience addressing students' reading challenges, together with her eighth-grade students, who provide complementary data on their responses to the scaffolding strategies used. The investigation centers on the variety of scaffolding strategies used, the rationale for their selection, and the process of their classroom implementation.

1.5.2 Limitation

This research adopts a qualitative case study approach involving a single English teacher and her students at one school; as such, the findings are not intended to be generalized to other teachers or educational settings. The data are primarily derived from classroom observation, a semi-structured interview, and a student questionnaire conducted over a defined period, which may be influenced by the unique characteristics of the school environment and student population. Because the study relies on one teacher's practice within three observed meetings, it captures an in-depth account of that teacher's scaffolding rather than a pattern that can be assumed to hold across other teachers or classrooms. The findings therefore offer in-depth, contextually situated insights into instructional practice at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Banjaranyar rather than broad, generalizable conclusions.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To prevent ambiguity and promote clarity throughout this research, the following operational definitions are provided:

1. Reading Comprehension:

The cognitive ability to read written texts, construct meaning from them, and accurately interpret the author's intended message, encompassing the identification of main ideas, supporting details, and implied meaning.

2. Scaffolding Strategies:

A set of deliberate, structured, and temporary instructional support techniques such as vocabulary pre-teaching, guiding questions, visual aids, and explicit modeling, that teachers employ to assist students in accomplishing reading tasks that lie beyond their current independent ability, with the ultimate goal of gradually building learner autonomy.

3. Scaffolding Implementation at Junior High School:

The practical application of scaffolding strategies within the junior high school EFL classroom by the teacher who adapt their scaffolding support to meet the specific reading comprehension needs of eighth-grade students.