

Improving Reading Comprehension Through Know–Want–Learned Strategy Among Tenth-Grade Students at SMK Muhammadiyah Jember

Yesi Arfiani¹, Mochammad Hatip², Fitrotul Mufaridah³

English Language Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember, Indonesia

Article Info

Keywords:

Keyword 1; Reading Comprehension
Keyword 2; KWL Strategy
Keyword 3; Classroom Action Research
Keyword 4; Descriptive Text

Article History:

Received : 05/12/2025
Revised : 05/02/2026
Accepted : 12/05/2026
Available Online:
31/07/2026

Abstract

Reading comprehension is one of the most important skills in learning English. Many students still find it difficult to fully understand what they read. This happens because they often lack vocabulary and have no clear strategy for reading. This research aimed to drive the improvement of reading comprehension using the Know-Want-Learned (KWL) strategy. Conducted through Classroom Action Research (CAR), the study was implemented in two cycles involving 19 students of tenth-grade at SMK Muhammadiyah Jember. Each cycle consisted of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. Data were collected through observations, and reading comprehension tests. The findings revealed that students' average reading scores increased from 57.6% in the preliminary study to 64.6% in Cycle 1 and finally to 76.1% in Cycle 2. The findings show that the KWL strategy effectively helps students improve their reading comprehension by encouraging them to recall what they already know, ask meaningful questions before reading, and reflect on what they have learned after engaging with the text. Furthermore, it encouraged students' active participation, and improved their reading scores. This study concludes that the KWL strategy is a useful tool in improving reading comprehension, particularly in understanding descriptive texts within the EFL context. Future researchers are also encouraged to try this strategy with different kinds of texts or in different school settings to see how well it works in other situations.

Introduction

Reading is one of a fundamental skill that is crucial in the learning process and individual development, It enable the students to understand and analyze the texts. Reading comprehension is a critical skill that significantly influences students' academic performance and lifelong learning capability (Thi Thanh Dieu 2015) The ability to comprehend text is not only essential for academic achievement but also lifelong learning and critical thinking skills necessary today (Mekuria, Bushisho, and Wubshet 2024) There

are various factors that make it hard for students to develop their strong reading comprehension. Research show that the use of specific reading strategies has a significant positive impact on reading comprehension. When this strategy systematically taught and practiced can improve students, ability to understanding text effectively (Sun et al. 2021).

Based on the result of PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), only 18% of 16-year-old students in Indonesia achieved at least Level 2 in reading literacy. This means that 82% of students are still below the basic level of reading literacy needed to understand simple texts. This alarming the urgents need the effective pedagogical strategies that can improve students' reading comprehension. The lack of effective reading strategies and proper teaching support can slow down students' progress. Many high school students struggle with reading comprehension, especially during standardized test. This shows that there is a gap between their basic reading skill and their ability to understand and analyze the texts (Yunanda et al. 2022). Therefore, it is important to using teaching methods to improve reading comprehension.

Moreover, the difficulty of reading comprehension as a cognitive process presents additional challenges. To understand texts well, students not only need basic reading skills but also the ability to combine information, make inferences, and analyze texts critically (Dabiri and Kashefian-Naeeni 2021). One major issue in improving reading comprehension is that many teachers use traditional teaching methods that do not actively involve students or help the students to understand the material better. Therefore, getting students engaged in their learning is essential to improving their understanding of what they read.

This study highlight the issue of students' low reading comprehension, which is reflected in their minimal active participation and their difficulty in understanding the text. Based on the preliminary test and also informal interview with the english teacher revealed that students are struggling with their reading comprehension. Data collected from SMK Muhammadiyah Jember especially from grade 10, show that 72.7% of students found that the students difficult to understand the context of the text and did not reach the criteria of success, while 27.3% reached the criteria of success but only recognize some vocabulary and read short sentences. The average reading score among these students is 57.6, indicating a significant gap between skill they have achieved at the criteria of success which is 75.

One promising approach to address this issue is the Know-Want-Learned strategy or also known as KWL strategy, which has become popular in schools. The KWL strategy helps students to activate their prior knowledge, set their learning goals, and reflect on what they

have learned after reading. According to Heriyawati et al, (2021) KWL strategy effectively bring back students' background knowledge and increases their interest in the reading material. Krismalita Sekar Diasti, (2023) found that the implementation of the KWL strategy can motivated and help EFL students more independent in the learning process. The KWL strategy has been found to encourage critical thinking and self-regulation in students. It not only helps with current reading comprehension issues but also provides students with important skills for their academic success. The KWL strategy offers a great opportunity to improve students' reading comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

Based on the background, this study will look at how the Know-Want-Learned strategy can help students improve their reading comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) by using descriptive text. Many students struggle to understand texts and have low literacy skill. This research will explore if the KWL strategy can help students use what they already know, set learning goals, and think more deeply about what they read. The aim is to see if this method can boost reading skill and encourage critical thinking, leading to better teaching practices.

Theoritical Framework

A. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is an important skill that helps students understand, interpret, and connenct with written materials. It means being able to make sense of what you read, which includes not just recognizing words but also using your background knowledge and the context to understand the text better (Wingard, Hermawan, and Dewi 2020).

B. KWL Strategy

The KWL strategy was developed by Donna Ogle in 1986. According to Vy & Ha, (2020) KWL Strategy is a teaching model designed to develop active reading of various texts. The strategy involves three-column table that help students organize their thoughts before and after reading.

C. Descriptive Text

Descriptive texts are a type of writing that aims to provide a detail of a person, place, object, or event, helping readers to visualize the subject through clear descriptions (Stavans and Ehrlich 2024).

Method

This study applied a Classroom Action Research design based on the model by Kemmis and McTaggart, (1988) to improve students' reading comprehension through the Know – Want – Learned strategy followed four key steps: planning, acting observing and reflecting.

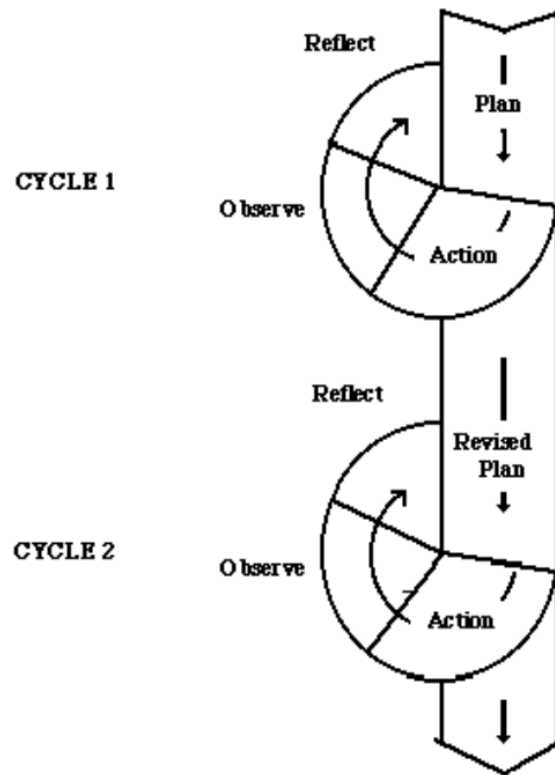


Figure 1. Classroom Action Research model according to Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988) cited in Syah, (2016)

In the planning the researcher worked with the english teacher to identify students' difficulties in reading and to design lesson plans using descriptive texts. In the acting stage introduced the KWL strategy in class, guiding students to write the KWL table. The observing stage involved monitoring students' participation and how they engaged with the learning process. Finally in the reflecting stage the result were reviewed to see what worked well and what needed to be improved for the teaching. The parcitipants were 19 students from class X at SMK Muhammadiyah Jember and the instruments used were reading comprehension tests and observation sheets. The reading tests were in multiple-choice format, consisting of 20 items focused on paragraph, sentence, and word-level comprehension was given after each cycle, Students' reading scores were analyzed using

percentage calculations to determine improvements. The observation sheets were used to describe student behavior and the implementation of the KWL strategy while in the learning process.

Findings and Discussion

This study was conducted to improve students' reading comprehension using the KWL (Know–Want–Learned) strategy through Classroom Action Research (CAR). The process went through two cycles, and each showed progress in students' comprehension skills. The results from both cycles showed how the KWL strategy helped students become more involved in learning, especially in understanding descriptive texts.

Result of the cycle one

The first cycle was carried out in two classroom meetings. In this phase, the Know–Want–Learned (KWL) strategy was introduced and implemented to help students develop their reading comprehension using descriptive texts. Each meeting followed the steps of Classroom Action Research: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

During the planning stage, the researcher collaborated with the English teacher to design lessons that addressed students' main difficulties—especially in identifying key details and understanding the structure of descriptive texts. Two lesson plans were prepared, supported by PowerPoint slides and a short YouTube video, aimed at making the materials more engaging and accessible. The researcher also created KWL worksheets and a reading comprehension test in multiple-choice format.

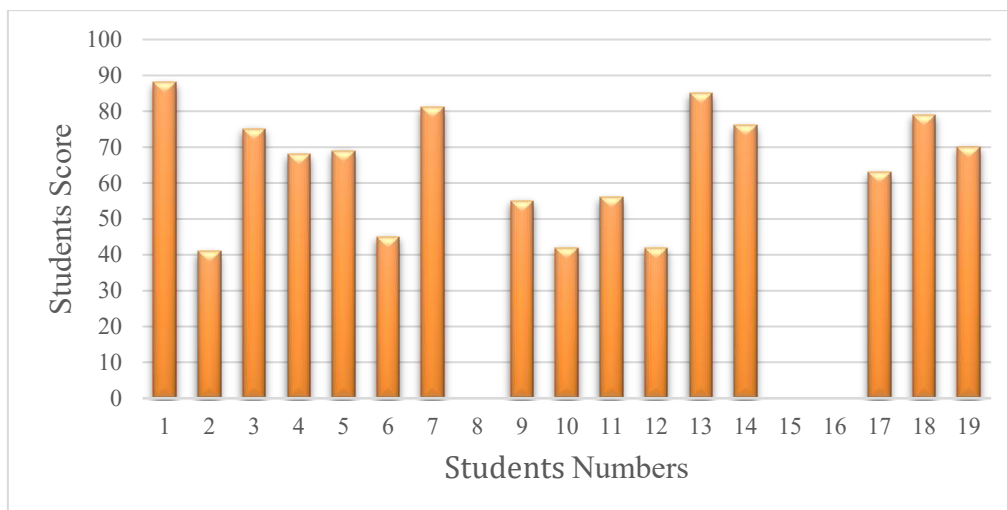
In the first meeting, the session started with greetings, checking attendance, and a warm-up discussion about theory of Descriptive text and introduced students to the KWL Strategy. The teacher then introduced the KWL strategy and explained its three stages (K, W, L) with simple examples. Students were asked to fill in the “K” (What I Know) column based on what they already knew about descriptive texts, and the “W” (What I Want to Know) column by writing down questions they had. After that, the class watched a video and reviewed the generic structure, purpose, and examples of descriptive texts. Students then began writing their reflections in the “L” (What I Learned) column based on the materials.

The second meeting focused more on applying the KWL strategy to a new reading passage. Students were first given keywords to activate prior knowledge about the topic: Borobudur Temple. They filled in the K and W columns again, then read the text together. While reading, the teacher guided them through new vocabulary and helped clarify meaning.

Afterward, students completed the L column by noting what they had learned. Finally, students completed a reading comprehension task to assess their understanding.

In the observing stage, the researcher noted that students were still passive in both sessions. Many struggled to create meaningful questions in the W column and were unsure how to connect the ideas in each section. Most of the class depended heavily on teacher guidance. The teacher's explanation was clear but still quite general, and several students expressed confusion about how to use the KWL table properly.

In the reflecting stage, the results showed some improvement. The average score increased from 57.6% in the pre-test to 64.6% in the post-test of Cycle 1. Although this was progress, it still fell short of the 75% target. The students' difficulties mainly stemmed from a limited vocabulary and lack of familiarity with the strategy. To address this, several changes were planned for Cycle 2, including giving clearer instructions, using simpler language, and providing more guided examples. It was also decided that students would be encouraged to work in pairs to boost confidence and participation during discussion. Here were the result of students' reading comprehension test in cycle 1:



Graphic 1. Score of Students Reading Comprehension in Cycle 1

Result of Cycle two

The second cycle was done to fix the problems found in the first cycle. It focused on helping students understand the KWL (Know–Want–Learned) strategy better by giving simpler explanations and clearer support. This cycle was completed in one meeting that lasted 90 minutes, and followed four main steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

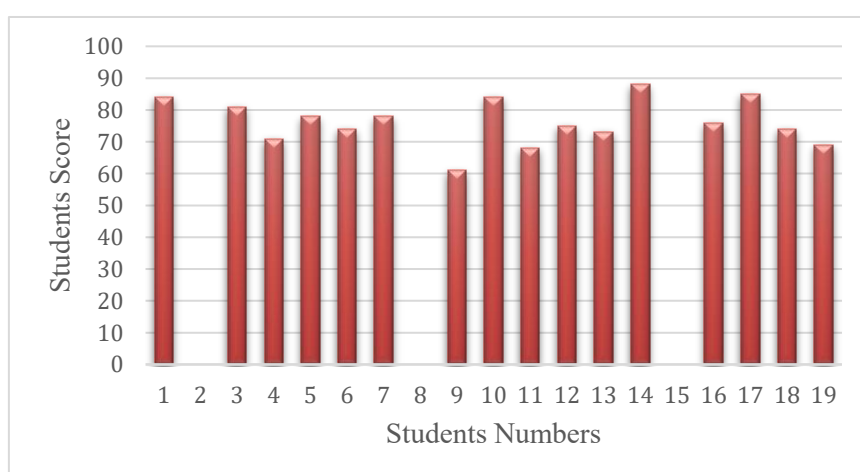
In the planning stage, the researcher made some changes based on what didn't work well in Cycle 1. Many students had trouble asking questions and didn't take part actively in

class. To solve this, the teacher planned easier lessons, used a more simple reading text with the title Prambanan Temple and gave better examples of how to fill in the KWL worksheet. A new reading test was also prepared to check students' understanding at the end.

During the acting stage, the teacher began the lesson by reviewing what students had learned before. Then, the teacher explained again how to use the KWL strategy, but this time with easier words and step-by-step examples. Before reading, students wrote down what they already knew in the K column, and then wrote what they wanted to know in the W column. After reading the text about Prambanan Temple, they completed the L column with the new things they had learned. At the end of the lesson, students did a reading test to check how well they understood the material.

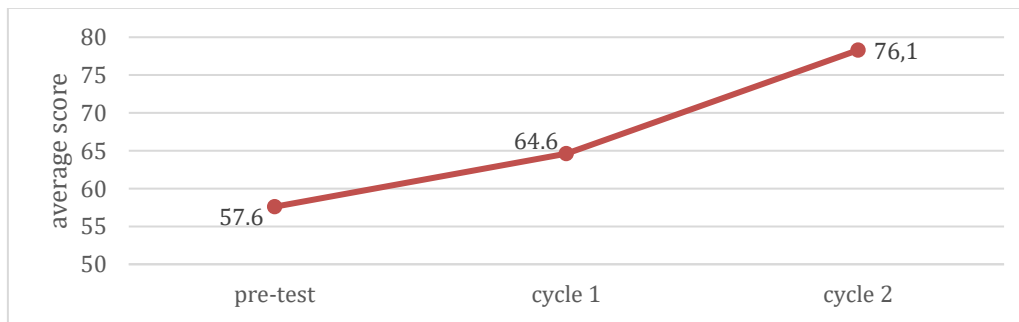
In the observation stage, the students were more active and confident. They answered questions, worked seriously on their KWL worksheets, and joined the discussion. Their questions were more focused, and they could explain their ideas better. The classroom felt more alive, and students showed more interest in the topic and the activity.

During the reflecting stage, the researcher saw clear improvement. The average student score increased to 76.1%, which means they passed the success standard of 75%. This showed that the changes made in the second cycle helped the students learn better. By giving simpler instructions, helping students work through each step, and creating a more supportive class environment, the KWL strategy became easier to follow and more useful for improving reading comprehension. To find out the students score in Cycle 2, take a look at the chart below:



Graphic 2. Score of Students Reading Comprehension in Cycle 2

The following chart illustrates the changes in students' average scores, highlighting the improvements since the pre-test and cycle 1. These visual representations offer a direct comparison of student performance over time.



Graphic 3. The average of Listening Comprehension Score in each cycle.

The average reading comprehension score for students in Cycle 2 reached 76.1%, which is higher than the success criteria of 75%. This shows a significant improvement of 11.5% from the previous cycle and 18.5% from the pre-test. This positive outcomes indicates that improvement made in Cycle 2, such a simpler and clearer explanations, guided questoOverall, the findings from cycle 2 can be concluded that the implementation of the KWL strategy has effectively improving students' reading comprehension. KWL strategy not only improved students' score in reading but also created a more interactive and enjoyable learning environment.

The findings from Cycle 1 revealed that while there was a slight improvement in students' reading comprehension after the introduction of the KWL strategy, the results were still below the expected success criteria. Only 64.6% of students reached the minimum standard, indicating that many of them still struggled to fully understand the reading material. Although students were introduced to the structure and purpose of the KWL strategy, they encountered difficulties in applying it independently, particularly when filling out the "W" column, where they were supposed to write questions based on what they wanted to know. Many students were confused and unable to formulate relevant or thoughtful questions, which suggested that the teacher's instructions were not yet clear or detailed enough. This is consistent with Dabiri & Kashefian-Naeeni, (2021) who explained that reading comprehension is not simply about recognizing vocabulary, but also involves the ability to infer meaning and make connections within the text. Furthermore, classroom observations showed that students tended to be passive and only responded when prompted. Their interaction was limited, and their involvement in discussions was minimal. Another issue observed in Cycle 1 was that some students still relied on word-for-word translation, which often disrupted their understanding of the overall meaning of the text. The KWL worksheets also reflected this issue, most questions in the "W" column were shallow, and the "L" column mainly repeated general information instead of showing real learning or

insight. Based on these reflections, the teacher needed to revise the teaching strategy by simplifying explanations, offering more examples, and providing better guidance, especially to help students ask relevant questions and connect new information to what they already knew.

In Cycle 2, these improvements were implemented with more structured support. The teacher used simpler language, offered clearer explanations of the KWL process, and gave direct examples for each column. Students were also provided with keywords to activate their background knowledge before reading, which helped them think more clearly about what they wanted to know. This revised approach led to significant progress in students' ability to use the strategy, especially in formulating meaningful questions. Vy & Ha, (2020) emphasize that the KWL strategy is most effective when teachers provide step-by-step guidance and model the process clearly, which aligns with what was done in Cycle 2. Students also became more active in class, participating in discussions and showing greater confidence when completing the worksheet. They were more engaged and showed stronger motivation during the lesson. This supports the findings of Heriyawati, (2021) who stated that the KWL strategy can increase students' interest and make them think more deeply, especially when teachers give clear support and encouragement throughout the process. In addition, the increase in the average score to 76.1% indicated that the improvements made in Cycle 2 were effective in helping students reach the learning goals. As Ogle, (1986) has noted, students tend to be more focused and involved when they set learning goals by asking their own questions. Overall, the success of Cycle 2 highlights the importance of teacher guidance in applying reading strategies like KWL. When students are supported with clear explanations, relevant materials, and opportunities to be active in the learning process, they are more likely to understand the text and become confident readers.

Conclusions

According to the results of this research, it can be concluded that the KWL strategy has been proven to improve reading comprehension for tenth-grade students at SMK Muhammadiyah Jember. This conclusion is drawn after conducting two cycles of action research, where the results exceeded the criteria of success, showing a significant increase in students' ability to comprehend texts. This was reflected in the increase in average reading comprehension scores from 64.6% to 76.1%, surpassing the success criteria. The results reaffirm that KWL is an effective strategy for guiding students through reading

comprehension by activating their prior knowledge in the “K” column, asking the questions in the ‘W’ column, and reflecting on what they had learned after reading in the “L” column.

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