Developing English Reading Comprehension with the KWL Plus Strategy

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill for secondary school students, enabling them to understand, interpret, and critically engage with texts in English. Despite its importance, many learners face challenges in comprehending texts due to limited vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, and ineffective reading strategies. To address these difficulties, the KWL Plus strategy—an extension of the traditional KWL (Know, Want to know, Learned) framework-has been proposed as an effective instructional approach. The KWL Plus strategy incorporates additional steps, such as reflecting on learning strategies and evaluating comprehension, to promote active reading and critical thinking.

This study investigates the effectiveness of the KWL Plus strategy in developing English reading comprehension skills among secondary school students. It examines how the strategy facilitates pre-reading activation of prior knowledge, encourages goal-oriented reading, and supports post-reading reflection and synthesis. The research also explores students' attitudes toward using KWL Plus, including motivation, engagement, and self-directed learning.

Findings from previous studies indicate that KWL Plus promotes deeper understanding of texts, enhances retention of information, and fosters analytical and evaluative reading skills. By systematically guiding students through the stages of knowing, questioning, learning, and reflecting, the strategy enables learners to become active, autonomous, and confident readers.

The results of this study are expected to provide practical pedagogical insights for teachers, demonstrating how structured, strategy-based instruction can improve reading comprehension and support the holistic development of English language skills in secondary education.

Keywords: English reading comprehension, KWL Plus strategy, secondary school students

Introduction

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in English language learning, as it enables students to understand, interpret, and engage with texts effectively. It plays a crucial role in academic success and lifelong learning, allowing learners to acquire knowledge, develop critical thinking skills, and communicate ideas effectively (Brown, 2014). However, many secondary school students face challenges in reading comprehension due to limited vocabulary, inadequate background knowledge, poor reading strategies, and lack of engagement with texts (Harmer, 2015). These difficulties often result in low comprehension, reduced motivation, and limited confidence in reading English materials.

To address these challenges, educators have emphasized the use of structured reading strategies that actively involve learners in the reading process. One such strategy is the **KWL Plus strategy,** an extension of the traditional KWL (Know, Want to know, Learned) framework. The KWL Plus strategy adds reflective and evaluative components, encouraging students not only to activate prior knowledge and set reading goals but also to reflect on learning strategies and evaluate their comprehension (Ogle, 1986; Tuncel, 2012). By promoting active engagement, goal-oriented reading, and critical reflection, the KWL Plus strategy helps learners construct meaning from texts and retain information more effectively.

Research has shown that strategy-based instruction, such as KWL Plus, enhances students' reading comprehension, fosters motivation, and develops autonomous learning skills (Sharif & Khalili, 2020). Integrating KWL Plus into English reading instruction aligns with constructivist learning principles, which emphasize active participation, prior knowledge activation, and learner-centered approaches (Vygotsky, 1978).

Given these benefits, this study investigates the effectiveness of the KWL Plus strategy in developing English reading comprehension among secondary school students, focusing on comprehension improvement, learner engagement, and attitudes toward strategy-based learning.

Problems of Developing English Reading Comprehension with the KWL Plus Strategy

Despite the advantages of the KWL Plus strategy in enhancing reading comprehension, several challenges may affect its implementation and effectiveness among secondary school students.

1. **Limited Prior Knowledge**
   o The KWL Plus strategy relies on activating students' prior knowledge during the "K" stage. Students with insufficient background knowledge may struggle to relate new content to what they already know, reducing the effectiveness of comprehension activities (Brown, 2014).

2. **Vocabulary and Language Proficiency Challenges**
   o Limited vocabulary and low English proficiency can hinder students' ability to understand texts, make predictions, and reflect on learning during the KWL Plus process. This can lead to frustration and decreased motivation (Harmer, 2015).

3. **Student Motivation and Engagement**
   o Some learners may find structured reading strategies like KWL Plus repetitive or challenging, especially if they are not accustomed to active or reflective learning approaches. Low engagement can reduce the benefits of the strategy (Sharif & Khalili, 2020).

4. **Time Constraints in Classroom Instruction**
   o Proper implementation of KWL Plus requires sufficient time for each stage-activating prior knowledge, setting goals, reading, and reflecting. In overcrowded curricula, teachers may struggle to allocate adequate time for these activities (Tuncel, 2012).

5. **Teacher Preparedness and Training**
   o Teachers need to be familiar with the KWL Plus framework and able to guide students through each stage effectively. Lack of training or experience can lead to superficial implementation, limiting students' comprehension gains (Ogle, 1986).

6. **Difficulty in Monitoring and Assessing Learning**
   o Evaluating students' progress through KWL Plus can be challenging, especially in large classes, as the strategy emphasizes qualitative reflection and self-assessment rather than conventional testing (Vygotsky, 1978).

Addressing these challenges requires careful instructional planning, scaffolding, teacher training, and adaptation of materials to students' proficiency levels and interests. When implemented thoughtfully, the KWL Plus strategy can effectively enhance reading comprehension and foster active, autonomous learning.

Characteristics of Developing English Reading Comprehension with the KWL Plus Strategy

The KWL Plus strategy possesses several distinctive characteristics that make it effective for enhancing English reading comprehension among secondary school students:

1. **Active Engagement**
   o Students are actively involved in all stages of reading: activating prior knowledge ("K"), setting learning goals ("W"), processing information while reading ("L"), and reflecting on strategies and comprehension ("Plus") (Ogle, 1986). This active participation promotes deeper understanding and retention.

2. **Learner-Centered Approach**
   o KWL Plus emphasizes learner autonomy by allowing students to identify what they know, what they want to learn, and how they process information. It encourages self-directed learning and personal responsibility for comprehension outcomes (Sharif & Khalili, 2020).

3. **Structured Reading Process**
   o The strategy provides a clear, step-by-step framework for approaching texts, helping students organize their thinking, focus on reading objectives, and track comprehension systematically (Tuncel, 2012).

4. **Integration of Metacognitive Skills**
   o KWL Plus incorporates reflection on learning strategies and comprehension, promoting metacognitive awareness. Students evaluate their understanding, recognize difficulties, and adjust strategies accordingly, enhancing critical thinking and problem-solving (Vygotsky, 1978).

5. Adaptability and Flexibility
   o The strategy can be applied to a wide range of text types, topics, and proficiency levels. Teachers can tailor tasks to match students' interests and abilities, ensuring relevance and engagement (Harmer, 2015).

6. Collaborative Learning Opportunities
   o While KWL Plus can be implemented individually, it also encourages peer interaction through discussions, sharing prior knowledge, and collaborative reflection, promoting social learning and communication skills (Brown, 2014).

7. Motivation and Interest
   o By setting personal learning goals and reflecting on achievements, students experience a sense of accomplishment, which enhances motivation and positive attitudes toward reading in English (Sharif & Khalili, 2020).

Overall, the KWL Plus strategy combines structure, reflection, and active learner participation, making it an effective and flexible tool for developing English reading comprehension while fostering cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational growth.

The Importance of Developing English Reading Comprehension with the KWL Plus Strategy

Developing English reading comprehension is essential for secondary school students, as it underpins academic achievement, language proficiency, and lifelong learning. Reading comprehension allows learners to understand, analyze, and respond to texts, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills (Brown, 2014). In the context of English as a foreign language, students often face difficulties such as limited vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, and low engagement, which can hinder their reading performance (Harmer, 2015).

The KWL Plus strategy addresses these challenges by providing a structured, learner-centered approach to reading. By guiding students through the stages of activating prior knowledge ("K"), setting learning goals ("W"), monitoring learning ("L"), and reflecting on comprehension and strategies ("Plus"), the method promotes active and meaningful engagement with texts (Ogle, 1986; Tuncel, 2012). This structured approach helps students develop metacognitive awareness, enabling them to evaluate their understanding, adjust strategies, and become autonomous learners (Vygotsky, 1978).

Moreover, KWL Plus encourages collaborative learning and interaction, as students can discuss their prior knowledge, share questions, and reflect on learning outcomes with peers. This not only enhances comprehension but also strengthens social and communication skills (Sharif & Khalili, 2020).

The importance of integrating KWL Plus into English reading instruction lies in its ability to improve comprehension, retention, and critical thinking while fostering learner motivation, autonomy, and confidence. It equips students with practical strategies to approach complex texts and promotes active, reflective, and self-directed learning, which are essential skills for academic success and lifelong language development.

Benefits of Developing English Reading Comprehension with the KWL Plus Strategy

The KWL Plus strategy offers multiple benefits in enhancing English reading comprehension for secondary school students. These benefits address both cognitive and affective aspects of learning:

1. Improved Reading Comprehension
   o By guiding students through structured stages—activating prior knowledge, setting learning goals, processing information, and reflecting on strategies—KWL Plus helps learners understand and retain information more effectively (Ogle, 1986; Tuncel, 2012).

2. Development of Metacognitive Skills
   o KWL Plus encourages students to monitor their understanding, evaluate learning strategies, and reflect on comprehension, fostering metacognitive awareness and self-regulated learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

3. Increased Motivation and Engagement
   o Setting personal learning goals ("W") and reflecting on achievements ("Plus") provides a sense of ownership and accomplishment, which enhances motivation and interest in reading English texts (Sharif & Khalili, 2020).

4. Enhanced Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills

o Reflective components of KWL Plus promote analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information, encouraging learners to think critically about texts and make meaningful connections (Brown, 2014).

5. **Learner Autonomy and Confidence**
   o The strategy promotes self-directed learning, as students actively manage their reading process and evaluate their progress. This autonomy builds confidence in reading and learning English (Harmer, 2015).

6. **Collaborative Learning Opportunities**
   o KWL Plus can involve peer discussions and sharing of prior knowledge and questions, fostering social interaction, cooperative learning, and communication skills (Sharif & Khalili, 2020).

7. **Flexibility Across Text Types and Proficiency Levels**
   o The strategy is adaptable to various texts, topics, and learners' proficiency levels, ensuring relevance, inclusivity, and continuous challenge (Tuncel, 2012).

Overall, the KWL Plus strategy not only enhances reading comprehension but also develops learners' cognitive, metacognitive, and affective skills, preparing them to become active, autonomous, and motivated readers of English.

Knowledge from Research

Research and practical experience with the KWL Plus strategy provide valuable insights into effective reading instruction and learner development:

1. **Nature of Reading Comprehension**
   o Reading is an interactive and constructive process that involves decoding text, making inferences, connecting prior knowledge, and evaluating meaning (Brown, 2014). Students often struggle with limited vocabulary, unfamiliar content, and ineffective reading strategies, which can inhibit comprehension (Harmer, 2015).

2. **Effectiveness of the KWL Plus Strategy**
   o KWL Plus structures reading into meaningful stages: activating prior knowledge ("K"), setting learning goals ("W"), processing and learning from the text ("L"), and reflecting on comprehension and strategies ("Plus") (Ogle, 1986; Tuncel, 2012). This structured approach promotes deeper understanding, active engagement, and metacognitive awareness.

3. **Pedagogical Strategies for Implementation**
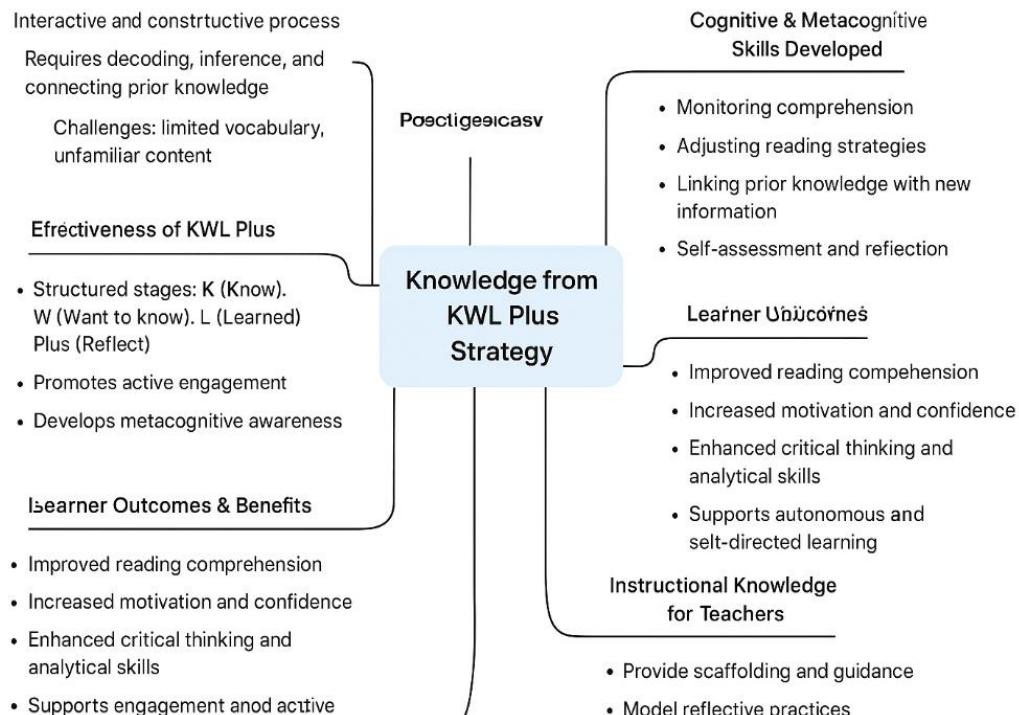
- o Teachers can enhance KWL Plus effectiveness by:
  - Selecting texts appropriate for students' proficiency levels.
  - Guiding students in setting clear and achievable learning goals.
  - Facilitating reflective discussion and evaluation of strategies.
  - Encouraging collaborative activities to share knowledge and insights (Sharif & Khalili, 2020).

4. **Learner Outcomes and Benefits**
   - o Students using KWL Plus demonstrate improved reading comprehension, increased motivation, greater confidence, and stronger critical thinking and analytical skills. The strategy supports autonomous and self-directed learning, allowing students to monitor and regulate their comprehension effectively (Vygotsky, 1978).

5. **Instructional Knowledge for Teachers**
   - o Effective use of KWL Plus requires teacher guidance, scaffolding, and feedback. Teachers must create a supportive environment, model reflective practices, and adapt tasks to learners' interests and cultural backgrounds to maximize engagement and learning outcomes (Brown, 2014; Harmer, 2015).

Overall, knowledge from KWL Plus research emphasizes the importance of structured, learner-centered strategies that integrate cognitive, metacognitive, and affective components to develop English reading comprehension in secondary education.

Conclusion

The use of the KWL Plus strategy has been shown to effectively enhance English reading comprehension among students. By guiding learners to activate prior knowledge (K), set learning goals (W), monitor their progress (L), and reflect on new knowledge (+), this strategy encourages active engagement with texts and promotes deeper understanding. Students become more motivated, confident, and independent readers, as they can connect new information with what they already know and assess their own learning process. Implementing KWL Plus not only improves comprehension skills but also fosters critical thinking, retention, and long-term learning outcomes. Therefore, this strategy serves as a practical and impactful approach for educators aiming to develop students' reading proficiency in English.

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