The Effects of Guided Reading Instruction on Elementary Students' Accuracy and Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

Guided reading instruction has been and remains a topic of interest among English teachers and language instructors due to the increased exposure to various schools of thought on teaching reading. Reading is a complex interaction process between the reader and the text that involves decoding and comprehension skills. Understanding guided reading instruction helps ease teachers' and learners' teaching and learning processes. The purpose of this study was to determine if guided reading positively affects elementary students' reading accuracy and comprehension. Data was collected through the use of Fountas and Pinnell running records and anecdotal records of 40 elementary students and interviews with teachers. The running records provided quantitative data on students' reading accuracy and reading comprehension. Anecdotal records and teacher interview provided qualitative data based on the students' reading behaviours. The findings revealed that most students progress in their reading levels and improved in their accuracy and comprehension scores after the implementation of guided reading while the analysis revealed no significant difference in the relationship between guided reading instruction and Grade 1 reading comprehension. Comprehension skills need to be reinforced in the reading instruction constantly to strengthen elementary students' reading comprehension. The implications of this study are that teachers should take advantage of this small group-based reading instruction to meet the needs of every reader in their classroom. This awareness could help teachers make more informed decisions and ultimately help aroused more attention in this area for improvement in reading.

Keywords: Guided reading, reading accuracy, reading comprehension, running records, anecdotal records

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Reading is the gateway to learning; it opens the doorway to endless knowledge, information, and learning opportunities. Figuratively, reading is like getting a fresh pair of eyes. It enables people to encounter different cultures and places without going there; readers can acquire information, participate in democracy, and for professional achievement. Reading transforms lives. Having the ability to read requires a string of skills that involve decoding, comprehending, and processing.

Learning to read is a complex task, and it is not a natural process. Buckingham and Castles (2019) pointed out that explicit education is necessary for most children to enable the complicated learning process of reading in an alphabetic language like English.

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Guided reading (GR) is a structured small-group instruction tailored to provide literacy support based on the learner's level. This form of reading instruction uses needs-based groupings, texts with varying degrees of difficulty, and a focus on developing the skill to equip independent reading (Rog, 2012).

During the session, the readers are given the opportunity to interact with the text that precisely offers the appropriate amount of support and challenge. The teacher's role usually involves providing scaffolding and prompting as needed. The goal of guided reading is to build confidence and independence by providing strategy and guidance to support readers and transition to a gradual release of responsibility, leading to automaticity.

A large body of literature suggested that guided reading instruction positively affected students' reading abilities (AlYousef, 2021; Gabl *et al*.,2007; Huber, 2011& DeVos, 2012). Researchers found that the components of guided reading, especially the use of levelled text (Gabl *et al*., 2007) and practical, explicit comprehension skill instruction, indicated an increase in reading comprehension of struggling readers (DeVos, 2012). Therefore, in this study, the researchers investigated the effects of guided reading on elementary students' reading accuracy and comprehension and students' reading behaviours. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the effects of guided reading instruction on elementary students' reading accuracy and comprehension? (2) How does guided reading affect students' reading behaviours?

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

Lev Vygotsky's theories served as theoretical basis on which Fountas and Pinnell (2006) created the GR framework, providing the framework's justification. Three fundamental ideas from Vygotsky's work supported GR: authentic learning takes place in the zone of proximal development, language serves as the primary form of communication, and learning takes place in the social context (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Al Yousef, 2021). The social constructivism theory is one of the underlying teaching and learning theories embedded in guided reading instruction. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner (McLeod, 2019). The term "proximal" implies the skills the learners are close to mastering. As cited in McLeod (2018), the notion of Bruner's (1986) scaffolding aims to help a child achieves a specific goal. Guided reading is based on the belief that the best learning occurs when a reader is assisted by an educator or expert "other" in reading and comprehending a text with clear but limited guidance (Department of Education and Training Victoria, 2023).

The teacher's role in guided reading is multifield, namely, to meet and plan reading instruction based on students' reading level and scaffold their learning through selecting level text that is just right. The teacher also acts as a facilitator, helping and connecting with the students while teaching them to read and clearly instructing after reading the text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, as cited in Bruce, 2010). Echoing Vygotsky's theory, the use of guided reading should enable students to advance from not finishing the task with the teacher to completing the task with the teacher's support. Despite this theoretical alignment, several critical research gaps remain. First, the effectiveness of guided reading in supporting diverse learners - especially those who struggle with reading, are English language learners, or come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds-has not been clearly established. In addition, it remains unclear

whether teachers are adequately trained to identify and respond to individual students' ZPDs, and whether their instructional decisions are truly targeted to those zones.

The quality and adaptability of scaffolding within guided reading is another underexplored area. A limited number of studies have examined whether teachers dynamically adjust their support in response to students' developmental progress or changing needs over time. This lack of focus may hinder a full understanding of how effectively guided reading operates as a ZPD-based instructional strategy. Moreover, while many studies highlight short-term gains in reading fluency and comprehension, there is limited insight into the long-term effects of guided reading on students' ability to become independent readers. Research has yet to determine whether scaffolded instruction within the ZPD fosters sustained growth in reading accuracy and comprehension beyond the classroom context. This present study addressed these gaps by examining how guided reading was implemented across diverse elementary classrooms, the extent to which it aligned with students' evolving ZPDs, and whether it promoted lasting improvements in reading development.

Guided reading instruction makes room for differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is the process of identifying and adapting lessons to students' learning strengths, needs, and interests (Sparks, 2015). Teachers can witness their students' reading books with proficient processing every day because readers interact with texts in their control (with supported teaching). Additionally, it is critical to encourage pupils to study more difficult texts so they can advance as readers by using the text gradient as a "ladder of advancement" (Clay, 1991, as cited in Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). There are several facets to a differentiated approach to reading instruction. Polk (2020) points out a few factors to consider when attempting to deliver excellent learning experiences for all students: student readiness, learning style, and interest. Critical considerations in the design of instruction include topics like content, interest, and learning processes.

Fountas and Pinnell (1996) became the first to popularise GR in the United States of America. Although GR was initially utilised in the USA, small group instructions were used to bring it to New Zealand and Australia in the 1980s (Pinnell & Fountas, 2010, as cited in Al Yousef, 2021). Guided reading is one of many balanced literacy strategies regularly used, along with interactive read-aloud, shared reading, mini-lessons, and individual reading. Rog (2012) proposed that an ideal guided reading session will be 20 minutes chunks with rotation among small groups and scheduled three days of work. While other students are engaged in independent reading to practise and other productive literacy activities, teachers can work with children with similar reading levels and needs during the scheduled time allocated for guided reading (Polk, 2020).

The guided reading process is conducted in a systematic and orderly manner following the steps. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2012), there are six to nine steps the guided reading process which can be flexibly modified by the teacher. First, the teacher gathers information about the reader to determine the learning emphasis. Second, the teacher carefully selects and analyses the texts to use. Third, the teacher introduces the text by giving. Fourth, invite the children to discuss the meaning of the text. During the interaction, inject one or two teaching points. Next, engage the students in letter or word work activity. As an extension, the teacher can provide additional activities such as writing about reading. Lastly, the teacher reflects on the lesson and plans the following lesson. Implementing guided reading takes time and effort, it involves planning, observing and documenting.

Further, Fountas and Pinnell (1996) also claim that "Running Record" is a tool for coding, scoring and analysing a child's precise reading behaviours. It provides both quantitative and qualitative information." Running Records, created by Marie Clay, is a method of accurately and objectively recording what a young reader says and does while orally reading continuous text. The task is 'authentic' in the sense that

students are asked to read in the same manner as they are in the classroom reading programme (Clay, 2000). The purpose of running records is that it gives informative records which allows teachers to observe students' reading behaviours such as strategies students use while problem-solving. Moreover, it also helps teachers to make sound teaching decisions, to track the progress of their students, and report to parents (Department of Education and Children's Services, Literacy Secretariat, 2011). Using this data, the school leaders can assess the effectiveness of the agreed-upon whole-site approach to literacy improvement. Based on the scoring system, if the students score 95-100% this means the text is easy, the score 90-94% means the text is instructional while the score of 89 and below means the text is hard. The texts that a student read should provide an appropriate level of challenge for the student's learning and should not be too easy or too difficult (Department of Education and Children's Services, Literacy Secretariat, 2011). Furthermore, teachers are learning that accurate reading is not the only goal; proficiency also requires efficient, independent self-monitoring behaviour and the ability to search for and use a variety of sources of information in the text.

Accuracy measures whether students are reading books at the appropriate level. The accuracy score of the student would indicate the level of difficulty of the text. A study conducted by Mesmer (2010) explored first graders' accuracy and reading rate in highly decodable and qualitatively levelled texts. The participants were seventy-four first graders. They read both levelled and decodable texts with and without practice and then reread the same texts throughout the year. Decodable texts are books that can be read by using letter-sound relationships that students have learned. Leveled texts are texts used during guided reading which follows the levelling system. The accuracy results of both decodable and levelled texts were inconclusive due to the contradiction shown in the analysis. In the end, Mesmer concluded "The analysis of accuracy across the first-grade year showed uniform growth regardless of text and inconclusive results for texts".

Reading comprehension is a complex skill that can be taught only through the effective processing of connected and coherent texts. It is an essential skill that helps us understand what we are reading. As cited in Heston (2011), Fountas and Pinnell (2006) also stressed that comprehension is the central core of our ability to think logically which then broadens our reasoning and deepens our understanding. The emphasis on comprehension is directed to the benefits students could gain by understanding what they read. When a student struggles to answer comprehension questions, it indicates that the text is too difficult for him or her. Therefore, the information from the text being read is not retained. General comprehension strategies involve visualizing, synthesizing, asking questions and retelling. After reading, the teacher skilfully guides a discussion in which students discuss their inferences, predictions, synthesis of new learning. The discussion or comprehension conversation can deepen a student's understanding of the text and extend the student's language abilities (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010).

Chamli (2022) defined independent reading level as reader's capacity to independently read accurately, fluently, and comprehend the content. The function of guided reading is to give students the opportunity to read books constantly and independently. During guided reading instructions, the students will be exposed to the same book for several sessions. Each book contained different teaching points that the teacher can draw out. After a few sessions, the former instructional level becomes the new independent level, and the teacher selects a more difficult material for instruction. Ford and Opitz (2011) pointed out that modelling specific reading strategies such as answering questions, questioning text, making connection and prediction are ways to teach the necessary skill to be independent readers. Through this process, students internalize the skills necessary to read more advanced texts. Therefore, it builds their

reading independence. Young's studies (2019) revealed that increased rigour, regularity, and duration of guided reading teaching can improve Grade 2 students' independent reading levels.

Based on the previous literature, apart from concerns about the ZPD, there are some other emerging gaps that arise. Firstly, definitional and instructional variability in guided reading. Although guided reading is widely implemented in elementary classrooms, its definition and application vary significantly across the literature. There is no single, universally accepted model, which has led to diverse interpretations in both research and practice. Some scholars align closely with the structured framework proposed by Fountas and Pinnell (2012; 2006), which emphasizes small-group instruction using levelled texts, along with systematic teacher scaffolding. Others adopt a broader perspective, incorporating a range of instructional strategies under the umbrella of guided reading. These definitional differences are reflected in the practical implementation of guided reading, particularly in terms of group size, session frequency, and instructional objectives. For instance, Young (2019) found that more frequent and intentionally structured guided reading sessions led to measurable gains in reading outcomes among second-grade students. However, Hansen (2016) reported that when guided reading strategies were applied inconsistently, they did not support comprehension growth, especially for struggling or advanced readers. These findings suggest that not only the definition but also the fidelity and consistency of guided reading implementation may significantly influence its effectiveness.

Secondly, instructional outcomes of guided reading. Although guided reading is widely used to support early literacy development, research findings on its effectiveness remain mixed. While many studies report beneficial outcomes, the evidence is not uniformly conclusive. For instance, Teets (2017) found that guided reading significantly improved students' reading fluency, yet it had little impact on reading accuracy. Similarly, Mwaura (2018) documented gains in reading achievement following guided reading interventions; however, these improvements did not reach statistical significance. In contrast, Denton *et al*. (2014) compared guided reading with explicit instructional methods and found that the latter produced greater improvements in phonemic decoding, oral reading fluency, and reading comprehension among at-risk primary-grade students. These conflicting results suggest that while guided reading may be effective in certain contexts, its impact could be enhanced when used in conjunction with more structured, explicit instructional approaches-in particular for students who experience difficulty with foundational reading skills.

Finally, numerous studies have explored the implementation of guided reading in elementary education, particularly from Grades 1 through 5, with a strong concentration of research originating in North America. The literature review reveals that guided reading began in Australia before being adopted and further developed in Canada and the United States by researchers such as Fountas and Pinnell (2012; 2006). This likely accounts for the abundance of North American studies available for scholarly reference. In contrast, there is a noticeable scarcity of research examining the use of guided reading within Malaysian primary schools, suggesting a potential lack of awareness or integration of this instructional method in the local context. Understanding how guided reading is applied internationally provides a valuable foundation for further inquiry. Investigating its effectiveness across different educational systems, cultural settings, and student populations is essential. This study aimed to contribute to the limited body of research on guided reading in Malaysia by applying the approach with elementary students. In doing so, it sought to enhance local knowledge of guided reading practices and explore its potential as a reading instruction or intervention method in both public and private Malaysian primary schools.

3.0   METHOD

This research used a mixed method design which consisted of both quantitative and qualitative approach. It followed the embedded design which engaged in gathering quantitative data and then moved on to collect qualitative data to explain or elaborate on quantitative results. This study was conducted in an international school located in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. The research site was an international school that served over 244 students from grades Pre-K through Fifth Grade. The First and Second Grade classrooms from the 2023 school year were used to gather reading data. The reading data were gathered from 40 students. The students in the study were of mixed ethnic groups including Chinese, Malaysian, Korean, Japanese, Indian, Indonesian, Australian, American, and Canadian.

The research instrument that was used included Fountas and Pinnell (2012) running records, anecdotal records, and interviews. The data collected from running records and anecdotal records enabled the researcher to observe and quantify student reading behaviours and improvement. A running record is an assessment tool that provides insight into a student's reading. It provides information on the following: a score of word reading accuracy, an analysis of a reader's errors, and self-corrections (Clay, 2000). The quantitative data such as scores or numerical information gathered through the accuracy and comprehension scores will be systematically analysed and assess the frequency of factors to provide a general picture of the research problem (Creswell, 2012). The qualitative aspect of this research was to gain a better and more refined understanding of teachers' observations and comments on the students' reading accuracy, comprehension, and reading behaviours. The interview was conducted with two elementary teachers who provided their students' running records and guided reading plans. The guided reading anecdotal records are the brief notes teachers took as they observed children. The teachers of the selected grade who were the commentators of their students' reading assessment were interviewed. Furthermore, the qualitative approach also analysed individuals' definitions and views based on their experiences; thus, it helped to provide a clear explanation of the meaning in people's lives. This approach was consistent in finding relevant information in response to the research questions.

In this study, there were three data collection periods. The first data collection happened from late February to mid-March 2023. During this period, the teacher participants assessed students' reading levels at the start of the school term. After the first phase of data collection is completed, the researcher met with the teacher participants to go through the running records and anecdotal records to examine the observed reading behaviours and areas to work on. The reading performance of each student was evaluated by examining their individual running records and then looking at them as a whole to identify any patterns. The anecdotal notes included comments on whether the student's reading comprehension is not proficient, limited or proficient, word recognition, fluency, ability to retell and so forth. Furthermore, the data was analysed to create different levels of guided reading instructional in small groups. The aim was that the groups would receive at least 4 guided reading sessions over the course of four weeks. The second part of the data collection involved collecting guided reading plans from the teacher participants. The researchers provided a guided reading plan as reference for teacher participants to construct their planning. The meeting date with teacher participants was scheduled based on the teachers' availability during the week. During the meeting, the researcher interviewed the teacher participants by reviewing the guided reading plan based on their reading needs with a specific frequency of guided reading sessions and teaching points. The interview was semi-structured. The study involved teacher participants conducting a minimum of four guided reading sessions with students. During these sessions, the teachers recorded their

observations using guided reading observation recording sheets. After completing the sessions, the teachers passed on the anecdotal records to the researcher. The researchers then transcribed and analysed the interviews using thematic content analysis.

The third part of the data collection took place from early May to late May 2023 (refer Table 1). Similar to Phase 1 data collection, the teacher participants assessed students' reading levels in the middle of the first school term. This would follow by a one-to-one conversation with each teacher participant who went through the running records and anecdotal records to examine the reading progress as well as to assess how much students' reading levels improved after receiving guided reading training.

Table 1 Data Collection Procedure

Qualitative and Quantitative Methods of Data Collection		
Phase 1	**Phase 2**	**Phase 3**
Early to mid of March 2023 (start of the school term)	Collect guided reading plans from Grade 1 & 2 Teachers	Early May to late May 2023 (middle of the 1st school term)
Collected running records (Grade 1 & 2)	Interview session to review the guided reading plans and next step	Collected running records (Grade 1 & 2)
Types of data: • Numeric score (accuracy and comprehension score) • Anecdotal record (teacher's observation of students' reading behaviour)		Types of data: • Numericc score (accuracy and comprehension score) • Anecdotal record (teacher's observation of students' reading behaviour)
Consulted and discussed with the teacher the running record and anecdotal records	Conducted 4 sessions of guided reading for the planned reading groups	Consulted and discussed with the teacher the running record and anecdotal records

Data analysis is the process of evaluating data by using logical and analytical reasoning to provide the findings and give explanations to the research questions in a conclusive way (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Figure 1 shows the data analysis procedure of the study. The quantitative data collected from running records such as the accuracy and comprehension score were compiled and entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 for analysis. The qualitative data was derived from the analysis of running records, anecdotal records and interviews. Two layers of data analysis were conducted. In the first layer, numerical data from pre- and post-reading assessments were compared. The pre-test took place in March 2023 before the students received four sessions of guided reading instruction. The post-test occurred in May 2023 to evaluate any improvements after the instruction. The pre-test provided an overview of the students' initial abilities and knowledge. The second layer of data analysis focused on qualitative data and involved analysing running records, anecdotal records, and semi-structured interviews. These qualitative methods aim to provide deeper insights into the students' reading progress and experiences during the guided reading sessions.
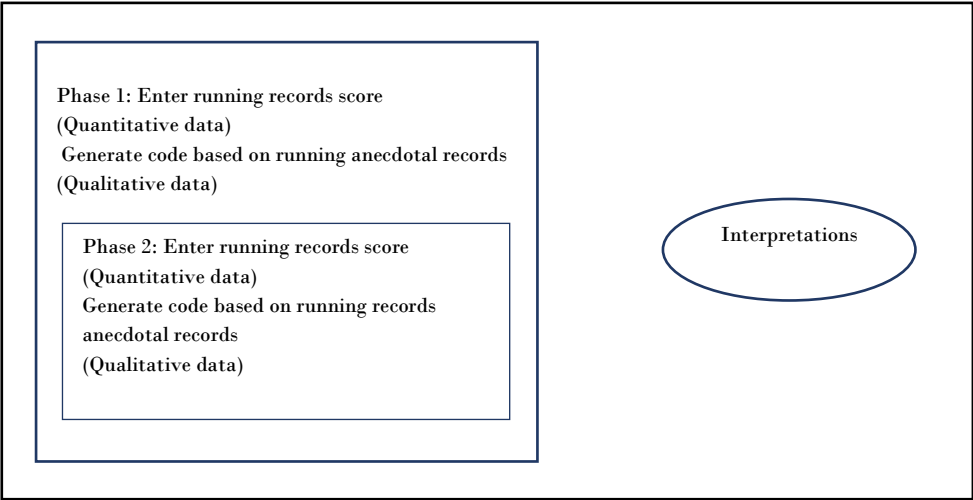
Phase 1: Enter running records score
(Quantitative data)
 Generate code based on running anecdotal records
(Qualitative data)

Phase 2: Enter running records score
(Quantitative data)
Generate code based on running records
anecdotal records
(Qualitative data)

Interpretations

Figure 1 Data Analysis Procedure

4.0   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to examine the effect of guided reading instruction on elementary students' reading accuracy and comprehension by comparing if there was any significant difference in the students' reading accuracy and comprehension before and after the intervention Furthermore, it also determined the relationship between guided reading and students' reading independence.

Table 2 Comparison of Statistical Analysis between Pre-test and Post-test Reading Accuracy Score

Accuracy Score	Mean	Standard Deviation (σ)	Minimum	Maximum
Gr1 Pre_Test	84.25	19.98914	22	100
Gr1 Post_Test	92.85	8.43723	73	100
Gr2 Pre_Test	95.2750	3.95858	87	100
Gr2 Post_Test	97.7500	1.65036	94	100

Table 2 displays the score increments between the pretest and post-test. For Grade 1 students, the mean score increased from 84.25 to 92.85, indicating an improvement of 8.6 points. The standard deviation decreased from 19.98914 to 8.43723, showing a reduction in score gaps. Likewise, Grade 2 students showed an increase in scores, with a mean score of 95.275 in the pre-test and 97.75 in the post-test, a difference of 2.475 points. Both grades demonstrated improvement in reading ability, and a paired sample t-Test was conducted to assess the significance of these differences. The accuracy score of a reading test below 90% indicates a hard reading level, 90-94% shows an instructional level, and 95-100% shows an independent level. The pre-test mean score for Grade 2 students is 95.275, indicating that most

of them are reading at an independent level, which may be influenced by factors like reading developmental skill and exposure to guided reading instruction or support.

During guided reading instruction, the teachers focused on decoding and reading strategies to improve reading accuracy. Grade 1 students were observed using picture cues, eye tracking, and cross-checking behaviors, while Grade 2 students employed chunking or sounding out and cross-checking. The post-guided reading instruction showed an 8.6-point increase in reading accuracy for Grade 1 students and a 2.475-point improvement for Grade 2 students, indicating higher increments for Grade 1. Additionally, Grade 1 saw a significant increase in the minimum score, suggesting the guided reading instruction was more effective for struggling readers compared to independent readers in Grade 2.

Table 2 Paired Sample t-Test for Reading Accuracy Score

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Grade 1	-8.6000	15.48310	3.46213	-15.84631	-1.35369	-2.484	19	.022
Grade 2	-2.4750	3.31454	.72115	-4.02625	-.92375	-3.339	19	.003

From the paired t-Test (see Table 3) performed, Grade 1 showed α=.022 and Grade 2's p-value was .003. Both p-values were less than 0.05 which showed that there was a significant difference between both tests before and after the intervention. This demonstrated a significant effect of implementation of guided reading on improving Grade 1 and 2 students' reading accuracy. Regarding accuracy rates, the results of the study confirmed a clear connection between guided reading and reading fluency. The accuracy rates remained consistently high, supporting this positive correlation. However, it is important to note that in this particular study, the accuracy rates data primarily served to validate the credibility and dependability of the running record findings. In addition, the accuracy rates demonstrated that teachers chose texts that aligned with participants' fluency levels and independent reading abilities. All in all, the data has proven that the guided reading instruction had increased sample abilities in reading thus improving their overall achievements in reading accuracy.

Table 3 Comparison of Statistical Analysis between Pre-test and Post-test Reading Comprehension Score

Comprehension score	Mean	Standard Deviation(σ)	Minimum	Maximum
Gr1 Pre_Test	71.5500	24.88812	16	100
Gr1 Post_Test	77.2500	19.29787	50	100
Gr2 Pre_Test	59.4000	24.79898	0	100
Gr2 Post_Test	78.7000	16.22247	39	100

Table 4 shows the score increments between the pretest and post-test for Grade 1 comprehension. The pre-test mean score was 71.55, which increased to 77.25 in the post-test, reflecting a 5.7-point enhancement. The standard deviation decreased from 24.88812 to 19.29787 in the post-test. The minimum score also increased from 16% to 50%, indicating improvement as all samples attempted some comprehension questions. For Grade 2 students, the reading comprehension mean score increased by 19.3 points, and the minimum score improved from 0% to 39%, showing progress in their reading comprehension. However, there was no difference in the maximum score among Grade 1 and 2 samples, as some samples had answered correctly which reflected understanding.

Table 4 Paired Sample t-Test Reading Comprehension Score

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Grade 1	-5.70000	25.97793	5.80884	-17.85804	-17.85804	-.981	-.981	.339
Grade 2	-19.3000	26.77214	5.98643	-31.82975	-6.77025	-3.224	19	.004

By examining the t-Test, it was proven that there was no significant difference in Grade 1 learners' reading comprehension between pre-test and post-test implementing guided reading despite there was score improvement shown in the mean score. This could be related to the rising difficulty of comprehension questions, as many Grade 1 children continue to struggle to answer them properly. This is seen in the case of some samples (n=7) who decreased in their comprehension scores. This demonstrates that they have not improved their comprehension, and guided reading instruction might not have direct benefit on comprehension for these learners. Various factors such as behavioural issues, learner's engagement during small group instruction, school events and so forth could influence students not effectively benefitted from guided reading instruction. Conversely, the t-Test results revealed that there was significant difference in Grade 2 learners' reading comprehension between pre-test and post-test after the implementation of guided reading instruction. This was supported by the findings as 65% of Grade 2 students had increased their comprehension scores. Similar to the studies conducted by Galb et. al. (2007) and Deegan and Chanin (2010), there was implication of improvement in grade two students' reading comprehension after implementing Guided Reading groups as shown in comprehension assessment and Developmental Reading Assessment.

The Grade 2 guided reading instruction focused on comprehension, with 45% of participants' anecdotal records showing students answering questions within and beyond the text. Students engaged with texts requiring them to answer inferential questions, frequently requiring multiple prompts. In May 2023, a noticeable 15% decrease was observed in students facing challenges with inferential questions, indicating the positive impact of the comprehension strategies taught. However, there was no significant difference found in the relationship between guided reading instruction and Grade 1 reading comprehension. To strengthen elementary students' reading comprehension, it is essential to consistently reinforce comprehension skills in reading instruction. Overall, guided reading instruction had a positive impact on Grade 2 reading comprehension based on the May reading assessment.

Table 5 Fountas & Pinnell Text Level Gradient

Time of Year	Entrance to grade			1st Interval		
Grade	Below	At	Above	Below	At	Above
1	<B	C	D+	<D	E	F+
2	<H	I	J+	<I	J	K+

This reading level was categorized based on the F&P Text Level Gradient (see Table 5) that determined the reading expectations for each grade level. In accordance with the time of the year, the entrance grade period for this study was March 2023, and the first interval was May 2023. In F&P Text Level Gradient, reading levels A to C were categorized as 'Early Emergent Reader', reading levels D to J fell into the 'Emergent Reader' category, reading levels K to P which went into the 'Early Fluent Reader' category, and reading levels Q to Z fell into the 'Fluent Reader' category. The reading levels of Grade 1 and 2 student sample ranged from level A to P (see Table 6).

Table 6 Participants' Reading Levels in Grade 1

Sample	Reading level (March 2023)	Reading level (May 2023)	Level up
A1	E	G	+2
B1	E	G	+2
C1	A	B	+1
D1	B	D	+2
E1	C	C	0
F1	E	G	+2
G1	A	B	+1
H1	D	F	+2
I1	E	G	+2
J1	B	F	+4
K1	B	F	+4
L1	E	G	+2
M1	D	G	+3
N1	B	D	+2
O1	A	C	+2
P1	B	D	+2
Q1	A	D	+3
R1	A	B	+1
S1	C	G	+4
T1	B	F	+4

Table 7 Participants' Reading Levels in Grade 2

Sample	Reading level (March 2023)	Reading level (May 2023)	Level up
A2	B	D	+2
B2	D	E	+1
C2	E	E	0
D2	F	G	+1
E2	E	E	0
F2	C	D	+1
G2	C	D	+1
H2	B	D	+2
I2	B	E	+3
J2	C	E	+2
K2	C	D	+1
L2	D	F	+2
M2	H	K	+2
N2	G	L	+5
O2	I	J	+1
P2	G	G	0
Q2	I	K	+2
R2	I	J	+1
S2	N	P	+2
T2	I	I	0

As shown in Table 6, 19 out of 20 Grade 1 students had increased in their reading level by a minimum of 1 level to a maximum of 4 levels. Most independent readers who had high accuracy and comprehension scores moved up to four reading levels by May 2023. There was only 1 student, student E1 who stayed on at the same level. The reader faced difficulties and was unable to progress to a higher level because of challenges in comprehending the text. As for Grade 2 students (see Table 7), 16 out of 20 had enhanced their reading level by a minimum of one level to a maximum of three levels. It was noticeable that four Grade 2 students remained at the same level as they demonstrated limited comprehension of the text.

During guided reading instruction, both Grade 1 and Grade 2 students participated in structured small groups tailored to their individual reading abilities and needs. They were explicitly taught reading strategies such as book walk, making connections, and making predictions to independently handle unfamiliar texts. Teachers observed students' interactions with the text, noted their reading behaviors, and prompted them to persevere through challenging passages, encouraging rereading for comprehension. The teachers also motivated students to tackle more difficult texts using the "ladder of advancement" concept from Fountas and Pinnell (2012). Furthermore, as highlighted in anecdotal records, the frequency of self-correction revealed an important insight into how guided reading enhances reading independence. Chamli (2020) also highlighted that scaffolding and modeling of reading strategies cross-check to confirm during guided reading instruction help to improve student reading independence.

Even though most Grade 1 and Grade 2 students had increased in their reading levels, it was worth examining the reading level expectations of the students. In view of Grade 1 and 2 students' reading level expectations, there were some improvements in terms of 11 students who read below grade level has reduced to 9 students while 7 students who read above grade level has increased to 11 students, indicating 4 students were reading surpass their grade level. On the contrary, there were no major changes among

Grade 2 students when it came to meeting the reading expectations. In fact, 75% of Grade 2 students remained reading below at grade level while only 25% of them have met the reading expectations being at grade level and above grade level. This further analysis reveals that guided reading instruction has potentially improved students' reading level, but it does not ensure students' progress and meet reading level expectations. However, it is worth noting that there are various factors that could influence students not meeting the reading expectation such as the duration and frequency of guided reading instruction, loss of instructional time due to behavioural issues, school events and so forth. Berninger *et al*. (2010, as cited in Stuckey, 2018) provided insights on factors contributing to the lack of success for certain students in a small group setting. Despite the benefits of guided reading in fostering reading improvement, some students may not experience the same level of success when evaluated following their participation in group activities. This can be attributed to individual challenges such as attendance, behaviour, and a lack of active involvement in the learning process during group lessons. However, it has been observed that guided reading in the primary grades enhances students' oral reading fluency, phonetic comprehension, and overall reading proficiency (Stuckey, 2018).

In conclusion, both Grade 1 and 2 pupils improved their reading level by an average of 1.5 to 2.25 levels after guided reading instruction. However, the analysis of grade level reading expectation across the first and second grade showed that not all of the students met the reading level expectations, 60% of the sample were reading at below their expected reading level. It is clear that guided reading teaching has the ability to improve pupils' reading levels. Nevertheless, it does not guarantee students' progress and the attainment of reading level expectations.

5.0   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this study, the researchers found out that nearly half of Grade 1 and more than half of Grade 2 students were struggling in reading and were reading at below grade level. However, most students progress in their reading levels and improved in their accuracy and comprehension scores though some still face difficulties, but the numbers are small. At the end of the study, most students were better at decoding and solving unknown words, cross check to confirm when reading and making connection to the text they read. Grade one comprehension skill is still lacking thus teachers need to constantly implement and reinforce comprehension strategies in class. All in all, students need to be given more consistent guided reading instruction through modelling and scaffolding in order to improve reading performance and thus increase their reading confidence and ability to make connections.

The study acknowledges certain limitations and offers recommendations for future research. Firstly, the researchers suggest extending similar studies to different international and public schools in Johor to gather more data and assess the effectiveness of guided reading on elementary students. This expansion would also consider the influence of diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Secondly, future studies should focus on various elementary grades, targeting students reading at or below their grade level. This would help determine whether guided reading improves weak core reading skills in struggling readers. Thirdly, the scope of the research was limited to first and second-grade classrooms, so comparing data from guided reading in another K-5 classroom could be valuable. Moreover, future research could extend the duration of intervention to a full school year to collect more substantial data and enable in-depth exploration of guided reading instruction. Lastly, exploring the integration of guided reading with technology, such as computer-assisted instruction, might enhance students' reading performance.

Guided reading is not a stand-alone reading instruction, it should be an integration in class along with whole class instruction and independent practice. Therefore, guided reading might not take the entire credit for improving student reading comprehension and accuracy instead it is the rudder that steer the reading journey. Teachers should take advantage of this small group-based reading instruction to meet the needs of every reader in their classroom.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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