



IMPLEMENTING KWL STRATEGY IN TEACHING READING FOR VOCATIONAL STUDENTS

Hervina Rahmawati Fatimah¹, Maya Rahmawati², Fauzi Miftakh³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang

Email Correspondence: hervinarahmawati03@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the use of the KWL (Know-Want to Know-Learned) strategy to enhance vocational high school students' reading comprehension, particularly in identifying explanatory text structures. Conducted in an eleventh-grade class of 25 students, it employed a qualitative approach through observation, KWL chart analysis, and interviews. Although students initially struggled with the KWL process and text structure, they gradually improved in recognizing general statements and explanation sequences. Thematic analysis showed that the strategy fostered engagement, collaboration, and activation of prior knowledge, making it an effective scaffold in EFL reading instruction.

Keywords: Explanation Text, KWL Strategy, Reading Comprehension, Vocational High School

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension holds a vital role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, especially for vocational high school students. These students are expected to read not only general academic texts but also technical materials relevant to their field of study (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). However, in reality, many vocational students struggle to understand English texts effectively.

Several factors contribute to these difficulties. Limited vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, and minimal exposure to various text types often hinder their ability to make meaning from what they read (Butarbutar & Haswani, 2021). Since comprehension involves connecting new information with what the reader already knows, these limitations can significantly impact their learning outcomes.

Research has shown that recognizing text structure such as cause-effect, sequence, or explanation can improve both understanding and recall (Meyer et al., 1980). This skill is



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especially important in vocational education, where students need to process information logically and systematically (Derewianka, 1990). Unfortunately, explicit instruction in text structure is often lacking in the current teaching practices in vocational schools.

In many Indonesian vocational classrooms, English reading lessons still rely heavily on traditional methods such as word-for-word translation and surface-level questioning (Fauzi & Hanifah, 2019). These methods may help students decode words but often fail to engage them in active reading or develop awareness of how information is organized, especially in genres like explanation texts.

To address these challenges, the KWL (Know–Want to Know–Learned) strategy, first introduced by Ogle (1986), offers a promising alternative. By encouraging students to activate prior knowledge (K), pose questions based on curiosity (W), and reflect on what they have learned (L), this strategy fosters metacognitive awareness and deeper engagement with texts (Nunan, 2003). While the effectiveness of KWL in improving general reading comprehension has been noted in several studies (McLaughlin, 2012; Rahim, 2005; Ardiyan et al., 2022; Diasti et al., 2023), few have explored its potential in helping students recognize text structure particularly in the explanation genre.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how the KWL strategy can support vocational high school students not only in comprehending texts but also in identifying the structural elements of explanation texts. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the question: *How does the KWL strategy help vocational students understand and recognize the structure of explanation texts in EFL reading instruction?*

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative case study design as outlined by Yin (2018). The purpose was to explore, in depth, students' experiences with the KWL strategy during reading instruction, particularly in identifying the structure of explanation texts. The case study approach was chosen to capture the real-life context and complexity of classroom interactions and student responses.

Participants

The participants were 25 eleventh-grade students from a vocational high school located in Karawang, Indonesia. These students were selected because they were currently studying English explanation texts as part of the curriculum. To gain varied insights, six

students representing high, medium, and low English proficiency levels were purposively chosen for interviews.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected over a series of four classroom meetings. The instruments included classroom observations, students' KWL charts, and semi-structured interviews.

1. **Observations** were conducted to document how students engaged with the KWL strategy during reading activities.
2. **KWL charts**, completed by students during two reading sessions, served as written reflections of their thought processes before, during, and after reading.
3. **Semi-structured interviews** were held with six selected students to explore their individual experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding the strategy.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the six-phase framework by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process included: (1) **familiarization with the data**, (2) **generating initial codes**, (3) **searching for themes**, (4) **reviewing themes**, (5) **defining and naming themes**, and (6) **producing the final report**.

This method enabled the researcher to interpret patterns related to student engagement, comprehension development, and challenges in identifying text structure within the reading process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study aimed to explore how the KWL (Know–Want to Know–Learned) strategy supports vocational high school students' reading comprehension, with a specific focus on their ability to identify the structure of explanation texts. Thematic analysis of classroom observations, students' KWL charts, and interviews revealed three main themes:

KWL Enhances Focus and Comprehension

The first theme highlights how the KWL strategy provided a clear structure that helped students stay focused and better understand reading tasks. In the initial meeting, many students were unsure how to use the chart, especially regarding the purpose of each column. However, as the sessions progressed, a shift in engagement was observed.

By the third and fourth meetings, students showed greater independence in completing the KWL chart. They more clearly articulated what they already knew and what they wanted to find out, while their reflections in the “Learned” column became more relevant and aligned with the text's main ideas.

As expressed by Participant 2, *“This strategy helps me to be more focused, because the steps are simpler.”* This illustrates how the structured nature of KWL served not only as a cognitive guide but also as a motivational tool, helping students stay on task and extract meaning more effectively from the texts.

Identifying Explanation Sequences Remains a Challenge

Despite improved comprehension, many students still faced challenges in recognizing how explanation texts are sequenced. Most students could identify the general statement at the beginning of the text, but had difficulty following the step-by-step explanation that followed.

This was particularly evident in their early KWL chart entries. In the “Learned” section, some students merely copied lines from the text without fully grasping how the information was organized. Several also mentioned that unfamiliar or technical vocabulary hindered their understanding.

Participant 4 remarked, *“The sequence part is hard to understand because the words are difficult and long.”* Supporting this, written responses became more accurate only after repeated practice and guidance in the second reading activity. This suggests that while KWL offers a helpful structure, it should be complemented with vocabulary support and explicit instruction on text organization for optimal results.

Group Collaboration Boosts Engagement

The third theme emphasizes the role of peer collaboration in enhancing student participation and understanding. Throughout the four sessions, students worked in small groups to complete their KWL charts and discuss the reading materials. Observations showed that group work increased student motivation, especially among those with lower confidence in their language skills.

Interview responses supported this finding. Participant 5 stated, *“In group, it’s easier because we can talk and help each other.”* Another added, *“Sometimes I don’t understand the text, but my friend explains it, and I get it.”* These comments show how peer interaction facilitated deeper processing of the text.

This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction within the zone of proximal development. In EFL vocational classrooms, where students often face both linguistic and affective barriers, collaborative learning can act as a powerful scaffold.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the KWL strategy functions as an effective scaffold in vocational EFL classrooms, particularly in helping students engage with texts and begin to recognize their structure. The structured steps of KWL support metacognitive engagement and focus, confirming earlier theories proposed by Ogle (1986) and Nunan (2003).

Importantly, this study goes beyond general claims about KWL improving comprehension. It specifically shows how the strategy helps students make sense of explanation texts, texts that require a clear understanding of logical sequence and information flow. This genre-specific focus marks a departure from most prior studies, which have primarily examined KWL in the context of narrative or general informational texts.

Furthermore, while previous research has acknowledged the value of collaboration in learning, this study underscores its particular relevance for vocational students. The use of small group work not only encouraged active participation but also provided a low-pressure environment where students could clarify misunderstandings and learn from one another.

This study offers a fresh perspective by applying the KWL strategy in a vocational EFL classroom with a specific emphasis on helping students understand the structure of explanation texts. Unlike many previous studies that focus on general reading comprehension, this research highlights how a structured reading approach can support vocational learners in navigating both language and content-related challenges. The findings provide practical implications for more inclusive and targeted EFL instruction, particularly in underexplored vocational education settings.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how the KWL (Know–Want to Know–Learned) strategy supports vocational high school students in comprehending explanation texts, particularly in

identifying their structure. The findings show that KWL effectively enhances students' engagement, helps them organize their thoughts, and improves their ability to recognize key textual elements.

While students demonstrated progress in understanding general structures, challenges remained in identifying sequences within explanation texts, often due to vocabulary limitations. Group collaboration emerged as a valuable support, especially for students with lower proficiency.

In conclusion, the KWL strategy contributes positively to fostering more active and reflective reading behaviors in EFL vocational classrooms. However, to maximize its impact, it should be complemented with explicit instruction on vocabulary and text organization. Future research may explore how KWL can be integrated with teaching discourse markers or applied to other text genres to further develop students' reading skills.

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