

THE USE OF KNOW, WANT TO KNOW AND LEARNT (KWL) STRATEGY TO IMPROVE READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

This Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted to find out how KWL strategy is applied in English reading class and the students' responses towards it. It was done in 2 cycles, in which each cycle consisted of planning the action, implementing the action, observing the action, and reflection. The instruments used in collecting the data were tests, observation sheets for the researcher and students, and questionnaires for the students. The results showed that KWL strategy gave better result in improving the students' reading comprehension skills in finding out the main idea, detailed information, word meaning, and references. The results from tests showed that students' mean score from pre-test was 62.8 and this increased to 68.2 at the end of cycle 1, and reached 80.4 at the end of cycle 2. Furthermore, the percentage of students' participation in the teaching and learning process gradually increased. This is shown from the observation checklist where the percentage of students' involvement is 57% (in the *enough* category) in cycle 1 and increased up to 80% (in the *very good* category) in cycle 2. It means that they worked well in conducting all activities. Furthermore, the results of questionnaire showed that 80% of the students responded positively towards the implementation of KWL. This strategy was found to help overcome problems encountered by teachers in getting the students to be more active to participate in the process of learning, expanding knowledge, learning about their needs and their interests, and activating their background knowledge.

Key Words: *Reading Comprehension, Know, Want to Know and Learnt Strategy, Classroom Action Research*

INTRODUCTION

In learning English, we are concerned with four skills, and reading is one of them which students from junior high school up to university level have to master. Reading is an active skill which involves eyes, mouth, ears and brain.

As we know, reading is a basic key to knowledge. It is important to add knowledge. Allah, the only one God, revealed to Prophet Muhammad PBUH about Iqra', which in English means 'read'. This implies that there is no knowledge, invention or innovation without reading. Therefore, reading should be taught at a very early age due to the importance of reading in a student's later life. However, reading alone is not sufficient. There is a need to have comprehension to gain information from what is read. Reading comprehension is the process of understanding and constructing meaning from a piece of connected words which form coherent thoughts. The examples of connected words are phrases, idioms, sentences and paragraphs that can be read with comprehension.

Thus, one aim of teaching reading is to develop the students' comprehension, so they can read effectively and efficiently. To be able to do this, the students should have a particular purpose in mind before they read the text. According to Sorrel (1990: 41), students read the text to create meaning as their mental processes work together so they can relate to the content of the text.

The 2006 curriculum supplement, a guide for teaching reading at the junior high school levels (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama* or SMP and *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* or MTsN), states that students should have to understand the meaning of words related to their daily life. The objective of teaching reading is so that the students will be able to get general and specific information from a text, deduce meaning and use lexical items. Furthermore, they will be able to understand the meaning of simple short essays both descriptive and procedural which will include such reading skills as identifying the main idea, identifying detailed information from the text, identifying references in the text, and comprehending word, phrase, idiom and sentence meanings. Therefore, a teacher must develop these skills because the students need them when they take the Annual National Examinations (UN).

Nowadays, some teachers in the schools still teach reading in a boring, monotonous way, where they do not explain the meaning of the text. They also do not show how to find out the main idea or how to use

contextual clues to find out word meanings. They ask questions to the students without teaching them on how to find the answers. As a matter of fact, some teachers themselves apparently do not know how to find the meaning or how to explain it. They should have this basic knowledge and be able to explain it to their students.

Furthermore, the teachers at MTsN Model Banda Aceh usually teach reading by translating to Indonesian and then asking questions individually. It was found that there were many students in grade seven that had difficulties in answering questions based on the text given when the researcher taught that class. Only a few students could give responses related to the content of the text. These activities made them think that reading was boring. Both teachers and students sit on their own space without actively interacting in the class. It affected the students' creativity, so they become passive learners in the class. This condition inspired the researcher to conduct a Classroom Action Research project to improve her way of teaching reading and to improve the students' reading ability, comprehension and love for reading.

In teaching reading, the researcher identified some specific problems during her preliminary research, they are: the students could not understand the detailed information in the text, they had inadequate vocabulary, they were not motivated during the "old style" reading skills activities, and they did not have the background knowledge required for the reading materials. This required the researcher to seek for the most appropriate strategy to use to have a successful teaching learning process.

There are several reading strategies which have been designed to help students enhance their comprehension of written texts. One of them is Know, Want to Know and Learnt which is abbreviated to KWL (Ogle, 1986). This is a reading comprehension strategy that uses three-steps of reading, where K stands for Know, W stands for What You Want to Know, and L stands for What You Have Learnt. By using KWL, students learn to consider their prior knowledge about the topic of their reading to determine what they already know about the topic and what they want to learn from the text. This strategy helps students develop their comprehension monitoring ability, such as their ability to check their understanding of the text. By helping them recognize that, they can use what they know to determine what they want to learn through reading. With KWL, they learn to draw on their prior knowledge about the topic of their reading to aid their understanding of

the text, determine their own purposes for reading, and summarize what they have learnt from reading. Therefore, the students will have a chance to answer the questions about what they have read.

In line with the above idea and based on the researchers' observation and experience, the teaching of reading in the school was still far from being satisfactory. In this case the researcher wanted to implement this strategy with her students at MTsN MODEL Banda Aceh. The students at this level rarely understood the reading material given by their teachers. The students were easily bored with reading the English texts and gained very little understanding at the end. This problem encouraged the researcher to try the KWL strategy in teaching reading.

Based on the previous background mentioned above, the following research questions are formulated:

1. How is KWL applied in improving students' reading comprehension?
2. How is the students' achievement in reading comprehension after implementing the KWL strategy?
3. What are the students' responses following the application of KWL in learning reading comprehension?

Following the research problems, this study was designed with the aim of:

1. Describing the application of KWL in the teaching and learning process in improving students' reading comprehension.
2. Knowing the students' achievement in reading comprehension after implementing the KWL strategy.
3. Discovering the students' responses in the application of KWL in learning reading comprehension.

THEORITICAL REVIEW

Reading Comprehension

Reading and comprehension is a combined process. Comprehension is critically important to the skill development of children and older people and to the ability to obtain education. Comprehension is defined as "intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between texts and reader" (Harris & Hodges, 1995: 207). Indeed, reading comprehension has come to be the essence of reading, essential not only to academic learning in all subject areas but also to long life learning as well. Driven by intention to gain meaning from the

text they are reading, readers engage in intentional, problem solving thinking processes (McShane, 2005:71).

The term reading comprehension is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language, which consists of three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading (Snow, 2002: 11). If the reader comprehends, he must bring all his capacities, abilities, knowledge, and experiences to the act of reading. Text, broadly construed to include any printed or electronic text, is to be comprehended.

Grellet (1991), as cited in Omaggio (1986:53), defines reading comprehension as “understanding a written text by means of extracting the required information from it as efficiently as possible”. Teachers assume that students should do comprehension exercises to improve their reading skills. Students tend not to read a text for overall meaning but rather to read to a point in the text at which a cue word in a question suggests that the answer may be found. In short, the main concern of reading as an activity is comprehension. In other words, a reader reading a written text or printed material reasonably anticipates comprehending the essence of such a text by relating his background knowledge to the researcher’s messages in the text.

According to Heaton (1988: 105-106), in testing for reading difficulties, it would be helpful to attempt to identify some of the specific skills involved in reading. There are nine detailed analyses of reading skills broken down from lower to higher levels in reading. The first skill is the ability to recognize words and word groups by associating sounds with their corresponding graphic symbols. It can be stated as reading aloud. The second is the ability to deduce meaning of words by understanding word formation (roots, affixations, derivation or compounding) and contextual clues. The third is the ability to understand the relationships within a sentence, especially the elements of sentence structure, negation (reduced clauses), fronting and theme (this helps students in understanding how to recognize information at a sentence level), and complex embedding. The fourth is to understand and perceive relationships between parts of a text through lexical devices (repetition, synonyms, and antithesis), grammatical cohesive devices (the former or preview reference and the former or the following reference) and connectives (in addition, however or firstly to show sequences of ideas or to link arguments). The fifth is to understand conceptual meaning, especially cause, effect, result,

purpose, reason, condition, contrast as discourse makers. The sixth is the ability to anticipate and predict what will come next in the text. The seventh is the ability to identify the main idea and other salient features in a text. The eighth is the ability to generalize and draw conclusions. Finally, the ninth is the ability to skim and scan (looking for general meaning and reading for specific information). Based on this explanation, when a teacher wants to test students' reading comprehension, he/she must state the skills based on their suitability level.

Know, Want to Know and Learnt (KWL)

Know, Want to Know and Learnt (KWL), which is the creation of Donna Ogle (1986), is a three-column chart that helps capture the before, during, and after components of reading a text selection. K is the first column telling what the students know about the topic before they read. Here, the teacher asks the students to tell the class what they already know. In other words, in this column, the teacher tries to activate students' prior knowledge before they go further. The second column is W. In this column, the students generate questions about the topic. They tell the teacher about all the things that they want to learn from the topic. Then the teacher can determine what they think is important about the topic. The last column is L; here, after reading the text, the students match what they knew in advance and what they wanted to know with what they learnt. In addition, this column states for everything that the students have learned about the topic.

With KWL, Ogle (1986) asserts that it helps students become better readers and help teachers to be more active in their teaching. In addition, KWL charts also help students to be active thinkers while they read, giving them specific things to look for and having them reflect on what they have learned when they finished reading. It is also a teaching strategy designed to engage readers in connecting prior knowledge with contextual information. It is used to organize, summarize and integrate knowledge acquired from reading.

There are some advantages and disadvantages in the KWL strategy. Ibrahim (2012) listed some advantages of KWL, such as:

1. It is appropriate for all education levels from beginners up to advanced.
2. It can be used for all skills but is most suitable for reading skills.
3. It helps students to monitor their comprehension and knowledge.
4. It encourages students to do critical thinking.

5. It makes teacher and students become more interactive in the teaching and learning process.
6. It sets out a purpose for reading. This means that readers have some ideas about the text before reading the whole text and focus to find the important points whilst reading.

The shortcomings of the KWL strategy are (Ibrahim, 2012:52):

1. It is difficult for students with no prior knowledge.
2. It takes time to complete.
3. It is not effective for reading fiction materials.
4. It is not appropriate for readers who are not active thinkers.
5. Students will give up and get bored easily.

Ibrahim (2012:53) further states that some students will find it difficult to complete the KWL sheet on their own by using the steps of KWL; many students avoid taking the risk of revealing what they know or do not know about the topic. Al-Ataie (2010:384) also mentions that most students use statements not questions in filling the W column. Furthermore, they use their native language when they cannot explain what they want to know in English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a classroom action research (CAR). The goal of the researcher was to improve her knowledge, teaching style, technique and methods in the classroom. This research was conducted at the junior high school of MTsN Model, Banda Aceh. This study tried to describe the use of KWL strategy to improve her ways of teaching reading. This CAR employed a collaborative research design. The researcher and her collaborative classroom teacher directly conducted the study. To cope with the classroom's activity in teaching reading, the researcher applied KWL strategy during the learning process. Here, she acted as the practitioner who taught the students with the proposed KWL strategy.

To gather the data, the researcher designed the instruments. These instruments were the teacher's observation sheets, the students' observation sheets, the questionnaire, and the tests.

To obtain data about the students' reading comprehension achievements in reading skills, the researcher obtained the data from the result of students' scores in a pre-test and compared them with the students' results from a post-test in both cycle 1 and cycle 2.

Furthermore, to obtain data about the students' responses toward the process of learning using KWL strategy, she obtained data from a

questionnaire. The students' responses could be as one of the consideration to claim the use of KWL strategy to be successful or not. Based on the reason, the researcher gave the students questionnaire that consisted of 13 items. The items were divided into four factors: (1) becoming helpful in reading skill, (2) studying actively, (3) becoming motivated in studying and (4) having the ability in completing the KWL chart.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Application of KWL Strategy in Teaching Reading Comprehension

The researcher applied KWL strategy in teaching reading comprehension to a reading class for six meetings in two cycles. The teaching and learning activities were based on a procedure, which involved three phases: (1) pre-teaching activities, (2) while-teaching activities, and (3) post-teaching activities.

In pre-teaching activities, the researcher and an observer entered the class and greeted the students. She did apperception activities to open the teaching and learning process and attract the students' attention to learning. Then, she checked the student's attendance list.

In while-teaching activities, the researcher first opened the lesson by explaining to the students about the text, about its structure, purpose and language features. Then, she explained to the students about the steps of KWL strategy and how to fill in the three columns of KWL form. After that, she gave the students an opportunity to ask questions related to her explanations.

Meanwhile, the researcher drew the KWL chart on the white board, and asked the students to draw the chart in their notebooks. She then introduced the topic of reading and wrote it on the board above the KWL chart. For the first step is K (Know). Here, she activated the students' background knowledge by asking them to brainstorm for words or phrases they knew related to the topic. This was done to make the students active and focus on what they were going to read. In particular KWL was developed to encourage purposeful reading by activating and organizing students' background knowledge (Ibrahim, 2012:45).

After the students talked about what they knew about the topic based on their prior knowledge, then they wrote it on the K column in their own sheet. The next step of the strategy is W (Want to Know) in

which the students were told to say what they wanted to know about the topic. Then the researcher asked one of the students to write the W on the board while the others were directed to write it in their note books. In this step, the students were directed to generate questions, not statements. After the K and W columns were filled in, she distributed the reading text to the students to read silently.

For the last step of L (Learnt), the students were ordered to read the text and to fill in the L column of the chart. The students should look for the answers to the questions in the W column while they were reading. They could fill out the L column on their own chart either during or after reading. And at this stage, the researcher asked some of them to do it on the board. In addition to writing questions in the W column, they were encouraged to write anything they found especially interesting in the L column. To distinguish between the answers to their questions in the W column and the other ideas they found interesting, they were asked to code the information in the L column. For example, they could put a check mark next to the information that answered the questions from the W column. And they could put a star next to the ideas that they found interesting. During these three steps, there was also a lot of discussion amongst the students. This was done based on the procedure carried out by Davis and Byu (2008:54) in which KWL allows the students to share what they learn with others, to learn that there are many sources where information can be found and to summarize their findings.

During the teaching activities, the researcher monitored the students' work. The students looked very enthusiastic in following the three steps of the KWL chart, and they also told about their problems in doing it. She also praised the students if they did their best in doing the steps.

The last activities were post-teaching activities. The researcher asked the students to answer the questions below the text orally. This was done in order to find out the students' comprehension in reading skills. They actively and seriously answered the questions. Later on, she asked the students to draw a conclusion about the reading material and present it orally.

Finally, the researcher tested the students to identify the students' learning results. She also distributed the questionnaire to the students in the second cycle to find out their problems and responses towards the use of KWL strategy for teaching reading comprehension.

The improvement of the researcher's performance in teaching reading was based on the result of her observation sheets. These showed that the percentage of her performance in the first cycle was 58% which was in the *enough* criteria. This increased in the second cycle to be 86% or in the *very good* criteria, which means that her performance had reached the criteria of *success* (>80%).

Another improvement which was measured was the students' participation during the teaching and learning process. It was based on the result of students' observation sheet form concerning their activities. The result noted that the percentage of their participation in the first cycle was 57 % or in the *enough* criteria. A great improvement in the students' participation was seen in the second cycle, where participation was 80 % or in the *very good* criteria. This indicated that it had reached the criteria of *success*. This evidence indicated that the application of KWL strategy in the process of teaching reading comprehension had successfully improved the students' participation in class.

After using KWL strategy, the students had good results in reading comprehension. This was seen from the students learning results. The first students' result in the pre-test was 62.8. It was not a good achievement for reading comprehension. This result did not meet the criterion of success which had been set earlier, which was 70. After the researcher applied KWL strategy in teaching reading comprehension, the students' result increased to 68.2. The researcher compared the students' learning results of pre-test and post-test given in the first cycle. The average score in pre-test was 62.8. The improvement was shown at the end of the first cycle that is the result of post-test at 68.2. It had increased by only 5.4 points from the pre-test.

Hence, better improvement came in the second cycle. KWL strategy could be used to improve the students' achievement in reading comprehension. It was proved by the students' learning result from the post-test in the second cycle. The students' average score in the post-test after the second cycle was 80.4; it increased by 12.2 points from the result of the first post-test in the first cycle. This means that it had reached the success indicator for this research; which was only 70.

Based on the result above, this indicated that the use of KWL strategy was effective in improving the students' achievement in reading comprehension especially in comprehending the descriptive text. Accordingly, Vacca and Vacca (2005: 45) believe that KWL

strategy is useful in improving students' achievements in reading comprehension skills.

The results of the questionnaire showed that 82% of students found KWL to be helpful, 88% found it to help in studying actively, 97% found it to motivate studying, and 82% found it to help their ability to complete the KWL chart. In conclusion, it can be said that the students had positive responses toward the use of KWL strategy in the learning process of reading comprehension in their class. This was proved by the percentage overall of the four factors measured above being greater than 80% or in the *good* criteria. Thus, it could be concluded that the students' responses toward the use of the KWL strategy in learning for reading comprehension had reached the *success* indicator that was greater than 80%.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings and the discussion presented above, the researcher comes to the following conclusions as the answers to the research questions stated earlier. First, in using KWL strategy in teaching reading skills, particularly with descriptive texts, the researcher had applied it in reading class based on the procedure that should be followed in order that the implementation would be effective. Generally, the implementation was divided into three general phases; pre-reading, in the process of reading, and post-reading. Moreover, the implementation of KWL strategy was a marked improvement on the researcher's previous performance in teaching reading comprehension. Based on the results from the observations, it was found that there are some points that showed the improvements in her ability in teaching reading comprehension. The improvement was shown from her activity in explaining the topic of the material, by showing them some pictures related to the material. Another improvement was shown from the instructions for KWL strategy given to the students, where she gave clear instructions and delivered in simple information before asking the students to follow the procedures for KWL steps. Then, she was able to manage the teaching time more effectively. Finally, she was able to make the students more active in learning reading comprehension by grouping them so that they were in good spirits, had more motivation and got more fun whilst learning.

Second, the researcher's performance in teaching reading comprehension using the KWL strategy in her class was also found to

increase. The result from the observation checklist form the teacher's activities showed that the percentage of her performance in the first cycle was 58%, whilst in the second cycle her performance reached 86%. This means that she could increase her teaching effectiveness by implementing KWL strategy in her reading class.

Third, the implementation of KWL strategy was effective in improving the students' achievement in reading comprehension skills in finding out the main idea, the word meanings, the detailed information, and the references. This was indicated by the results from the test given to the students where there was an improvement in their scores in each cycle. It increased from 68.2 to 80.4. Based on these results, this indicates that the implementation of KWL strategy was effective in improving the students' reading comprehension skills especially in comprehending descriptive texts.

Fourth, with the implementation of KWL strategy for improving reading skills, the students' improvement in reading skills also increased gradually. They were more active from one meeting to the next meeting. This was shown in the result of observation sheet taken where at the beginning of cycle 1, student participation was only 57% this increased in steps to 80% at the end of cycle 2.

Fifth, implementing KWL strategy helped both the researcher and students. It helped the students to become better readers and to be active thinkers while they read, giving them specific things to look for and having them reflect on what they have learned when they finished reading. And for the researcher, it helped her to be more interactive in the teaching and learning process.

Based on the facts above, the researcher would like to make some suggestions. It is suggested for English teachers to use KWL strategy as a strategy for teaching reading comprehension to respect and overcome the problems encountered in reading classes especially in learning reading comprehension. Moreover, this strategy is designed to help the students to understand and to comprehend text book materials by (1) activating their background knowledge and (2) by using a systematic three steps procedure before, during and after reading.

For other researchers, since this study is a CAR project, the researcher realizes that there were some limitations either in her thinking skills or attitudes in the classroom. Therefore, it is hoped further researchers will do similar research into KWL strategy or some improved strategy either with better interpretation or better implementation.

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