

# Imaginative versus Non-Imaginative Texts for Lower-Secondary EFL Reading Comprehension: A Quasi-Experiment

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i5.3174>

\*Ilham Sahabuddin, Wahyuddin, Siti Hajar Larekeng, Hasman, Sudarmanto 

<sup>12345</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Parepare, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: [ilham852803@gmail.com](mailto:ilham852803@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension remains challenging for many lower-secondary EFL learners, creating a need for texts that support active meaning construction. This study asked whether, under a shared four-meeting reading sequence, a Grade 8 class using imaginative texts would achieve higher posttest reading-comprehension scores than a class using non-imaginative texts. Imaginative texts were operationalized as story-based texts intended to evoke mental imagery and engagement with represented events and situations; the comparison texts were not categorized as imaginative. A nonequivalent pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design involved 42 students, with 21 students in each intact class. Both groups received topic activation, individual reading, vocabulary clarification, comprehension questions, and retelling. Pretest scores were low (experimental  $M = 40.38$ ,  $SD = 5.62$ ; control  $M = 40.95$ ,  $SD = 12.77$ ), and no statistically detectable between-group difference was found,  $t(40) = -0.18$ ,  $p = .858$ ; this result does not establish equivalence. At posttest, the experimental group ( $M = 75.29$ ,  $SD = 12.93$ ) outperformed the control group ( $M = 56.57$ ,  $SD = 12.83$ ) on raw posttest scores,  $t(40) = 4.49$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.39$ . Fifteen experimental students (71.43%) versus three control students (14.29%) reached the good or very good categories. The findings suggest a context-specific advantage for imaginative texts within structured EFL reading instruction, while the intact-class design, brief intervention, repeated test form, and incomplete psychometric documentation limit causal and generalizable claims.

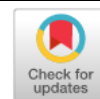
**Keywords:** *Imaginative Texts, Reading Comprehension, EFL Instruction, Quasi-Experimental Design, Lower-Secondary Students*

### Article History:

Received 11<sup>th</sup> August 2026

Accepted 10<sup>th</sup> October 2026

Published 21<sup>st</sup> October 2026



## INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a pivotal component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) literacy, as it empowers learners to construct, integrate, evaluate, and apply meaning from written texts, which is essential across various academic contexts. This skill is not merely about decoding written symbols but involves a complex interaction between the reader, the text, and the context, which is crucial for academic success and lifelong learning (Saidakhmedovna & Suyarkulovna, 2026). Effective reading comprehension enables learners to connect ideas across words, sentences, and larger textual units, facilitating a deeper understanding of the writer's message (Methnani, 2025). Recent EFL studies identify limited vocabulary, low motivation, and monotonous instruction as continuing barriers, while cognitive and metacognitive strategy use, prediction, summarization, contextual inferencing, and richer language input can support comprehension (Awang et al., 2025; Bapir & Rasul, 2025; Oktavianti et al., 2026; Stevani et al., 2022; Suhaila et al., 2025). These findings make the quality of both reading instruction and the texts through which learners construct meaning especially important.

For lower-secondary EFL learners, the problem is particularly demanding because comprehension depends on several developing linguistic and cognitive resources. Vocabulary knowledge and morphological awareness are strong predictors of reading performance (Teng & Cui, 2025), whereas delayed lexical access and reliance on first-language translation can increase processing demands and interrupt real-time comprehension (Limbeng et al., 2026). Learners also encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammar, and lengthy passages

when instruction remains largely surface-oriented (Oktavianti et al., 2026). Broader evidence that many students still fail to reach minimum comprehension levels further illustrates the persistence of the problem (Muñiz & Labra, 2025). Accordingly, effective EFL reading instruction needs to coordinate linguistic support, cognitively manageable processing, and purposeful engagement with texts rather than treat comprehension as a single skill (Limbeng et al., 2026; Oktavianti et al., 2026).

Text selection is therefore not a neutral component of reading instruction. A multidimensional literacy perspective emphasizes that texts and tasks should balance linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental demands (Iswati, 2022), while contemporary accounts of reading pedagogy similarly stress cognitive, social, culturally sustaining, multilingual, and multimodal dimensions (Beauchemin et al., 2026). Learners also report a need for texts connected to daily life and culture (Hằng & Hương, 2023), and reader-centered materials can promote more authentic engagement with meaning (Saraceni, 2022). Contextually meaningful content, including ecoliteracy-oriented texts, may further connect language learning with critical engagement (Haerazi et al., 2025). Together, this work suggests that textual characteristics may shape how readily learners attend to, connect, and retain information.

In the present study, imaginative texts are operationally defined as story-based texts intended to stimulate mental imagery and experiential engagement with represented characters, settings, events, conflicts, and situations. The label is study-specific and should not be treated as interchangeable with every literary, narrative, fictional, or creative text. The reviewed literature itself examines partially overlapping but distinct forms, including fantasy stories, comics, novels, fiction, and other story-centered resources. Fantasy stories have been associated with improved reading literacy (Mu'alimah et al., 2023), and English comics can support comprehension through combined verbal and visual information (Bugtong et al., 2025). Experiential reading can increase active participation (Bahchevanova-Georgieva, 2024), while novel-based instruction has been linked with reading performance and motivation (Mulyarti, 2025). Fiction has also been used to stimulate reflection on complex themes (Halberg & Lyngstad, 2022), and narrative/storytelling activities can promote participation and imaginative involvement (Montenegro et al., 2024). Such texts may therefore be meaningful for struggling readers when they support sustained, purposeful engagement rather than function as entertainment alone (Ivey & Friddle, 2023).

Several mechanisms could explain why imaginative texts may support comprehension. Story structures can help readers organize characters, goals, events, and causal relations into a coherent mental representation, while narrative processing has been linked with memory, empathy, and identity-related engagement (Jinhui & Kang, 2025). From a construction-integration perspective, comprehension requires readers to generate inferences and integrate new information with prior knowledge (Butterfuss et al., 2020; Gauche & Pfeiffer Flores, 2022). Meta-analytic evidence also indicates that narrative and expository texts can differ in memory and comprehension outcomes (Mar et al., 2021). Narrative frameworks may additionally support coherent idea development (Moyano & Stella, 2024), and neurocognitive work shows that text comprehension depends on constructing and integrating mental models (Keller et al., 2024). These mechanisms make visualization, schema activation, inferencing, emotional involvement, and active meaning construction plausible pathways, although the present study does not measure them directly (Jinhui & Kang, 2025).

The potential value of imaginative texts also depends on the activities surrounding them. Narrative games, dramatization, and role-play have been associated with improvement at literal, inferential, and critical levels of comprehension (Jiménez et al., 2025), and ludic-literary activities have produced favorable reading outcomes in experimental comparisons (Maina & Papalini, 2023). More generally, pedagogical interventions are strengthened when they address both cognitive and affective components of reading (Antić & Stevanović, 2024). Pre-reading vocabulary and topic activation can facilitate comprehension and engagement (Wisudawati et al., 2025), while storytelling may support inference, causal reasoning, motivation, and social participation (Alvarez et al., 2025). Thus, any advantage of imaginative

texts is likely to emerge through interaction between text affordances and structured instructional support.

Contemporary second-language reading research conceptualizes comprehension as a multidimensional meaning-construction process in which linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, working memory, inferential processing, metacognitive regulation, and text characteristics interact (Duke et al., 2021). Accordingly, intervention research has examined text-structure instruction, explicit strategies, digital and multimodal scaffolding, and teacher-supported extensive reading, with effects varying by task, learner, duration, and assessment conditions (Bogaerds-Hazenberg et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022; Reiber-Kuijpers et al., 2021; Robb & Ewert, 2024; Samiei & Ebadi, 2021). Text characteristics also matter: young L2 readers' allocation of attention to textual and visual information relates to comprehension, and mental-imagery ability is associated with reading performance (Pellicer-Sánchez et al., 2020; Suggate & Lenhard, 2022). At the same time, narrative-versus-expository research and studies of literature in foreign-language materials treat genre, literary status, and strategy use as distinct issues rather than a single construct (Calafato & Gudim, 2022; Härtig et al., 2022; Nilforoushan et al., 2023).

Despite this evidence, the comparative contribution of textual imaginativeness remains insufficiently resolved under broadly similar classroom procedures. Much prior work has manipulated reading strategies, delivery media, multimodal support, extensive-reading arrangements, or broad genre categories rather than comparing imaginative and non-imaginative texts while holding the surrounding instructional sequence as constant as possible. The gap is especially relevant in lower-secondary Indonesian EFL classrooms, which are less represented than university-level and technology-enhanced settings in the recent intervention literature. The present study therefore used two intact Grade 8 classes in a nonequivalent pretest-posttest design, with four shared reading meetings and text type as the principal documented instructional contrast. The design does not establish perfect isolation of imaginativeness, because the available records do not document formal matching of the two text sets on length, readability, vocabulary difficulty, topic familiarity, or linguistic complexity. Its contribution is consequently a constrained, context-specific comparison rather than universal causal evidence.

Accordingly, the study asked whether, among two intact Grade 8 EFL classes receiving the same broad reading sequence, the class taught with imaginative texts would achieve higher posttest reading-comprehension scores than the class taught with non-imaginative texts, while pretest performance and descriptive pretest-to-posttest change were documented for both groups.

## METHOD

### Research Design

The study employed a nonequivalent pretest-posttest control-group quasi-experimental design to examine whether Grade 8 students taught with imaginative texts achieved higher posttest reading-comprehension scores than students receiving comparable instruction with non-imaginative texts. Two intact classes were measured before and after the instructional period. Because students were not individually randomized, the design is interpreted as quasi-experimental, and group formation, baseline performance, and possible threats to causal inference are reported explicitly (Handley et al., 2018).

Table 1. Quasi-Experimental Pretest-Posttest Design

| Group                    | Pretest        | Instructional condition                                          | Posttest       |
|--------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Experimental class (8.B) | O <sub>1</sub> | X <sub>1</sub> : instruction using imaginative reading texts     | O <sub>2</sub> |
| Control class (8.C)      | O <sub>1</sub> | X <sub>2</sub> : instruction using non-imaginative reading texts | O <sub>2</sub> |

In Table 1,  $O_1$  and  $O_2$  denote the pretest and posttest, respectively, and  $X_1$  and  $X_2$  denote the two text conditions. The pretest described initial reading-comprehension performance and was used to examine whether a statistically detectable baseline difference was present. After four instructional meetings, the posttest provided the primary between-group outcome. Pretest-to-posttest change was also summarized descriptively within each class; the available analysis did not include a direct inferential group-by-time test.

### Research Setting, Population, and Sample

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 11 Parepare during the 2025/2026 academic year. The target population comprised 66 Grade 8 students in three intact classes: 8.A ( $n = 24$ ), 8.B ( $n = 21$ ), and 8.C ( $n = 21$ ). Two classes were selected at the class level: 8.B served as the experimental group and 8.C as the control group, yielding an analytic sample of 42 students (21 per condition). The available study records did not specify the class-selection mechanism beyond this class-level selection and did not report participant attrition. Age range, gender distribution, standardized English-proficiency level, and prior English-learning experience were also not documented in the available dataset and therefore are not reported.

Table 2. Population and Study Sample

| Class | Population (n) | Study role         | Included sample (n) |
|-------|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 8.A   | 24             | Not included       | -                   |
| 8.B   | 21             | Experimental group | 21                  |
| 8.C   | 21             | Control group      | 21                  |
| Total | 66             |                    | 42                  |

The sample size was determined by the availability and selection of two intact classes rather than by a reported a priori power analysis. This setting-constrained sample should therefore be interpreted with attention to estimation precision rather than statistical significance alone (Lakens, 2013). In addition, the absence of individual random assignment leaves open selection bias and class-level confounding from unmeasured learner or classroom characteristics. The pretest can describe observed baseline similarity, but it cannot eliminate these threats to internal validity.

### Research Variables and Operational Definitions

The independent variable was the instructional text condition. In the experimental condition, imaginative texts were the principal reading input and were defined in the study as story-based texts intended to stimulate mental imagery and engagement with represented events and situations. In the control condition, students followed the same general instructional sequence using texts that the study categorized as non-imaginative. Because the exact genres of the control texts were not documented, the term non-imaginative is retained as the study's operational comparison label rather than treated as a universal text category. The intended contrast was therefore the nature of the reading texts, not the overall classroom procedure.

The dependent variable was reading comprehension, operationalized as students' percentage scores on a researcher-prepared reading-comprehension test administered at pretest and posttest. Conceptually, comprehension involves constructing meaning from written text and includes understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on, and engaging with texts (OECD, 2019). The continuous percentage score was used for the inferential comparisons, while categorical performance bands were used only for descriptive interpretation.

### Instructional Conditions

Both groups participated in four instructional meetings delivered by the researcher. At each meeting, the researcher stated the instructional purpose and introduced the text. Students completed a pre-reading orientation to activate relevant knowledge and preview purpose, structure, and content; read the assigned text individually; identified unfamiliar vocabulary;

answered comprehension questions; and retold the text in their own words. These procedures were shared across conditions. The experimental group used imaginative/story-based texts, whereas the control group used non-imaginative texts.

Table 3. Comparison of the Experimental and Control Conditions

| Instructional component      | Experimental group                                           | Control group                                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Number of treatment meetings | Four meetings                                                | Four meetings                                                |
| Instructor                   | Researcher                                                   | Researcher                                                   |
| Core text type               | Imaginative/story-based reading texts                        | Non-imaginative reading texts                                |
| Pre-reading phase            | Purpose, topic, structure, and content orientation           | Purpose, topic, structure, and content orientation           |
| During-reading phase         | Individual reading and identification of unfamiliar words    | Individual reading and identification of unfamiliar words    |
| Post-reading phase           | Comprehension questions and retelling in students' own words | Comprehension questions and retelling in students' own words |

The parallel procedures were intended to make text type the principal documented instructional contrast. However, the study records available for this manuscript did not provide the titles or sources of the texts, the number of distinct texts, exact or approximate word counts, readability indices, lesson duration, or formal matching evidence for vocabulary difficulty, topic familiarity, and linguistic complexity. Consequently, equivalence of the two text sets on these attributes cannot be demonstrated retrospectively, and the intervention should be interpreted as a classroom comparison with partially documented treatment fidelity rather than as a perfectly isolated text-feature experiment.

### Reading-Comprehension Test and Scoring

Reading comprehension was measured with a researcher-prepared test comprising 20 multiple-choice items and five essay items. Each correct multiple-choice response received one point and each incorrect response received zero. Essay responses were assigned item-specific point values established by the researcher. Raw points were converted to percentage scores using the following expression:

$$\text{Percentage score} = (\text{points obtained} / \text{maximum possible points}) \times 100$$

The same test form and items were administered at pretest and posttest, with 2 × 40 minutes allocated to each administration. The pretest documented initial performance and the posttest measured performance after the four instructional meetings. The available records did not provide complete evidence of test piloting, content-validation procedures, reliability coefficients, or scoring reliability for the essay items. Because transparent evidence for test content, scoring, validity, and reliability is central to defensible outcome interpretation (Flake & Fried, 2020), this incomplete psychometric documentation is treated as a limitation rather than supplemented with unverified information.

Table 4. Classification of Reading-Comprehension Scores

| Score range | Classification |
|-------------|----------------|
| 86-100      | Very good      |
| 71-85       | Good           |
| 56-70       | Fair           |
| 41-55       | Poor           |
| ≤ 40        | Very poor      |

The classifications in Table 4 were used descriptively to summarize the distribution of student performance. Inferential conclusions were based on continuous test scores rather than on the categorical labels, thereby preserving the information contained in the original scores.

## Data-Collection Procedure

Data collection proceeded in three consecutive phases. First, both classes completed the reading-comprehension pretest under the same stated time allocation of  $2 \times 40$  minutes. Second, the experimental and control classes completed four instructional meetings under their respective text conditions while following the shared sequence described above. Third, both classes completed the posttest under the same time allocation. The posttest reused the pretest form and items, permitting direct score comparison across occasions but also creating a possible test-familiarity effect considered in the limitations.

## Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics included frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum for each group at each measurement occasion, together with the five performance classifications in Table 4. The analysis also screened the data for entry errors, missing values, outliers, and assumptions relevant to parametric testing; normality was considered at the group level and equality of variances before the between-group tests. Categorical score bands were used descriptively, whereas inferential tests used the continuous scores.

An independent-samples *t* test compared the two groups at pretest to identify any statistically detectable baseline difference. The primary inferential comparison then used a two-tailed independent-samples *t* test on raw posttest scores. Descriptive gain scores were calculated as posttest minus pretest for each group, but the available analysis did not report an inferential between-group gain-score test, ANCOVA, or other direct group-by-time model; therefore, gain differences are interpreted descriptively only. Statistical significance was set at  $\alpha = .05$ .

For the primary posttest comparison, the hypotheses were  $H_0: \mu_{\text{post,E}} = \mu_{\text{post,C}}$  and  $H_1: \mu_{\text{post,E}} \neq \mu_{\text{post,C}}$ . Results are reported with group means and standard deviations, the between-group mean difference, the *t* statistic, two-tailed *p* value, Cohen's *d*, and a 95% confidence interval where it can be derived from the reported aggregate statistics. Effect magnitude and precision are interpreted alongside the intact-class design and small sample rather than from *p* values alone, consistent with quantitative reporting standards (Appelbaum et al., 2018).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

#### Baseline Reading-Comprehension Performance

The analysis included 42 Grade 8 students, with 21 students in each group. At pretest, the experimental group had a mean score of 40.38 (SD = 5.62) and the control group 40.95 (SD = 12.77). All students were classified as poor or very poor: 10 experimental students (47.62%) and seven control students (33.33%) were poor, while 11 experimental students (52.38%) and 14 control students (66.67%) were very poor. No student reached the fair, good, or very good categories. These distributions indicate low observed baseline performance in both classes but, by themselves, do not establish group equivalence.

Table 5. Distribution of Reading-Comprehension Performance Categories at Pretest and Posttest

| Performance category | Score range | Experimental pretest, n (%) | Control pretest, n (%) | Experimental posttest, n (%) | Control posttest, n (%) |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Very good            | 86-100      | 0 (0.00)                    | 0 (0.00)               | 7 (33.33)                    | 0 (0.00)                |
| Good                 | 71-85       | 0 (0.00)                    | 0 (0.00)               | 8 (38.10)                    | 3 (14.29)               |
| Fair                 | 56-70       | 0 (0.00)                    | 0 (0.00)               | 4 (19.05)                    | 7 (33.33)               |
| Poor                 | 41-55       | 10 (47.62)                  | 7 (33.33)              | 2 (9.52)                     | 9 (42.86)               |
| Very poor            | $\leq 40$   | 11 (52.38)                  | 14 (66.67)             | 0 (0.00)                     | 2 (9.52)                |
| Total                | -           | 21 (100.00)                 | 21 (100.00)            | 21 (100.00)                  | 21 (100.00)             |

### Posttest Performance and Descriptive Change

After the four instructional meetings, the experimental group showed a pronounced upward shift in the descriptive performance categories. Fifteen students (71.43%) were classified as good or very good, four (19.05%) as fair, two (9.52%) as poor, and none as very poor. In the control group, three students (14.29%) were good, seven (33.33%) fair, nine (42.86%) poor, and two (9.52%) very poor. Thus, the proportion reaching the good or very good categories was 57.14 percentage points higher in the experimental class (71.43% versus 14.29%), although these categories are descriptive summaries rather than inferential outcomes.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics and Mean Change in Reading-Comprehension Scores

| Group        | n  | Pretest M | Pretest SD | Posttest M | Posttest SD | Mean change |
|--------------|----|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Experimental | 21 | 40.38     | 5.62       | 75.29      | 12.93       | 34.91       |
| Control      | 21 | 40.95     | 12.77      | 56.57      | 12.83       | 15.62       |

The experimental group increased from  $M = 40.38$  ( $SD = 5.62$ ) at pretest to  $M = 75.29$  ( $SD = 12.93$ ) at posttest, a descriptive mean gain of 34.91 points. The control group increased from  $M = 40.95$  ( $SD = 12.77$ ) to  $M = 56.57$  ( $SD = 12.83$ ), a gain of 15.62 points. The descriptive gain was therefore 19.29 points larger in the experimental group. Because the available analysis did not include an inferential comparison of individual gain scores or a group-by-time model, this difference in change should not be interpreted as a statistically tested treatment effect.

### Between-Group Inferential Comparisons

At baseline, no statistically detectable between-group difference was found,  $t(40) = -0.18$ ,  $p = .858$ , Cohen's  $d = -0.06$ . This near-zero observed difference supports describing the measured starting scores as similar, but the nonsignificant  $p$  value does not prove equivalence between the intact classes. At posttest, the experimental group ( $M = 75.29$ ,  $SD = 12.93$ ) scored higher than the control group ( $M = 56.57$ ,  $SD = 12.83$ ), a reported mean difference of 18.72 points. The raw posttest comparison was statistically significant,  $t(40) = 4.49$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a large reported standardized difference (Cohen's  $d = 1.39$ ). Based on the reported mean difference,  $t$  statistic, and degrees of freedom, the approximate 95% confidence interval for the posttest mean difference was 10.29 to 27.15 points.

Table 7. Independent-Samples Comparisons of Experimental and Control Groups

| Measurement occasion | t     | df | Two-tailed p | Cohen's d | Statistical conclusion                                 |
|----------------------|-------|----|--------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Pretest              | -0.18 | 40 | .858         | -0.06     | No statistically significant difference                |
| Posttest             | 4.49  | 40 | <.001        | 1.39      | Significant difference favoring the experimental group |

### Summary of the Findings

Taken together, the groups had similarly low observed pretest scores, but the experimental class obtained substantially higher raw posttest scores after the four-meeting instructional period. This pattern was reflected in the 18.72-point posttest mean difference, the large reported standardized effect, and the larger proportion of experimental students reaching the good or very good categories. Both groups also improved descriptively, with mean gains of 34.91 and 15.62 points, respectively. However, because the reported inferential analysis compared raw posttest scores rather than gain scores or pretest-adjusted posttest scores, the study supports a posttest advantage associated with the imaginative-text condition but does not statistically establish that the magnitude of pretest-to-posttest change differed between groups.

## Discussion

The central finding was a substantial posttest difference between two intact classes that began with similarly low observed reading-comprehension scores. After four meetings, the imaginative-text group scored 18.72 points higher on average than the non-imaginative-text group,  $t(40) = 4.49$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a large reported standardized difference ( $d = 1.39$ ). Statistically, this is a strong sample-specific contrast; educationally, it is also notable because the difference occurred on the study's 0-100 score scale and was accompanied by a marked shift into higher performance categories. Nevertheless, the effect should not be generalized mechanically from 42 students in two intact classes. L2 reading depends on coordinated vocabulary, working memory, inference, monitoring, and prior knowledge, all of which can vary across adolescent EFL learners and classrooms (Ali et al., 2022; Duke et al., 2021; Shin, 2020; Vettori et al., 2024).

The higher posttest performance in the experimental class is consistent with research showing that comprehension benefits when learners activate prior knowledge, apply reading strategies, and process inferential relations rather than read passively (Li et al., 2022; Samiei & Ebadi, 2021). It also converges with evidence that young L2 readers' allocation of attention to supportive textual and visual information is associated with comprehension (Pellicer-Sánchez et al., 2020). These studies did not test the identical contrast used here, so the agreement should be interpreted at the level of mechanism: imaginative texts may have supplied richer relations to anticipate, visualize, connect, and infer within the structured lesson sequence. Because the comparison involved intact classes and incompletely matched text characteristics, the result remains context-bound evidence rather than definitive proof that imaginativeness alone caused the difference.

The score distributions add an educational perspective to the statistical result. In the experimental class, 15 of 21 students (71.43%) reached the good or very good categories, compared with 3 of 21 (14.29%) in the control class; no experimental student remained very poor. This broad movement suggests that the posttest advantage was not confined to one or two extreme scores. At the same time, the categories are locally defined score bands and should not be treated as independently validated proficiency levels. The pattern is nevertheless compatible with work emphasizing accessible texts, sustained engagement, guided analysis, and teacher-supported movement toward more independent comprehension (Duke et al., 2021; Robb & Ewert, 2024).

A plausible explanation concerns the construction of mental representations during story reading. Imaginative texts organize information around characters, settings, goals, conflicts, and event sequences, which can provide a coherent framework for connecting details and generating inferences. Mental-imagery ability is positively associated with reading performance, and research on multimodal and imaginal processing indicates that representation can shape narrative understanding (Pellicer-Sánchez et al., 2020; Suggate & Lenhard, 2022). Such texts may also sustain emotional involvement with represented situations, making relevant schema and causal relations easier to activate. However, imagery is not uniformly beneficial: representational supports can sometimes interfere with particular levels of text processing (Seger et al., 2021). Visualization, engagement, and inferential processing are therefore plausible mechanisms in this study, not mediators directly measured by the data.

The shared instructional sequence probably interacted with these text affordances. Topic activation could connect the reading with prior knowledge; vocabulary clarification could reduce lexical barriers; comprehension questions could direct attention to central and inferential information; and retelling required students to reconstruct meaning in their own words. Current accounts treat comprehension as an interaction among reader, text, task, and instructional support rather than an effect of text type in isolation (Duke et al., 2021). Strategy instruction, inferential scaffolding, and guided reading similarly support comprehension processes (Li et al., 2022; Robb & Ewert, 2024; Samiei & Ebadi, 2021). Thus, imaginative texts may have been especially productive because they offered event relations and situations that the shared activities could activate, question, and reconstruct.

The control group's descriptive improvement is equally important. Its mean increased from 40.95 to 56.57, indicating that the common instructional sequence may have supported reading even without imaginative texts. Intensive and blended EFL reading approaches can strengthen vocabulary analysis, questioning, close processing, and comprehension when systematic guidance is provided (Ali et al., 2022; Robb & Ewert, 2024). The present comparison therefore should not be framed as effective versus ineffective instruction. Rather, the results are consistent with a possible incremental posttest advantage for imaginative texts within an instructional sequence that appeared beneficial in both classes. This interpretation avoids attributing all observed improvement to text type when teacher guidance and repeated comprehension practice were shared.

Pedagogically, the findings support incorporating imaginative texts as one component of a diversified lower-secondary EFL reading curriculum rather than replacing non-imaginative texts wholesale. Texts should be developmentally appropriate and paired with vocabulary support, prediction, schema activation, inferential questioning, discussion, and retelling. Evidence from multimodal, strategy-based, and extensive-reading research likewise suggests that texts are most productive when learners process them actively (Li et al., 2022; Pellicer-Sánchez et al., 2020; Robb & Ewert, 2024). The practical contribution of the present study is therefore conditional: imaginative texts may be useful when embedded in structured instruction and when their linguistic demands are appropriate, not because the present design establishes their universal superiority.

Several limitations qualify the interpretation. The study involved only two intact classes from one school, leaving possible selection bias and unmeasured class-level differences (Andrade, 2021). The intervention lasted four meetings, so persistence and transfer cannot be established. Reuse of the same test form may have introduced familiarity or pretesting effects (Pan & Carpenter, 2023), while incomplete documentation of instrument validity and reliability constrains score interpretation because item design, piloting, and testing conditions can affect L2 reading-test reliability (Zhao & Aryadoust, 2025). In addition, participant characteristics and formal matching of the two text sets on length, readability, vocabulary difficulty, topic familiarity, and linguistic complexity were not available, and the inferential analysis did not directly test group-by-time change. Future research should use larger and more diverse multisite samples, longer interventions, validated parallel test forms, delayed posttests, direct pretest-adjusted or group-by-time analyses, and measures of engagement, imagery, and literal versus inferential comprehension.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study asked whether a Grade 8 EFL class taught through imaginative texts would achieve higher posttest reading-comprehension scores than a class receiving the same broad instructional sequence through non-imaginative texts. For this sample, the answer was affirmative at posttest: the experimental group ( $M = 75.29$ ,  $SD = 12.93$ ) scored significantly higher than the control group ( $M = 56.57$ ,  $SD = 12.83$ ),  $t(40) = 4.49$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.39$ . Both groups improved descriptively, but the available analysis did not directly test whether their pretest-to-posttest changes differed statistically. The findings therefore support a context-specific posttest advantage associated with imaginative texts, not definitive proof that imaginative texts are universally superior or that text type alone caused the observed difference.

Educationally, imaginative texts may be incorporated into structured lower-secondary EFL reading instruction alongside other text types, particularly when they are paired with topic activation, vocabulary support, comprehension questioning, and retelling and are appropriate to learners' linguistic and developmental levels. Generalization remains limited by the small sample of two intact classes from one school, the four-meeting intervention, incomplete documentation of participant and text comparability, reuse of the same assessment form, and incomplete psychometric evidence. Larger and more diverse samples, longer interventions, validated parallel assessments, delayed posttests, and direct pretest-adjusted or

group-by-time analyses are needed to determine whether the observed advantage is robust, durable, and attributable to the imaginative qualities of the texts.

## REFERENCES

- Ali, Z., Palpanadan, S. T., Asad, M. M., Churi, P., & Namaziandost, E. (2022). Reading approaches practiced in EFL classrooms: A narrative review and research agenda. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 7(1), 28. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-022-00155-4>
- Alvarez, S., Cristina, E., Tituaña, C., Victoria, M., Noroña, V., Fernanda, P., Lucintuña, C., & Cesar, J. (2025). Contar historias como estrategia pedagógica para la comprensión lectora de estudiantes. *Revista Ciencia Innovadora*, 3(4), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.64422/rci.v3n4.2025.108>
- Andrade, C. (2021). The limitations of quasi-experimental studies, and methods for data analysis when a quasi-experimental research design is unavoidable. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 43(5), 451-452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02537176211034707>
- Antić, S., & Stevanović, J. (2024). How to improve reading comprehension: Mapping critical areas for pedagogical interventions. *Nastava i Vaspitanje*, 73(3), 345-362. <https://doi.org/10.5937/nasvas2403345A>
- Appelbaum, M., Cooper, H., Kline, R. B., Mayo-Wilson, E., Nezu, A. M., & Rao, S. M. (2018). Journal article reporting standards for quantitative research in psychology: The APA Publications and Communications Board task force report. *American Psychologist*, 73(1), 3-25. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000191>
- Awang, N. A. binti, Zakaria, W. N. F. binti W., & Suhaimin, M. F. bin. (2025). A conceptual paper on cognitive and metacognitive strategies in L2 reading among tertiary ESL learners. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 9(24), 249-253. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRIS.2025.924ILEIID0028>
- Bahchevanova-Georgieva, R. (2024). Experiential reading. *Education and Technologies Journal*, 15(2), 385-388. <https://doi.org/10.26883/2010.242.6192>
- Bapir, N. S. M., & Rasul, T. H. (2025). Enhancing EFL college students' reading comprehension through practical reading strategies. 63, (گۆفاری ئەكادیمیای كوردی). <https://doi.org/10.56422/kaj.1.63.745>
- Beauchemin, F., Luo, B., Yong, L., & Zhang, G. (2026). Teaching reading as a complex and multidimensional process. *The Reading Teacher*, 79(5). <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.70039>
- Bogaerds-Hazenbergh, S. T. M., Evers-Vermeul, J., & van den Bergh, H. (2021). A meta-analysis on the effects of text structure instruction on reading comprehension in the upper elementary grades. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 56(3), 435-462. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.311>
- Bugtong, M., Milio, Z., Canuto, P. P., Lumidao, Y., Lumecio, D., Choycawen, M., & Bando, D. (2025). English comics as reading materials and intervention in improving students' reading comprehension. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 83(4), 480-500. <https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/25.83.480>
- Butterfuss, R., Kim, J., & Kendeou, P. (2020). Reading comprehension. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of education*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.865>
- Calafato, R., & Gudim, F. (2022). Literature in contemporary foreign language school textbooks in Russia: Content, approaches, and readability. *Language Teaching Research*, 26(5), 826-846. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820917909>
- Duke, N. K., Ward, A. E., & Pearson, P. D. (2021). The science of reading comprehension instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 74(6), 663-672. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1993>
- Flake, J. K., & Fried, E. I. (2020). Measurement schmeasurement: Questionable measurement practices and how to avoid them. *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science*, 3(4), 456-465. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2515245920952393>
- Gauche, G., & Pfeiffer Flores, E. (2022). The role of inferences in reading comprehension: A

- Haerazi, H., Sumarsono, D., Utama, I. M. P., & Irawan, L. A. (2025). Analyzing EFL learners' learning needs in developing the ecoliteracy-based teaching materials in reading skills. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, 7(11), 1181–1194. <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i11.11404>
- Halberg, H., & Lyngstad, A. B. (2022). Å bevege seg i og gjennom tekster. Skjønnlitterær lesing i tverrfaglig undervisning om rovdyr på mellomtrinnet. *Nordic Journal of Literacy Research*, 8(2), 64–81. <https://doi.org/10.23865/njlr.v8.3178>
- Handley, M. A., Lyles, C. R., McCulloch, C., & Cattamanchi, A. (2018). Selecting and improving quasi-experimental designs in effectiveness and implementation research. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 39(1), 5–25. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-040617-014128>
- Iswati, L. (2022). Promoting a multidimensional literacy framework through texts and tasks for EFL reading class. *Humanitatis: Journal of Language and Literature*, 8(2), 317–328. <https://doi.org/10.30812/humanitatis.v8i2.1824>
- Ivey, G., & Friddle, K.-A. (2023). Expanding meaningfulness for struggling readers. In *International encyclopedia of education* (4th ed., pp. 398–407). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.07056-1>
- Jinhui, G. J. G., & Kang, H.-S. (2025). Reconsidering literature curriculum development from a perspective of narrative neuroscience. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 8(8). <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v8-i8-100>
- Keller, T. A., Mason, R. A., Legg, A. E., & Just, M. A. (2024). The neural and cognitive basis of expository text comprehension. *npj Science of Learning*, 9(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-024-00232-y>
- Lakens, D. (2013). Calculating and reporting effect sizes to facilitate cumulative science: A practical primer for t-tests and ANOVAs. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00863>
- Li, H., Gan, Z., Leung, S. O., & An, Z. (2022). The impact of reading strategy instruction on reading comprehension, strategy use, motivation, and self-efficacy in Chinese university EFL students. *SAGE Open*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221086659>
- Limbeng, Z. N., Nisa, K., Fadillah, F., & Lubis, Y. (2026). Language processing in EFL learners: A psycholinguistic study of lexical access and sentence comprehension. *International Journal Multidisciplinary Science*, 5(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.56127/ijml.v5i1.2498>
- Maina, M., & Papalini, V. (2023). Potencialidades del uso de actividades lúdico-literarias en la comprensión lectora inicial. *Pensamiento Educativo: Revista de Investigación Educativa Latinoamericana*, 60(1). <https://doi.org/10.7764/PEL.60.1.2023.2>
- Mar, R. A., Li, J., Nguyen, A. T. P., & Ta, C. P. (2021). Memory and comprehension of narrative versus expository texts: A meta-analysis. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 28(3), 732–749. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-020-01853-1>
- Methnani, M. (2025). The importance of teaching reading comprehension among learner of English as a foreign language (EFL). 2297–2290, 38(10, *مجلة العلوم الشاملة*). <https://doi.org/10.65405/f21p8d06>
- Montenegro, R., Patricia, D., Alcivar, Z., Fernanda, C., Crespo, F., Eugenia, M., Bedoya, B., & Victoria, M. (2024). La narrativa y los cuentos como estrategia interactiva de aprendizaje en la educación imaginativa: una visión metodología desde las ciencias sociales. *Revista Interdisciplinaria de Educación, Salud, Actividad Física y Deporte*, 1(3), 108–125. <https://doi.org/10.70262/riesafd.v1i3.2024.28>
- Moyano, C., & Stella, L. (2024). Dimensiones integradas. *Societas*, 26(2), 279–307. <https://doi.org/10.48204/societas.v26n2.5349>
- Mu'alimah, I. K., Niwangtika, W., & Nisak, W. K. (2023). Pemanfaatan cerita fantasi untuk meningkatkan kemampuan literasi membaca di sekolah dasar. *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research*, 3(1), 447–454. <https://doi.org/10.31004/innovative.v3i1.3324>
- Mulyarti, M. (2025). Enhancing reading comprehension through inspiring novels: A pre-experimental study in an EFL context. *Jurnal Edukasi Saintifik*, 5(2), 87–95.

<https://doi.org/10.56185/jes.v5i2.928>

- Muñiz, L. L., & Labra, G. H. (2025). Comprensión lectora en la educación obligatoria y superior. *Ibero Ciencias - Revista Científica y Académica*, 4(3), 4651–4672. <https://doi.org/10.63371/ic.v4.n3.a361>
- Nilforoushan, S., Rashtchi, M., & Abbasian, G.-R. (2023). Exploring the perceived and real metacognitive reading strategies of Iranian EFL learners: Different text types in focus. *SAGE Open*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231164567>
- OECD. (2019). *PISA 2018 assessment and analytical framework*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/b25efab8-en>
- Oktavianti, I. N., Budiwati, T. R., Prayudha, Prayogi, I., & Hidayah, I. N. (2026). Students' attitudes, challenges, and needs in English reading comprehension: Foundations for AI-integrated corpus-based language pedagogy. *Discover Education*, 5(1), 34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-026-01115-7>
- Pan, S. C., & Carpenter, S. K. (2023). Prequestioning and pretesting effects: A review of empirical research, theoretical perspectives, and implications for educational practice. *Educational Psychology Review*, 35(4), 97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-023-09814-5>
- Reiber-Kuijpers, M., Kral, M., & Meijer, P. (2021). Digital reading in a second or foreign language: A systematic literature review. *Computers & Education*, 163, 104115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.104115>
- Robb, T. N., & Ewert, D. (2024). Classroom-based extensive reading: A review of recent research. *Language Teaching*, 57(3), 295–324. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444823000319>
- Saidakhmedovna, Y. D., & Suyarkulovna, N. N. (2026). Reading comprehension and its assessment. *Latin American Journal of Education*, 6(1), 398–402. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18273277>
- Samiei, F., & Ebadi, S. (2021). Exploring EFL learners' inferential reading comprehension skills through a flipped classroom. *Research and Practice in Technology Enhanced Learning*, 16(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41039-021-00157-9>
- Saraceni, C. (2022). Materials for developing reading skills. In *The Routledge handbook of materials development for language teaching* (pp. 233–243). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/b22783-20>
- Seger, B. T., Wannagat, W., & Nieding, G. (2021). Children's surface, textbase, and situation model representations of written and illustrated written narrative text. *Reading and Writing*, 34(6), 1415–1440. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-020-10118-1>
- Shin, J. (2020). A meta-analysis of the relationship between working memory and second language reading comprehension: Does task type matter? *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 41(4), 873–900. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716420000272>
- Stevani, M., Prayuda, M. S., Sari, D. W., Marianus, S. M., & Tarigan, K. E. (2022). Evaluation of contextual clues: EFL proficiency in reading comprehension. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 10(3), 993–1002. <https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v10i3.7076>
- Suggate, S., & Lenhard, W. (2022). Mental imagery skill predicts adults' reading performance. *Learning and Instruction*, 80, 101633. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2022.101633>
- Suhaila, J., Aisyah, S. M. R., Harahap, E. B. K., & Lubis, Y. (2025). Improving reading comprehension skills in reading. *Invention: Journal Research and Education Studies*, 477–487. <https://doi.org/10.51178/invention.v6i2.2564>
- Teng, M. F., & Cui, Y. (2025). The role of vocabulary knowledge, morphological awareness, and working memory in reading comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 37(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.64152/10125/67481>
- Vettori, G., Casado Ledesma, L., Tesone, S., & Tarchi, C. (2024). Key language, cognitive and higher-order skills for L2 reading comprehension of expository texts in English as foreign language students: A systematic review. *Reading and Writing*, 37(9), 2481–2519. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-023-10479-3>
- Wisudawati, A. F., Wulandari, R. M., Isa, M., Permatasari, I., Aziz, M., & Mudhofir, I. (2025). Unlocking the power of pre-reading: Strategies for better comprehension and engagement. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Sastra Inggris*, 5(3), 134–143.

<https://doi.org/10.55606/jupensi.v5i3.6067>

Zhao, H., & Aryadoust, V. (2025). A meta-analysis of the reliability of second language reading comprehension assessment tools. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 47(1), 388–416.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263124000627>