

Integrating Picture Sequence and Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) Enhances EFL Students' Narrative Reading Comprehension

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Article History:

Received: March 2026

Reviewed: May 2026

Published: July 2026

Abstract

Comprehending English texts remains challenging for EFL learners, as they often struggle to grasp the overall idea, particularly when dealing with lengthy texts and unfamiliar vocabulary. To address this issue, the present study combines Picture Sequence with the Question–Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy to support students' reading comprehension. This integrated approach helps students visualize story events while guiding them to answer comprehension questions more purposefully. Using a quasi-experimental design involving 72 tenth-grade students, learners taught through the integrated strategy showed greater improvement in narrative reading comprehension (mean = 67.08–80.14) than those receiving conventional instruction (mean = 70.00–75.14). Although the improvement was moderate (Cohen's $d = 0.50$), it reflected a meaningful enhancement in students' competency to comprehend narrative content and respond accurately to comprehension questions. Based on the findings, the combined strategy can be considered a practical and effective approach for improving narrative reading comprehension in EFL classroom settings.

Keywords: reading comprehension, narrative text, picture sequence, QAR strategy, integrating strategies

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, the ability to communicate across languages has become increasingly important. English, as the most widely used international language, plays a crucial role in global communication across sectors, including international business, mass media, diplomacy, transportation, science, entertainment, and many more (Pajarwati et al., 2021). For EFL learners, mastering English is essential for academic achievement and future professional success. Among the four language skills, reading holds a particularly important role because it serves as the foundation for acquiring knowledge and understanding academic content (Khoirunnisa & Safitri, 2018). However, reading in a foreign language involves complex cognitive engagement, where learners must interpret meaning, make inferences, and connect new information with existing knowledge (Shea & Ceprano, 2017). This means that comprehension goes beyond simply decoding words; students must be able to evaluate the writer's intention, identify implied meanings, and relate the content to their own experiences or prior understanding. As a result, many EFL learners experience difficulty comprehending English texts, especially when

they encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, abstract ideas, or culturally unfamiliar content.

These challenges are evident among Indonesian EFL learners, who often struggle to comprehend English reading materials effectively. Previous studies have reported that students often struggle to identify inconsistencies within texts, lack the analytical skills to interpret English material, and experience low motivation when reading English texts (Oakhill et al., 2005; Salikin & Tahir, 2017; Septia et al., 2022). These difficulties are particularly evident in narrative texts, which require an understanding of plot, character, setting, and sequence of events. Although narratives are commonly found in Indonesian classrooms, students often struggle to comprehend their structure and purpose (Watkins & Knapp, 2005). Previous studies have also reported that EFL learners experience difficulties in identifying factual information, determining main ideas, and interpreting vocabulary in context when reading narrative texts (Septia et al., 2022). Consistent with these findings, the pre-test results and classroom activities showed that many students struggled to identify key points and comprehend detailed information in narrative texts,

highlighting the need for more effective reading strategies.

Visual learning tools have proven to be promising in this regard. Picture Sequence, for example, provides a visual representation of the storyline, helping students understand the context of events and reserve information (Efendi, 2021; Nurhayati, 2014). By visually illustrating narrative progression, these sequences provide concrete support that aids students in processing textual meaning more effectively. Picture sequences help illustrate key events in a text, increase students' interest, and encourage active classroom participation (Zulaikah, 2017). Previous studies have shown that the use of picture series improves students' comprehension of narrative texts and supports their motivation to read. For example, Alqy and Zuhriyah (2023) found that picture series helped students follow storylines and key details more easily, while Bander et al. (2023) reported that visual elements created a more engaging classroom atmosphere and reduced students' lack of motivation. To maximize the effectiveness of Picture Sequences, combining them with cognitive strategies such as QAR can promote deeper engagement and interaction with the text.

Picture Sequences and QAR complement each other because they address different aspects of reading comprehension. Picture Sequences provide visual guidance that helps students build a coherent mental representation of the story's plot, while QAR guides students to identify sources of answers and encourages strategic thinking while reading. This visual support reduces the cognitive load involved in processing events in the narrative, whereas QAR promotes deeper understanding through structured questions. Therefore, the integration of these strategies is expected to facilitate both literal and inferential comprehension.

QAR strategy trains students to identify different types of questions and determine the appropriate source for the answer, whether it lies within the text or requires background knowledge (Raphael, 1986). This strategy encourages organized reading and supports the development of critical reading skills. Previous studies have shown its effectiveness in improving reading comprehension. Afriani et al. (2020) reported that tenth-grade students taught using QAR improved in identifying main ideas and supporting details, which foster collaboration and critical thinking, while Astuti (2022) found that students achieved higher post-test scores and showed improved abilities to analyze, interpret, and synthesize textual information. These results confirm that QAR not only improves comprehension but also develops higher-order thinking skills. Furthermore, combining QAR with visual aids such as Picture Sequence can

enhance comprehension. Cortese (2003) noted that integrating QAR with visual materials helps students connect questions with textual and visual information, leading to deeper engagement and understanding. When combined, these strategies support different learning needs and promote effective reading instruction.

Although previous studies have demonstrated that Picture Sequence improves students' understanding of narrative texts (Alqy & Zuhriyah, 2023; Bander et al., 2023) and that QAR enhances students' ability to answer comprehension questions strategically (Afriani et al., 2020; Astuti, 2019), these studies have examined each strategy separately. Very limited empirical research has investigated the integration of Picture Sequence and QAR within a single instructional framework, particularly for Indonesian senior high school EFL learners reading narrative texts. Consequently, little is known about whether combining visual scaffolding with cognitive questioning strategies produces greater improvements than conventional reading instruction. This gap forms the basic premise for this study.

METHODS

This study adopted a quantitative approach through a quasi-experimental design to assess the effectiveness of integrating Picture Sequence and QAR strategy in improving students' reading comprehension. Specifically, a non-equivalent control group design was applied, in which two existing classes were selected without random assignment (Miller et al., 2020). The experimental group consisted of one class that received instruction through the integrated Picture Sequence and QAR strategies, whereas the other class served as the control group and was taught using a traditional method.

The participants were 72 tenth-grade students from a public senior high school in Sidoarjo, East Java, Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique was employed because random assignment was not feasible in the school setting. Two intact classes were selected based on the English teacher's recommendation, considering their comparable English achievement records from the previous semester and similar pre-test mean scores, which showed no substantial difference in their initial reading comprehension performance. The school holds an "A" accreditation and implements the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning. In addition, supportive facilities, including technology-equipped classrooms, provided an environment conducive to conducting this study.

Data were collected through both pre- and post-tests, each comprising 20 multiple-choice questions related to fairy tales. These tests gauged various aspects of reading

comprehension, such as identifying main ideas, inferring meaning, understanding grammar, locating detailed information, distinguishing unstated facts, recognizing supporting ideas, interpreting vocabulary, and understanding idioms or phrases within the passage. The test items were developed based on Brown's (2003) components of reading comprehension and have been reviewed by two experts in English language education who evaluated the relevance, clarity, language appropriateness, and alignment of each item with the learning objectives. Suggestions from the validators were incorporated before the instruments were administered. Subsequently, reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha yielded coefficients of 0.702 for the pre-test and 0.704 for the post-test, which are categorized as relatively high (Taber, 2018).

The data collection was conducted in five sessions. The first meeting involved administering the pre-test to measure students' initial reading comprehension, followed by a brief introduction to narrative texts. The second meeting focused on introducing the instructional strategies. Students in the experimental group learned Picture Sequence through jumbled-paragraph activities and were introduced to the Question–Answer Relationship (QAR) strategy, while the control group received conventional instruction on narrative texts. The third meeting was devoted to guided practice, during which the experimental group continued applying the Picture Sequence and QAR strategies through structured worksheets. In contrast, the control group completed conventional reading comprehension activities. In the fourth meeting, the experimental group integrated both strategies by arranging picture sequences and answering QAR-based comprehension questions, while the control group continued learning through standard reading activities without Picture Sequence or QAR. Finally, the post-test was administered in the fifth meeting to evaluate students' reading comprehension after the treatment. The test scores collected were then analyzed using statistical procedures to assess the effectiveness of the implemented teaching strategies.

The analysis began with the Shapiro-Wilk test, which was chosen because it is suitable for small samples (Mishra et al., 2019), to verify if the data were normally distributed. This step was important because normality is required for the use of parametric tests such as the Independent Samples T-test. Then, Levene's test was administered to determine whether the variances of both groups were equal, as this is needed for fair comparison (Fiandini et al., 2024). After both assumptions were met, an independent samples t-test was performed to determine if the post-test scores differed significantly

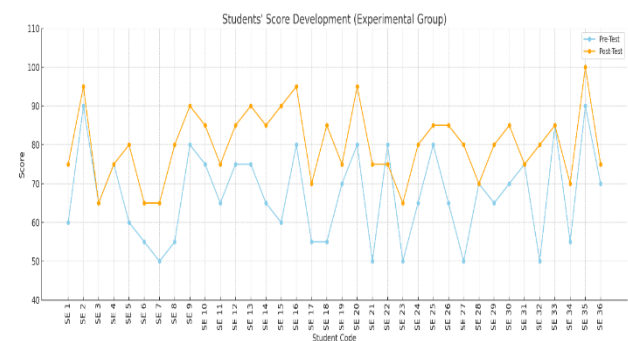
between the experimental and control groups. However, while statistical significance indicates the likelihood that the difference is not due to chance, it does not convey the strength or educational relevance of the difference. For this reason, Cohen's *d* was also computed to measure the effect size, providing a standardized index of how meaningful the difference was. As Aarts et al. (2013) noted, p-values can be misleading because they depend on sample size, so adding effect size helps to better understand the real impact of the intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of students' reading comprehension performance reveal a clear difference between the experimental and control groups after the implementation of Picture Sequence and Question–Answer Relationship (QAR) strategies.

Figure 1

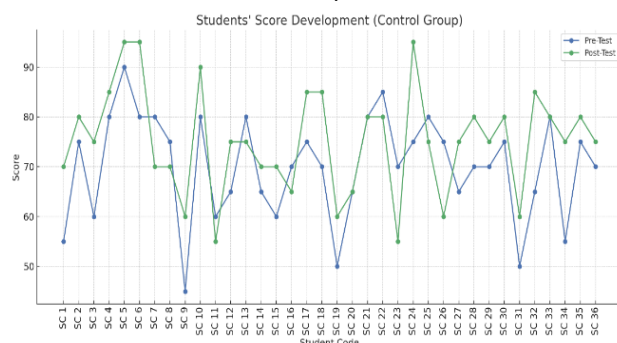
Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores for the Experimental Class



As shown in Figure 1, the experimental group showed a significant increase. The experimental group's pre-test total score was 2,415, with an average score of 67.08. After the intervention, the post-test total score increased to 2,885, with an average of 80.14. This reflects an overall increase of 470 points, or an average increase of 13.06 points per student.

At the individual level, 29 out of 36 students in the experimental group showed improvement in their post-test scores. Seven students demonstrated substantial gains ranging from 20 to 30 points, indicating that the strategies were particularly beneficial for students with lower initial reading proficiency. However, not all students responded in the same way. Four students maintained the same scores between the initial and final tests, indicating that although the strategy was generally effective, some students would likely require tailored instruction or more targeted guidance. In addition, only one student experienced a slight decline in performance, from 80 to 75. This minor decline, nevertheless, did not detract from the overall upward trend observed in the experimental group.

Figure 2
Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores for the Control Class



In contrast, the control group showed more limited progress. The total pre-test score was 2.520, with an average of 70.00, while the post-test total increased to 2.705, with an average of 75.14. This represents an overall gain of 185 points or an average increase of 5.14 points per student, which is considerably lower than the improvement observed in the experimental group.

Although a number of students in the control group showed improvement, many experienced only slight gains or no progress. Several students maintained the same scores on both the pre-test and the post-test, and a few students showed a decrease in performance. These findings indicate that conventional instruction was less effective in producing consistent improvement across students when compared to the experimental treatment.

Classroom observations further revealed that students in the experimental group were more actively engaged during the learning process. They showed greater enthusiasm in connecting visual elements with the text and responding to different types of comprehension questions. This active involvement supported better understanding and retention of narrative texts.

To make the findings more reliable and scientifically grounded, further statistical analysis was carried out. Inferential statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS to examine the significance of the observed differences. The analyses included tests of normality, homogeneity of variances, an independent samples t-test, and effect size calculation.

Table 1
Pre-Test Normality Test result

Tests of Normality				
		Saphiro-Wilk		
	Class	Statistic	df	Sig.
Reading Comprehension Pre-Test Result	Pre-Test Experiment	.944	36	.068
	Pre-Test Control	.949	36	.094
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction				

The first step of the analysis involved testing the normality of the data distribution. A normal distribution is a fundamental assumption for applying parametric tests, such as the independent samples t-test, which was later used to compare group means. In this study, the Shapiro-Wilk test was employed, as it is considered more appropriate and powerful for small to medium-sized samples ($n < 50$ or $n < 100$) (Mishra et al., 2019), which is the case for the 36 students in each group involved in this study.

The Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the pre-test scores of both groups were normally distributed, as shown in Table 1. The experimental group obtained a significance value of 0.068, while the control group obtained 0.094, both of which exceeded the threshold of 0.05.

Table 2
Post-Test Normality Test Result

Tests of Normality				
		Shapiro-Wilk		
	Class	Statistic	df	Sig.
Reading Comprehension Post-Test Result	Post-Test Experiment	.957	36	.168
	Post-Test Control	.958	36	.189
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction				

Similarly, the post-test scores of both groups also met the assumption of normality. As indicated in Table 2, the experimental group had a significance value of 0.168, meanwhile the control group had a value of 0.189. These results further strengthen the reliability of the statistical conclusions drawn from the test. Thus, the results of Table 2 not only provide technical support for proceeding with the independent samples t-test, but also validate that the data collection and treatment processes maintained strict statistical standards.

Table 3
Pre-Test Homogeneity Test Result

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Reading Comprehension Pre-Test Result	Based on Mean	1.244	1	70	.268
	Based on Median	.989	1	70	.323
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.989	1	69.760	.323
	Based on trimmed mean	1.190	1	70	.279

Following the normality analysis, homogeneity of variances was examined to verify the assumptions for parametric testing. This step is essential to ensure that score variability between the experimental and control groups is statistically equivalent. Table 3 presents the results of Levene's test for the pre-test scores. The test based on the mean produced a Levene statistic of 1.244 (df = 1, 70; p = 0.268), whereas the median- and trimmed mean-based tests yielded significance values of 0.323 and 0.279. Since all values exceed 0.05, the assumption of equal variances was met, indicating comparable variability between the two groups before treatment.

Table 4

Post-Test Homogeneity Test Result

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Reading Comprehension Post-Test Result	Based on Mean	.336	1	70	.564
	Based on Median	.332	1	70	.566
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.332	1	66.722	.566
	Based on trimmed mean	.355	1	70	.553

After ensuring that both groups had equivalent variances in the pre-test, homogeneity testing for post-test scores was done to assess whether the equivalence of variances remained intact after the treatment was administered. As shown in Table 4, the Levene test based on the mean yielded a significance value of 0.564. Similar results were obtained for the median (0.566), adjusted median (0.566), and trimmed mean (0.553). All values were greater than 0.05, indicating no significant difference in variance between the groups.

These results confirm that both pre-test and post-test data met the homogeneity assumption. Therefore, differences in post-test mean scores can be attributed more confidently to the treatment rather than to differences in score variability, supporting the use of an Independent Samples T-Test.

Table 5

Independent Samples T-Test Result

Independent Samples T-Test									
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means						
F		Sig.	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.336	.564	2.122	70	.037	5.000	2.357	.300	9.700
Equal variances not assumed			2.122	68.459	.037	5.000	2.357	.298	9.702

After confirming that the data met the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference in reading comprehension scores between the experimental and control groups. As shown in Table 5, the assumption of equal variances was met (Levene's Sig. = .564); therefore, the *equal variances assumed* results were used for interpretation. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(70) = 2.122$, $p = .037$. The experimental group achieved a higher post-test mean ($M = 80.14$) than the control group ($M = 75.14$), suggesting that the integrated Picture Sequence and QAR strategy contributed to better reading comprehension performance.

Although the *t*-test indicated that the difference between the two groups was statistically significant, statistical significance alone can distort the true impact of an effect, as *p*-values are sensitive to sample size and do not reflect practical relevance. Therefore, Cohen's *d* was calculated to determine the practical significance of the intervention (Aarts et al., 2013). The formula is presented as follows:

$$d = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{\sigma_{pooled}}$$

Where:

- $M_1 = 80.14$ (mean of the experimental group)
- $M_2 = 75.14$ (mean of the control group)
- σ_{pooled} = pooled standard deviation

Before calculating Cohen's *d*, the pooled standard deviation needed to be determined using the following formula:

$$\sigma_{pooled} = \frac{\sqrt{(n_1 - 1) \cdot SD_1^2 + (n_2 - 1) \cdot SD_2^2}}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}$$

Where:

- $n_1 = n_2 = 36$ (number of participants (students))
- $SD_1 = 9.22$ (standard deviation of experimental group)
- $SD_2 = 10.72$ (standard deviation of control group)

Substituting the values:

$$\begin{aligned}\sigma_{pooled} &= \frac{\sqrt{(n_1-1) \cdot SD_1^2 + (n_2-1) \cdot SD_2^2}}{n_1 + n_2 - 2} \\ &= \frac{\sqrt{(36-1) \cdot (9.22)^2 + (36-1) \cdot (10.72)^2}}{36+36-2} \\ &= \frac{\sqrt{35(85.0084) + 35(114.9184)}}{70} \\ &= \frac{\sqrt{2975.294 + 4022.144}}{70} = \frac{\sqrt{6997.438}}{70} \\ &= \sqrt{99.9634} = 9.998\end{aligned}$$

Thus, the pooled standard deviation is rounded to:

$$\sigma_{pooled} = 10.00$$

After obtaining the pooled standard deviation, the next step was to calculate the effect size using Cohen's *d* to determine the magnitude of the treatment effect.

$$d = \frac{80.14 - 75.14}{10.00} = \frac{5.00}{10.00} = 0.50$$

The calculated effect size using Cohen's *d* was 0.50. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, a value between 0.21 and 0.50 indicates a medium effect, placing this result at the upper boundary of that category. This suggests that the difference in post-test reading comprehension scores between the experimental and control groups was moderate, yet potentially impactful in practical classroom settings. Although the effect size did not reach the large category, it indicates that the integrated strategy had a meaningful practical impact on students' reading comprehension. Therefore, the findings provide evidence that combining Picture Sequence and QAR may serve as a useful instructional approach for teaching narrative reading in EFL classrooms.

These results warrant further consideration in light of previous studies and established theories in order to understand how and why these strategies can improve reading comprehension. The success of this intervention can be attributed to the complementary strengths of the two strategies employed. The Picture Sequencing Strategy, for example, helps students understand the logical flow of a narrative by transforming abstract textual information into concrete visual representations. These visual aids help students form mental models of the story's events, thereby enhancing both comprehension and retention of the memory. This aligns with Efendi's (2021) suggestion that images offer clear visual representations that support understanding. At the same time, the QAR strategy guided students in identifying the types of questions and understanding where and how to find the answers. Raphael's (1986) framework for QAR helped learners identify four levels of comprehension: (Right There) for literal understanding, (Think and Search) for summarizing across the text, (Author and Me) for combining text with interpretation, and (On Your Own) for responses based on personal experience.

Several prior studies have supported the effectiveness of these strategies. For instance, research by Alqy and Zuhriyah (2023) demonstrated how Picture Sequences enhanced narrative comprehension by assisting students in sequencing events and recalling crucial story elements. Similarly, Bander et al. (2023) demonstrated that visuals increased motivation and helped students engage more deeply with texts. The present study's findings corroborated these findings, as students who engaged with Picture Sequences became more confident in retelling stories and identifying key elements.

QAR's value was also reinforced through this study. According to Afriani et al. (2020), students trained in QAR strategy became more skilled at distinguishing question types and using textual evidence effectively. In the current research, students in the experimental group developed a stronger awareness of how to connect their prior knowledge with the text and select appropriate responses. This structured thinking approach promoted more meaningful reading habits. Astuti (2019) also noted that QAR improved students' analytical skills. Similar outcomes were found here, where students not only answered questions correctly but could also explain their reasoning and summarize content more precisely.

When both strategies were applied together, they created a mutually reinforcing instructional approach. Visuals helped clarify the storyline, while question frameworks structured students' interpretation of the content. This combination aligned with Cortese's (2003) argument that students learn better when supported by visual materials and guided cognitive strategies. As observed in this study, the synergy between the two approaches resulted in increased students' engagement, enhanced their ability to analyze narrative texts, and improved their overall performance.

As reflected across multiple data sources, the integration of Picture Sequence with QAR strategies demonstrated clear pedagogical value in enhancing students' reading comprehension. This pedagogical value refers not only to the observed improvement in test scores but also to the way these strategies fostered essential learning behaviors such as active engagement, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. The visual structure provided by Picture Sequences helped students conceptualize the sequence of events, making abstract narrative components more concrete and accessible. At the same time, the QAR framework trained students to approach questions systematically by identifying the relationship between the question and the source of the answer, whether it was located directly in the text or required inference based on prior knowledge. From an instructional standpoint, integrating these strategies

represents a shift toward a more student-centered approach to learning. Instead of passively receiving information, students became active participants in the meaning-making process, taking an active role in creating their own understanding of the material. The increased enthusiasm, collaboration, and thoughtful questioning are evidence that the learning environment has been enriched by the strategies applied. Therefore, the pedagogical value demonstrated in this study extends not only to the academic gains but also to the broader educational development of students.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of integrating Picture Sequence and Question-Answer Relationship (QAR) strategies in improving tenth-grade students' reading comprehension of narrative texts. The findings suggest that students who were taught using the integrated approach achieved higher reading comprehension scores than those who received conventional instruction. The combination of Picture Sequence and QAR appeared to support students in visualizing story events, organizing narrative sequences, and approaching comprehension questions more strategically. These findings indicate that integrating visual and cognitive strategies may contribute to a more engaging and structured learning experience for EFL students. However, because this study was conducted with a limited sample from a single school, the findings should be interpreted with caution and cannot be generalized to all EFL contexts. Further research involving larger samples, different educational settings, and various text genres is recommended to provide additional evidence regarding the effectiveness of this instructional approach.

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