Enhancing College English Reading Pedagogy through the Integration of the KWL Teaching Mode

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ABSTRACT

College English reading instruction in Northwest China presents a range of challenges, such as students' varying linguistic backgrounds, limited exposure to English, a test-centric teaching approach, and resource constraints. In response, educators have developed diverse strategies to tackle these difficulties. This study aims to investigate the KWL model's effectiveness in enhancing students' reading comprehension skills by conducting experimental research. The research involved 51 undergraduate students who were majoring in translation and interpretation at a private university in Northwest China and enrolled in the College English Reading I course. The students were divided into two groups, with Class 2 serving as the experimental group and Class 5 as the control group. After implementing the KWL model in the course for one semester, test scores and examination results were analyzed to assess the model's impact. The findings revealed that the KWL teaching method helped students to analyze texts more effectively and connect their prior knowledge to new reading material. In the whole process, online learning platform and resources were emplyed. This study provides useful insights for college English reading instructors looking to adopt an innovative teaching approach that caters to students' interests and prior knowledge.

Keywords: College English teaching mode reform, KWL model, Challenges in college English reading teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

English reading courses in Northwestern Chinese universities play a vital role in the regional educational landscape. This part explores the significance of these courses within the context of Northwestern China, a region characterized by cultural diversity and burgeoning economic opportunities. It also delves into the unique challenges and opportunities associated with English language education in this area.

1.1 Significance of English Reading Courses for undergraduates.

First, for the reason of globalization and communication: In an era of globalization, proficiency in English is paramount for students in Northwestern China. English serves as a facilitator of cross-cultural communication, enabling students to engage on a global scale, access international information, and actively participate in intercultural dialogues. University English reading courses provide the essential foundation for honing advanced language skills, effectively opening doors to a wealth of global knowledge.

Second, reading play a significant role in pursuing academic success: English reading proficiency stands as an indispensable asset for academic achievement, especially among students pursuing fields such as international relations, business, and the sciences. It offers unfettered access to a trove of academic resources, journals, and research publications in English, significantly enhancing their academic pursuits.

Thirdly, English language skills are highly coveted by employers, both within China and in the global job market. Graduates proficient in English reading gain a competitive edge, as many

multinational corporations and industries require a high level of English proficiency.

1.2 Challenges of University English Reading Courses in Northwestern China

College students in Northwestern China face a range of challenges in their English classes. The primary obstacle is linguistic diversity, as many students speak local dialects or regional languages, which makes it difficult for them to fully understand the intricacies of the English language.

In addition, these students have limited exposure to authentic English materials and interactions with native speakers, which negatively affects their listening and reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, several universities in Northwestern China struggle with resource constraints, such as a shortage of qualified English instructors and limited access to updated teaching materials.

To make matters worse, many universities in the region prioritize standardized English exams over holistic language acquisition, which can undermine the practical application of English in real-world contexts.

In college English reading classes, students face additional challenges, including the inherent difficulty of English texts, a lack of motivation, and potentially ineffective teaching methods. A study by Nanda and Pratama highlights the need to address these challenges and refine teaching approaches to improve student outcomes.

Despite these challenges, English reading courses in Northwestern China are crucial for academic and professional success in the globalized world. It is essential to address linguistic diversity, increase exposure to English, and emphasize the importance of these courses for significant improvements in regional English education.

1.3 Research Purpose and Research Questions

This study applies the KWL teaching model to the English reading teaching of undergraduate students majoring in translation in our university, and uses the method of empirical teaching to study how the KWL teaching model is applied in actual university English reading teaching, and to test the advantages and shortcomings of the KWL teaching model in university English reading teaching. It is

hoped that it can provide some practical experience for university English reading teaching in Northwest China.

There are two research questions in this study:

- How can we integrate the KWL teaching model into English reading class for undergraduates?

- How does KWL teaching model improve the students' reading comprehension?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 KWL Model

In English reading instruction, the KWL model serves as a three-step pedagogical approach, Donna Ogle [5] explicates that KWL stands for Know, Want to know, and Learn, symbolizing the sequential processes of reading instruction involving what students already know, what they want to know, and what they ultimately learn.

In the first stage, students respond to pre-reading questions to activate prior knowledge. Engaging in a brainstorming activity, they collectively recall background information related to the lesson, discussing aspects like words, phrases, structures, writers, and cultural elements. This information is documented in the "K" column of the widely adopted KWL chart.

The "W" element, representing "what I want to know before or while reading," involves students actively formulating questions to deepen their understanding of the reading topic. Resembling a "goal-setting" stage, teachers assist students in generating questions to overcome challenges like cognitive conflict, information gaps, and lack of student interest, as noted by Carr and Ogle [2].

In the concluding "L" phase, symbolizing "what I have learned after reading," students collaborate with instructors to synthesize newfound knowledge. This collaborative process extends to enriching discussions among students, enhancing flexibility and communication skills in line with the transformative goals of the KWL model.

2.2 KWL Model and English reading teaching

The KWL model is a teaching and learning strategy that encourages students to develop effective reading skills by integrating new material into their existing knowledge base, constructing

new understanding, and adapting existing conceptions and beliefs as needed [4]. It is widely used in English teaching class. The KWL model helps students to process information, think independently and effectively, build up knowledge and trigger the students to be autonomous learners[1][3][7].

To sum up, KWL model represents three steps in a class. Before reading, the teacher asks students to recall their background knowledge as brainstorm by asking them what they know before the lesson. And during reading, the teacher asks what students want to know about today's new lesson, and then students resolve the questions by themselves. At last, after learning, the teacher lets students summarize the new lesson by asking what they have learned in the new class. All these three questions are written in KWL chart by students.
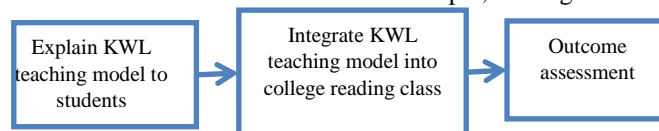

Figure 1 Research rationale.

Integrating the KWL model into college reading classes is the most crucial part of this research as it is essential for achieving the desired teaching outcomes. The final part involves assessing the teaching outcomes, which includes conducting a post-test and collecting scores of students in the experimental and control classes. A comparison is then made between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control classes, respectively.

3.2 Population

This empirical study delves into the teaching approach of College English Reading I, focusing on 46 translation and interpretation undergraduates from a private university in Northwest China. The participants were divided into two groups - an experimental group (Class 2) and a control group (Class 5). The experimental group underwent a teaching reform based on the KWL teaching mode, while the control group primarily received instruction through traditional college English Reading methods. After one semester experiment, the pretest scores of students and semester examination scores will be compared.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Rationale

To follow these guidelines ("Figure 1"), it's crucial that lecturers explain the KWL teaching model and how it works in the reading class before using it. The KWL model is a thinking-reading procedure that helps learners access the knowledge they possess about the topic. It has three steps: 1). "K" Step: Students share what they know about the topic. 2). "W" Step: Before reading, students write down what they want to learn. 3). "L" Step: After reading, students summarize what they learned and identify what they still need to learn. Lecturers should guide students through the first two steps with oral discussions followed by personal responses on worksheets. By following the KWL model, learners access existing knowledge about the topic, leading to better comprehension.

3.3 Implementation of KWL Model into College Reading Class

3.3.1 Implementing KWL Model into College English Reading Class

As per Ogle's research in 1986[5], we can implement the KWL model into a college reading class by following these steps as is shown in "Figure 2".

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│        STEP 1 Choose a text         │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│      STEP 2 Create a KWL chart      │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  STEP 3 Ask students to brainstorm  │
│        words, terms, or phrases.    │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  STEP 4 Ask students what they want │
│        to learn about the topic.    │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  STEP 5 Have students read the text │
│    and fill out the L column of     │
│           their charts.             │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  STEP 6 Discuss the information that│
│    students recorded in the L       │
│           column.                   │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  │
                  ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  STEP 7 Encourage students to       │
│  research any questions in the W    │
│  column that were not answered by   │
│           the text.                 │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
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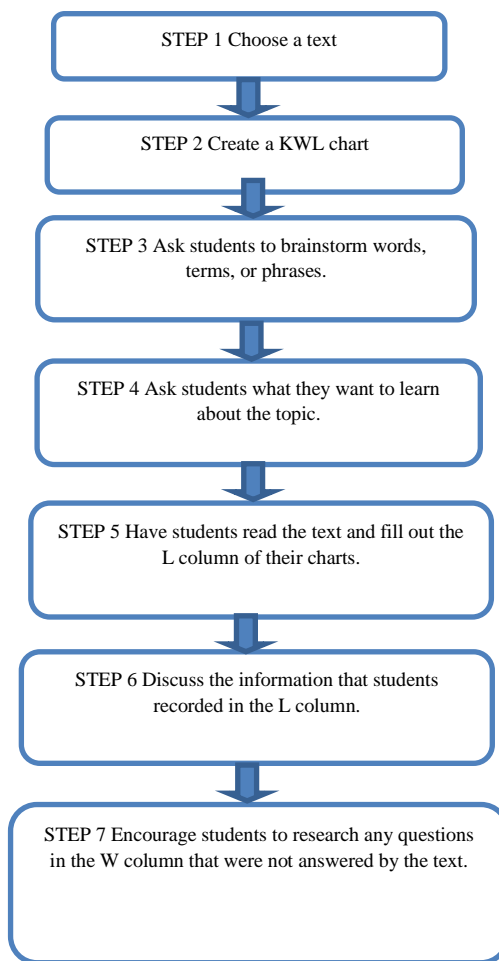
Figure 2 Steps to implement KWL model into college English reading class.

To implement the KWL model in college English classes, seven steps are suggested to follow as shown in "Figure 2":

- The lecturers select a text, either narrative or expository.

- The lecturers make KWL charts for both the teacher and students.

- Students in groups collaboratively generate relevant words, terms, or phrases related to the topic and record them in the K column of the chart.The lecturers record all students' contributions. Choose a key concept that is specific enough to elicit informative insights. This step involves group brainstorming to identify what the participants already know about the reading topic. The goal of this brainstorming exercise is to activate students' prior knowledge or schemas to facilitate comprehension.

- The lecturer encourages students to express their curiosity about the topic and write down their questions. The questions are recorded in the "W" column. In step 3, students reflect on what they already know about the topic and now they identify categories of information they want to learn. The teacher helps students focus on important questions.

- Students read and fill out the "L" column of their charts by looking for answers to the questions in their "W" column. They have a better understanding of the topic and learn to ask meaningful questions that drive their learning.

- To foster student engagement with the material, it is essential to encourage discussion about the information they have documented in the "L" column. Students can review their queries and ascertain whether the text addresses their concerns. Lecturers can recommend additional resources to aid in students' pursuit of knowledge. This approach places students' individual interests at the forefront rather

than solely delving into the author's perspective.

- Students should be motivated to conduct further research on any questions in the "W" column that remain unanswered by the text.

3.3.2 Teaching Resources: Discussing Methods to Enhance KWL Teaching Using Modern Technology and Educational Resources

Chaoxing platform can be used in Step 3 as shown in "Figure 2", students can be divided into groups, and employ Chaoxing platform on their cellphones. In this way, it is easy to show all the brainstorm results to students by projecting them on the display screen at the front of the classroom. It is beneficial for students to see the results of brainstorm in time. At the same time, cloud computing can be used to see the most frequent words and expressions by the size and thickness of the font. The larger the font size and the thicker the font, the more students used the expression or vocabulary. Conversely,The smaller the font size and the thinner the font, the fewer students used the expression or vocabulary

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To assess the efficacy of KWL teaching methodology, we conducted an analysis of the English reading course outcomes of our students. Before the start of the course, we administered a pretest to gather reliable data for future comparisons. After completing the teaching experiment after one semester, we conducted a post-test and carried out a comparative analysis. Furthermore, we collected the scores of the experimental and control classes, in the final semester examination held at the end of each semester, to evaluate the teaching effect.

Table 1. preliminary test

	N	Mean	Min.	Max.
Class 2	25	5.08	1	9
Class 5	26	5.12	0	9
sum	51	5.10	0	9

Table 2. Final test

	N	Mean	Min.	Max.
Class 2	25	7.68	2	11
Class 5	26	6.23	0	9
sum	51	6.955	0	11

The pre-test and post-test scores for the college English reading course are displayed in "Table 1" and "Tabel 2". "Table 1" highlights that 25 students in experimental Class 2 took the pre-test, with the highest score being 9, the lowest score being 1, and the class average being 5.08. The control class, Class 5, had 26 participants with a maximum score of 9, a minimum score of 0, and a class average of 5.12. The average scores of both classes indicate a similar level of English reading ability. "Table 2" shows that after a semester of teaching and testing, the experimental Class 2's average score improved from 5.08 to 7.68, with the highest score increasing from 9 to 11. The students' average scores improved significantly.

Table 3. Scores of semester examination

Student No.	Scores of class 5	Scores of class 2
Stu. 1	60	95
Stu. 2	80	73
Stu. 3	55	70.5
Stu. 4	51	60
Stu. 5	67	51.5
Stu. 6	52	42
Stu. 7	62	65
Stu. 8	54	65.5
Stu. 9	56	77
Stu. 10	69	53
Stu. 11	44	59.5
Stu. 12	49	60.5
Stu. 13	61	76.5
Stu. 14	59	64
Stu. 15	47	68.5
Stu. 16	57	72
Stu. 17	51	78
Stu. 18	50	76
Stu. 19	51	64.5
Stu. 20	40	53.5
Stu. 21	48	65
Stu. 22	48	67
Stu. 23	49	62
Stu. 24	57	59

Student No.	Scores of class 5	Scores of class 2
Stu. 25	72	49
Stu. 26	62	
Mean	56	68

The final exam scores for College English Reading I are summarized in "Table 3". Based on the data in "Table 1", it is evident that the experimental and control classes had similar scores at the beginning of the semester. However, at the end of the semester, when both classes used the same exam paper, with the same type of questions and structure, the experimental class scored an average of 68, while the control class, which continued to follow the traditional teaching method, scored an average of 56.

The comparison of these scores highlights that the KWL teaching model is highly effective in enhancing students' comprehensive English reading ability and their competence to analyze and comprehend reading materials[1][6].

5. CONCLUSION

Research has shown that the KWL approach can help students improve their reading skills by giving them a better understanding of the structure of written material. It also encourages them to use their prior knowledge to enhance their comprehension of the text. The KWL approach is particularly effective in group settings and has been shown to increase student engagement. However, it is important for teachers to choose relevant topics that students are already familiar with. Assigning topics without first considering their background knowledge is not recommended, as the KWL approach relies on activating their prior understanding of the subject matter.

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