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THE ROLE OF KWL CHARTS IN ENHANCING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AMONG EFL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the effectiveness of the KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned) chart—a popular graphic organizer—in developing reading comprehension skills among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) undergraduate students. A total of 22 students participated in the study. While the control group read the text using traditional methods without visual frameworks, the experimental group completed a KWL visual chart before and during the reading process. The findings indicated that utilizing the KWL schema significantly enhanced students' ability to identify main ideas and analyze textual information more effectively.
Keywords: English language, reading comprehension, KWL chart, visual schema, undergraduate students, text processing.

ANNOTATSIYA: Ushbu maqola ingliz tili darslarida talabalarning o'qib tushunish (reading comprehension) ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishda grafik tashkilotchi hisoblangan KWL (Bilaman, Bilishni xohlayman, Bildim) jadval-sxemasining samaradorligini o'rganadi. Tadqiqotda jami 22 nafar bakalavriat talabasi ishtirok etdi. Nazorat guruhidagi talabalar matnni an'anaviy usulda shunchaki o'qib chiqishdi, eksperimental guruhda esa o'qishdan oldin va o'qish davomida KWL vizual sxemasi to'ldirildi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatdiki, KWL sxemasidan foydalanish talabalarning matndagi asosiy g'oyalarni topish hamda axborotni tahlil qilish qobiliyatini sezilarli darajada oshirgan.
Kalit so'zlar: ingliz tili, o'qib tushunish, KWL jadvali, vizual sxema, bakalavriat talabalari, matn ustida ishlash.

АННОТАЦИЯ: В данной статье исследуется эффективность таблицы KWL (Знаю, Хочу узнать, Узнал) — популярного графического организатора — в развитии навыков чтения (reading comprehension) у студентов бакалавриата, изучающих английский язык. В исследовании приняли участие 22 студента. В контрольной группе студенты читали текст традиционным способом без визуальных структур, тогда как в экспериментальной группе до и во время чтения заполнялась визуальная схема KWL. Результаты показали, что использование схемы KWL значительно повысило способность студентов находить ключевые идеи и анализировать текстовую информацию.
Ключевые слова: английский язык, чтение текста, таблица KWL, визуальная схема, студенты бакалавриата.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental academic skill for university students. In higher education, undergraduate students must read a large volume of English scientific articles, textbooks,

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and research papers. However, reading is not just about pronouncing words correctly or translating sentences; it is about deeply understanding the author's hidden message and analyzing the facts. Many first-year students struggle with reading lessons. They often complain that after reading a long page of an English text, they cannot remember the main points or explain what the text was about.

To overcome this reading barrier, educational researchers suggest using a visual organizer called the KWL chart. Invented by Donna Ogle [1;10-22], the KWL chart is a visual matrix divided into three simple columns: "K" (What I Know), "W" (What I Want to Know), and "L" (What I Learned). This visual framework works as a cognitive bridge. According to cognitive learning theories by Jean Piaget [2;55-70], human learning occurs when new information is actively connected to prior knowledge.

When students fill out the first two columns before reading, they activate their brains and set a clear focus for reading. As reading expert Christine Nuttall [3;40-55] states, active readers always interact with the text instead of just looking at the words passively. Locally, in Uzbekistan's foreign language methodology, professor Jamol Jalolov [4;110-125] notes that reading lessons must include pre-reading activities that stimulate the students' logical thinking and curiosity.

As a first-year student, I have noticed that my classmates often read texts passively, which makes them forget the vocabulary and facts instantly. Therefore, this study aims to see how using a visual KWL chart can change students' reading behavior and improve their overall text comprehension score.

METHODS

Participants:

The empirical study was organized at Namangan State University, focusing on a group of 22 undergraduate students. All participants shared a similar intermediate English level. They were split into two equal teams of 11: the Control Group (traditional reading) and the Experimental Group (reading with a visual KWL framework).

Procedure:

The practical experiment was conducted using an authentic 600-word reading text about "The History and Future of Green Architecture." Both groups had exactly 25 minutes to read and analyze the text.

- In the Control Group, students used the traditional reading style. The teacher gave them the text, and they started reading it immediately. They were allowed to underline words and make text notes on the margins.

- In the Experimental Group, before opening the text, the teacher drew a large KWL matrix on the board and gave copies to the students. For the first 5 minutes, students filled out the "K" column (writing down what they already knew about eco-friendly buildings) and the "W" column (writing what questions they wanted the text to answer). Then, they read the text and simultaneously filled out the "L" column (writing down the new facts they discovered).

Evaluation Method:

After the 25-minute reading period, the texts and charts were collected. Both groups received a standard reading comprehension test consisting of 10 comprehension questions. Five questions were literal (finding direct facts from the text), and five questions were inferential (requiring critical thinking and analyzing the text structure). Each correct answer received 1 point, leading to a maximum of 10 points.

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RESULTS

The quantitative data obtained from the comprehension tests clearly demonstrated that the visual KWL strategy turns reading into a much more successful cognitive process.

In the literal comprehension section, where students had to pinpoint specific facts from the text, the control group scored an average of 6.2 out of 10 points. They often got confused by the long paragraphs and missed some direct answers. On the other hand, the experimental group students, who tracked their reading using the KWL sheet, achieved an average score of 8.4 out of 10 points. The chart helped them scan the text for answers much faster.

The most prominent difference was observed in the inferential critical thinking section of the test. The traditional control group students struggled significantly, finishing with a low average score of 4.1 out of 10 points. They could not synthesize the author's opinions easily. However, the experimental group students performed exceptionally well, reaching an average score of 7.8 out of 10 points.

When looking at the combined total score of the test, the control group finished with an overall average of 5.15 points, while the experimental group finished with a high average of 8.1 points. This means the visual group outperformed the traditional group by roughly 57%. Furthermore, during the post-reading discussion, 90% of the students in the experimental group were able to retell the text structure logically without looking back at the paper.

ANALYSIS

The deep textual analysis of these results shows that a visual organizer changes a student's reading perspective from passive to active. In the control group, students started reading the text blindly. They did not have an initial goal, so their minds tried to process every single word with equal importance. This led to cognitive fatigue. By the time they reached the fifth paragraph, they had already forgotten the details of the first paragraph. This explains their low score of 4.1 in critical thinking.

In contrast, the KWL chart gave the experimental group a sense of direction. By writing down what they "Wanted to know" (*W* column) before reading, their brains developed an active filter. While reading, their eyes automatically scanned the lines like a radar to catch the answers to their own questions.

The "L" column (*Learned*) acted as a visual filing cabinet. Instead of leaving the new facts as loose text blocks in their minds, the students immediately structured them inside the visual boxes. This physical act of writing down key information into a diagram solidified their textual memory. It lowered their reading anxiety and allowed them to process complex sentences with higher confidence, which ultimately resulted in their excellent 8.1 overall average score.

DISCUSSION

Our research proves that visual frameworks are crucial for transforming reading lessons into deep cognitive experiences. The high performance of the experimental group strongly confirms Neil Anderson’s [5;75-90] active reading theories, which state that successful readers always control their comprehension using visual and mental blueprints.

Using a KWL chart removes the traditional teacher-centered approach where the teacher asks all the questions. Instead, it allows undergraduate students to ask their own questions and monitor

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their own learning process. This is extremely important for first-year students who are transitioning from school memorization to independent university-level critical analysis.

Visual charts do not require advanced graphic skills; they simply use shapes and columns to give students a clear mental plan. By introducing these visual schemas into the language curriculum, we can help students read academic English texts faster, deeper, and with genuine interest.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the KWL chart is an exceptionally effective visual tool for enhancing reading comprehension among EFL university students. The empirical results prove that using this graphic organizer significantly improves both factual and critical reading scores while reducing classroom boredom. The KWL matrix helps undergraduate students organize their thoughts and remember textual information long after the lesson ends. Therefore, we highly recommend that university English instructors regularly implement KWL charts and similar graphic organizers during reading comprehension modules to foster independent and analytical reading habits.

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