



**ENHANCING EFL READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH CHUNKING STRATEGIES: CLASSROOM RESEARCH IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

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**ABSTRAK**

Siswa EFL di sekolah kejuruan Indonesia masih mengalami kesulitan dalam memahami bahan bacaan. Siswa cenderung mendasarkan pemahaman mereka pada analisis kata dan terjemahan, yang menghambat kemampuan mereka untuk membaca teks secara menyeluruh. Masalah ini sangat kritis karena siswa perlu memahami teks instruksional dan prosedural untuk keperluan pekerjaan mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menerapkan strategi chunking guna meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa di kelas EFL sekolah kejuruan. Dengan menggunakan metode CAR, yang berfokus pada sekelompok siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan, penelitian ini dilakukan dalam satu siklus yang terdiri dari empat tahap: perencanaan, pelaksanaan, observasi, dan refleksi. Tes pemahaman bacaan, pengamatan kelas, dan catatan refleksi siswa digunakan sebagai instrumen pengumpulan data. Terjadi peningkatan signifikan dalam pemahaman bacaan siswa, yang dibuktikan dengan nilai tes yang lebih tinggi, peningkatan kelancaran membaca, dan perubahan dalam proses membaca, yang awalnya hanya melibatkan melihat kelompok kata atau frasa untuk membangun makna. Pengamatan kelas menunjukkan peningkatan partisipasi dan kepercayaan diri siswa. Beberapa siswa tidak menunjukkan peningkatan, namun skor mereka juga tidak menurun. Kondisi ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi tersebut cukup efektif dalam mengajar mereka. Penelitian ini dihentikan pada akhir siklus I karena tujuan pembelajaran telah tercapai. Penelitian ini memberikan bukti praktis mengenai efektivitas dan kelayakan strategi chunking dalam meningkatkan pemahaman bacaan di lingkungan sekolah kejuruan.

**Kata Kunci:** *Pemahaman Bacaan EFL, Strategi Chunking, Pendidikan Kejuruan, Penelitian Tindakan Kelas*

**ABSTRACT**

Indonesian vocational EFL students still have problems understanding reading materials. Students tend to base their understanding on word analysis and translation, which hinders their ability to read texts as a whole. This problem is particularly critical as students need to understand instructional and procedural texts for their work. This study aimed to apply the chunking strategy to improve students' reading comprehension in vocational EFL classes. Using the CAR method, which focuses on a group of vocational high school students, this study was conducted in a single cycle comprising four stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. Reading comprehension tests, classroom observations, and student reflection notes were used as data collection instruments. A significant improvement in students' reading comprehension, as evidenced by higher test scores, increased reading fluency, and changes in the reading process, which initially involved only looking at groups of words or phrases to construct meaning. Classroom observations showed an improvement in students' participation and confidence. Some students did not show their improvement, but their scores did not decline either. This condition shows that the strategy was quite effective in teaching them. The study



was terminated at the end of cycle I because the teaching objectives had been achieved. This study provides practical evidence of the effectiveness and feasibility of the chunking strategy in improving reading comprehension in a vocational school setting.

**Keywords:** *EFL Reading Comprehension, Chunking Strategy, Vocational Education, Classroom Action Research*

## INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental component in mastering English as a foreign language (EFL), enabling learners to understand meaning, interpret ideas, and critically analyze written texts (Armanda & Indriani, 2023; Grabe & Yamashita, 2022). In an EFL context, reading also functions as a tool to enrich vocabulary, develop grammatical knowledge, and build academic literacy (Fahmi & Arjulayana, 2024). However, for vocational school students, reading comprehension presents a more complex challenge due to the technical vocabulary and instructional structures commonly found in vocational texts. This challenge is further exacerbated by limited access to authentic materials relevant to their fields, making reading comprehension a major obstacle in achieving workplace literacy competencies.

Literacy remains a national concern in Indonesia. Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate that Indonesian students achieved an average reading score of 371, significantly below the OECD average of 476 (OECD, 2023). This low performance reflects students' limited reading comprehension, particularly in higher-order skills such as inference and critical interpretation. Consequently, these foundational literacy gaps hinder the development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) proficiency within the vocational education sector. These challenges are more pronounced in vocational education, where students often perceive English as irrelevant to their technical fields and demonstrate low motivation to engage in reading (Shewangizaw & Hailu, 2024).

These national-level findings are also reflected in classroom practices. Classroom observations reveal similar patterns. Many students can recognize individual English words but struggle to understand sentence and paragraph meanings (Allehyani, 2025). The students tend to recall isolated lexical items rather than grasp the overall message of a text (Herman & Leeser, 2022; Kwakkel et al., 2024). This indicates that reading instruction in vocational EFL classrooms overemphasizes word-level analysis and translation, while neglecting fluency and holistic text processing.

Vocational students are required to engage with various workplace-related texts, such as manuals, work orders, safety regulations, and technical reports. These texts demand the ability to quickly identify and process relevant information. However, when instruction relies heavily on translation or decontextualized grammar exercises, students have limited opportunities to develop higher-order reading skills, including summarizing, procedural reading, and functional comprehension of technical texts (Ahmed Okasha, 2020). Additionally, instructional materials are sometimes misaligned with students' cultural and social contexts, further hindering effective learning (Halawa et al., 2025).

Chunking is a teaching strategy that addresses this need by grouping words into manageable units. As a reading strategy, it enables students to recognize syntactic and semantic patterns, increases reading speed, and reduces cognitive load. According to cognitive load theory, dividing information into smaller units enhances processing, comprehension, and retention (Huang et al., 2023; Zou et al., 2025). From a psycholinguistic perspective, chunking enhances reading comprehension by integrating lexical, syntactic, and discourse-level processing (Wang & Christiansen, 2024). This approach is particularly relevant for vocational

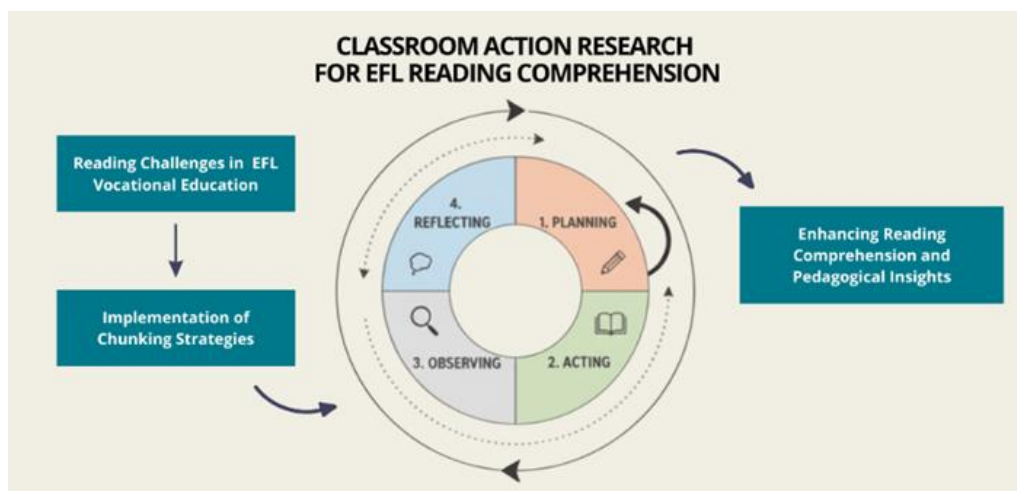
students, whose texts often contain repetitive phrase patterns and specialized vocabulary characteristic of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts (Ghafar, 2022).

Several empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of chunking in EFL reading contexts. Nguyen and Nguyen (2024) reported improved performance among Vietnamese students compared to those receiving traditional instruction. Similarly, Alnujaidi (2025) found a significant increase in Saudi students' reading comprehension following chunking-based tasks. In Indonesia, Sari et al. (2023) showed that vocational students taught through chunking achieved better comprehension and higher engagement than those using translation-based methods. Additionally, Mediena et al. (2025) highlighted its role in helping students manage complex ESP texts through semantically meaningful grouping. Despite growing evidence on chunking effectiveness, its pedagogical implementation in vocational EFL contexts remains underexplored, particularly within iterative and reflective frameworks such as Classroom Action Research (CAR). These limits understanding of how chunking can be adapted to context-specific instructional challenges.

Classroom Action Research (CAR) provides a practical framework for addressing instructional challenges by enabling teachers to design, implement, and evaluate interventions in their own classrooms (Yusron et al., 2023). Previous CAR studies indicate that chunking-based instruction can improve reading comprehension and enhance student engagement (Abejuela et al., 2023). However, evidence in vocational EFL contexts remains limited. This study not only examines the effectiveness of chunking but also provides a context-sensitive instructional model for vocational EFL classrooms through CAR, contributing to both pedagogical practice and the limited body of research in vocational ESP reading instruction.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study was designed as a systematic inquiry into classroom practice to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process. The research aimed to identify and resolve specific reading comprehension difficulties encountered by students through a series of planned interventions. A collaborative and reflective approach was adopted to ensure that each action taken was based on real-time classroom observations and evaluations. Consequently, this study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) model consisting of cyclical stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to evaluate the enhancement of students' reading comprehension through the chunking strategy.



**Figure 1. EFL Reading Comprehension CAR Cycle Model**



This research was conducted in the major of computer networking and telecommunications engineering at vocational high school in Sampang during the 2025/2026 academic year. This study involved 22 tenth-grade students. They were deliberately selected based on the results of an initial English diagnostic test that showed poor reading skills and required special treatment to overcome this. The students' proficiency level in English was typically at A1 on the CEFR.

The instructional materials consisted of short descriptive and recount texts appropriate for vocational high school students. During the planning stage, lesson plans integrating the chunking strategy were developed. In the acting stage, the teacher implemented the strategy by guiding students to read texts in meaningful units rather than word by word. Texts were divided into visually differentiated chunks to help students identify syntactic and semantic units within sentences.

The observing phase included teaching, systematic observations of the class, and data collection during instruction. During the reflective stage of the study, the instrument of data analysis was the researcher, who reflected on the data to determine the strategy's success and make modifications to the instruction for the next cycle. Two lessons per week for four weeks per cycle. The second cycle was based on revising the strategy based on reflections from the first cycle.

Reading comprehension tests, classroom observation checklists, and student reflection journals were used in the data collection. Reading comprehension tests served as the primary quantitative instrument for assessing students' development. There were 10 items on each test, including main ideas, supporting details, inferences, and vocabulary in context. The inclusion of these diverse item types ensured a comprehensive evaluation of the students' ability to process vocational texts effectively.

The researcher observed the class using structured checklists to record student engagement and participation. These observations also aimed to document observable signs of text comprehension during the intervention. To gather qualitative data, student reflection journals were employed to capture learners' views on the use of the chunking strategy. These journals further provided detailed information regarding students' experiences and opinions about the specific text samples used in the study.

Quantitative data from pre-tests and post-tests were analyzed descriptively by comparing mean scores and calculating improvement percentages. A ten per cent (10%) or more increase in the average post-test was regarded as the sign of a meaningful gain. The observation notes and students' reflection journals were qualitative data. It was analyzed thematically to identify trends in students' engagement, understanding development, and classroom interaction.

Two proficient English teachers validated the tests, observation checklists, and reflection journals before they were administered to the students. This validation process was crucial to ensure the transparency, relevance, and compatibility of the instruments with the specific research objectives. Consistency was maintained by following standardized procedures throughout the data collection phase to ensure the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, a peer teacher served as a co-observer during the classroom sessions to minimize subjectivity and enhance the inter-rater reliability of the qualitative observations.

To the best of our knowledge, all ethical principles of educational research were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Formal consent was obtained from the school management, all participating students, and the parents of the participants involved. The researcher explicitly informed the students that their participation was entirely voluntary and they were under no obligation to take part in the study. To protect the privacy of the individuals, confidentiality



was strictly maintained by using pseudonyms for all participants in the final report and data analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary outcomes of the classroom action research describe the evidence generated through the implementation of the chunking strategy and its impact on students' reading comprehension. The findings are organized in line with the Research questions and subsequently discussed to explain their pedagogical significance. Each cycle of the intervention was meticulously documented to reflect the progression of student performance and engagement throughout the study. Furthermore, the analysis integrates data from multiple sources to provide a holistic view of how breaking text into manageable segments facilitates better understanding for vocational students.

### Results

This chapter discussed the results of a cycle I classroom action research on students' reading comprehension of narrative text and their learning to use the chunking strategy after the teaching learning process. The results are based on numerical data from pre-test and post-test, and on qualitative data from classroom observations and students' reflection journals. The primary quantitative data were students' reading comprehension tests before and after the instruction of the chunking strategy in cycle I. The comprehensive data regarding these assessment results are systematically presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. The comparison of students' pre-test and post-test mean scores**

Assessment	Mean Score
Pre-test	42.17
Post-test	51.30

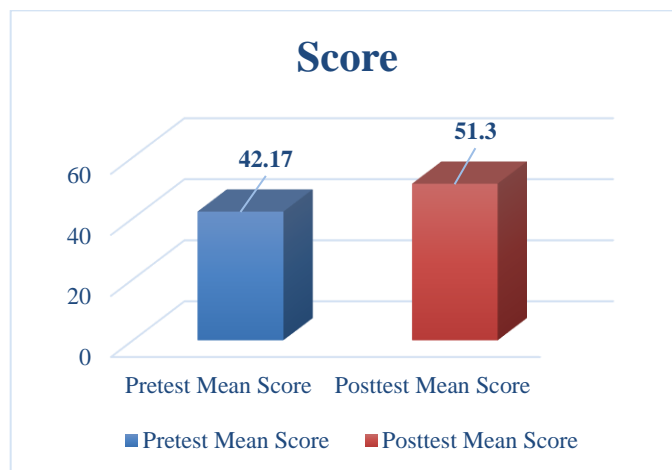
Based on the data presented in Table 1, this research demonstrated significant improvement in students' reading comprehension after applying the chunking technique. The mean score for the final test was higher than that for the pre-test by 9.13 (51.30 vs. 42.17). Moreover, the increase was as high as approximately 21.6%. This result significantly exceeded the pre-determined success criterion of 10% as stated in the research methodology. Since the target for a meaningful gain was achieved with a comfortable margin, the intervention was considered successful in this cycle. These findings provide evidence that chunk-based training led to substantial and positive gains in reading comprehension, rendering further cycles unnecessary.

In addition, a deeper analysis reveals that chunking has a beneficial effect on the vast majority of students. None showed a drop in grades. The distribution of individual student performance percentages is shown in Table 2. This finding indicates that the chunking strategy consistently supports students' reading comprehension improvement across different levels of ability.

**Table 2. Distribution of Individual Students' Score Changes**

Score Change Category	Number of Students (N=22)	Percentage (%)
Improved Scores	18	81.8%
Maintained Scores	4	18.2%
Declined Scores	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

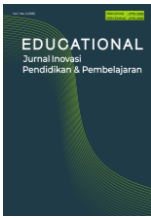
As indicated in Table 2, 81.8% were final examination score increasers. It indicates that 18 of 22 students improved. In addition, no students experienced a decrease in test scores, and four students (18.2%) retained their scores. This dispersion underscores that the approach led to enhanced learning for the majority of students. It was ensuring that the remaining students were not negatively affected by the intervention. The magnitude of this improvement and the clear difference between students' initial and final tests are visually displayed in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Students' Mean Score Improvement in Reading Comprehension**

As illustrated in Figure 2, there was a visible upward trend in the students' mean scores from the pre-test to the post-test. The bar chart clearly depicts a substantial shift in performance, highlighting the effectiveness of the intervention within the cycle I. Further analysis can be seen in the responses of both groups of students, which show that most of the improvement occurred on questions that required them to identify, analyze, and understand the meaning of main ideas and phrases in context. It was simpler to tell what words do when they are together in a sentence, and so the students were better able to grasp the meaning as a whole. In addition, questions related to locating specific information and scanning for ideas across sentences showed better performance, indicating enhanced cross-textual reading skills.

Two key forms of qualitative data emerged from classroom observations to support the quantitative findings. When cycle I was initiated, most students showed word-by-word reading habits. Securing after every word or short phrase has become the norm, resulting in a stumbling, reading that significantly obstructs "I am sorry, what were you saying?". Finding pauses in all the wrong places, and flu-tone were also prevalent, reflecting low syntactic and clausal awareness. They gradually adjusted their reading methods using chunking. With the teachers' advice, students were taught to break words into meaningful chunks (noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases). Visual chunking (color-coded text, phrases separated by slashes) apparently helped students identify natural breaks in sentences.



In later sessions, students' reading fluency improved. Students began reading with more natural intonation and less unnecessary pausing. They were more sensitive to phrase boundaries and confident in reading aloud. This increased fluency appeared to facilitate greater comprehension. The students spent more time concentrating on the meaning of the text and less time on decoding individual words. Student engagement also appeared heightened, as indicated in classroom field notes. Students are more active while reading, especially when they are in pairs or small groups, identifying chunks collaboratively. Several students offered to talk, to show them both chunk boundaries and to explain a bit why certain words go together. This transformation illustrates that the chunking strategy not only helped with comprehension but also gradually made the classroom more interactive and student-centered.

Student reflection journals provided further insight into learners' views of the chunking strategy and their reading progress. Several students mentioned that reading English texts was easier when sentences were divided into small sense units. Several students said chunking helped them make more sense of sentences and reduced their confusion when encountering new words. Students were also able to build confidence in reading English texts. They say they are more at ease answering the comprehension questions, as they are no longer thinking in terms of isolated words but of phrases. This result is consistent with improved comprehension accuracy and supports the view that more efficient text processing was enabled by chunking.

However, reflection journals did not cause all participants to stop struggling in some areas of thinking. A very few of them mentioned that it was difficult to tell the boundary between one chunk and the next, especially in longer sentences or when dealing with unknown structures. These students seemed to be more dependent on teacher direction and pictures. Such students were found to be highly dependent on teacher instruction and visual aids, indicating the need for continued scaffolding. These students needed to be pushed more and given more opportunities to feast on the chunking strategy until it became a natural act. They also had particular trouble with items that were completed using visual information alone to determine chunk boundaries. This finding suggests that chunking is a helpful tool, but its benefits differ across individual learners, influenced by factors ranging from language knowledge to prior experience with structured reading strategies.

The results of cycle I indicate that applying the chunking method achieved a statistically significant improvement in students' reading comprehension and learning engagement. The rise in mean scores, coupled with the fact that most students improved, suggested that the chunking technique throughout the unit helped students make sense of the English texts. The qualitative data also highlight a transformation in students' reading practices, from word-based decoding to phrase-based decoding and meaning-making. Enhancements in fluency and comprehension accuracy, as well as classroom interaction, may indicate the positive effect of the chunking approach on both the cognitive and affective aspects of reading. They may not have applied in every case we looked at, but we were particularly impressed by their stable performance at the end.

Reflecting on these results, the implementation of the chunking strategy in cycle I successfully addressed the students' difficulties in processing vocational texts. Since the quantitative improvement and qualitative observations met the established success indicators, the researcher decided that further cycles were not required. Although cycle II is often considered in action research to refine interventions, the substantial progress observed in this initial phase indicated that the core pedagogical problem had been effectively resolved. The consistency between improved test scores and positive student engagement during observations confirmed that the chunking strategy was sufficiently robust to meet the research objectives



without further modification. Thus, the action research was completed in cycle I as the instructional goals had been fully attained.

## Discussion

The result of this CAR in the vocational EFL class showed that the chunking strategy had a substantial impact on students' reading comprehension (Abejuela et al., 2023). Data from Cycle I indicate remarkable progress, with more than 80% of students showing individual improvement in their reading scores. In particular, the 21.6% increase in the class mean score strongly supports the quantitative finding that the pre-determined instructional goals have been successfully reached. This outcome reaffirms the effectiveness of the chunking strategy, as the measured improvement clearly exceeded the success indicator of 10% established in the research methodology.

Furthermore, the notable improvement suggests that EFL readers can effectively employ chunking to facilitate their comprehension and avoid fragmented, word-to-word reading patterns. By grouping words into meaningful functional units, students are better equipped to process complex vocational texts without being overwhelmed by individual vocabulary hurdles. This shift from a bottom-up approach to a more holistic processing of information aligns with recent research on chunking in EFL contexts (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Samhudi, 2022). As the result, the implementation of this strategy not only enhances immediate test performance but also fosters a more efficient cognitive approach to decoding English sentences among vocational students.

Classroom observations provided strong support for the quantitative findings. At the beginning of the cycle, many students paused frequently while reading and showed uncertainty when asked about the text's meaning. These behaviors were those of people having trouble with syntax and text organization. During the cycle, students displayed a more fluid reading pattern, with less pausing and greater confidence in answering comprehension questions. It is probably because chunking helped the students develop more fluent reading through purpose-driven reading, as it allows the learner to use more cognitive resources for sense-making rather than decoding words one by one (Wang & Christiansen, 2024). This kind of progress is crucial in vocational schools, as students tend to lose motivation and confidence when they see English texts.

The chunking effects in this study are also very pertinent to the nature of vocational education. Vocational students need to read practical, functional texts such as instructions, descriptions, and procedures. The processing of these texts, for the most part, involves efficient processing of repeated technical words and expressions (Ghafar, 2022). The results show that chunking can help learners identify these patterns and better understand the text's organization and purpose. This finding is consistent with previous Research showing that a certain degree of chunking is appropriate in the ESP setting, as comprehension relies on developing an understanding of how information is packaged at the phrase and clause levels rather than on translating individual vocabulary items.

As engagement increased, students' minds shifted toward reading activities. During group discussions, students were observed becoming more active and motivated to engage in reading tasks. It was also noted from student reflection journals that learners found reading less difficult and less daunting when texts were divided into chunks (HJ Wahid & A. Thais, 2020). It is a significant finding, as low motivation and negative attitudes towards reading in English are frequently encountered problems in vocational classrooms. By breaking down the reading process and making texts more user-friendly, chunking fostered a more positive learning



climate and encouraged active involvement in learning (Ahmed Okasha, 2020; Ruke et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, the majority of students responded positively to the intervention, some learners were unable to improve their scores. They were not because of performance in grades or drops in test scores among these students. The qualitative data showed that these learners struggled to identify suitable chunks and needed more time to get used to the strategy. It suggests that although chunking is a powerful tool, students with less linguistic awareness may need more support (Huang et al., 2023). Teacher modeling, repeated practice, and visual aids might better support such learners. These results are consistent with earlier classroom studies showing that it is important to provide more scaffolding when instructing new reading strategies to students with reading difficulties.

The findings of cycle I indicate that the main instructional problem has been successfully addressed. The purpose of this study was achieved. According to action Research principles, additional cycles are not required when the intended improvement has been reached, and the instructional strategy has proven effective (Siregar, 2025; Meesuk et al., 2020). The positive changes in students' understanding, reading strategies, and motivation indicated that the chunking strategy was effective for the instruction goals in the first Cycle. In addition, earlier Research has indicated that chunking leads to rapid gains in reading fluency and basic comprehension, especially among low-proficiency EFL learners. Since the learners in this study were at the beginner level, the progress made in cycle I was deemed sufficient to complete the study. The decision to end the study after one cycle was also supported by reflective analysis, which indicated that no major instructional obstacles remained that would require further cycles.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study's results demonstrate the practical benefits of chunking for vocational EFL teachers. This approach is easy to put into practice and does not involve the use of complex apparatus or technology. In this way, by working with teachers on phrases rather than sentences or words, students can become more functional readers and better equipped to read in vocational settings. The results indicate that chunking can be a practical instructional approach alongside translation-based instruction, helping acquire reading fluency and comprehension simultaneously.

Finally, the discussion revealed that the chunking strategy positively affected students' reading comprehension and motivation in a vocational EFL classroom. The alignment of quantitative findings, classroom observations, and student reflections further enhances the trustworthiness of the results. These findings lend support to the application of chunking in instruction in vocational English and further underscore its significance in encouraging meaning-focused reading behaviors among EFL learners with low proficiency.

## CONCLUSION

This study suggests that the chunking strategy can support the development of reading comprehension among vocational high school students in an EFL context. The findings indicate that chunking facilitates a meaningful shift from word-level decoding to phrase-level processing, enabling learners to identify main ideas and technical information more efficiently. The achievement of the targeted outcomes within the cycle I further indicates that the intervention was effective in addressing students' primary reading difficulties. This rapid progress demonstrates that providing students with structural tools to manage cognitive load can lead to immediate and measurable improvements in their ability to parse complex English sentences.



The results highlight the relevance of chunking for vocational education, particularly in facilitating the comprehension of procedural and instructional texts commonly encountered in workplace settings. By promoting meaning-focused processing, chunking supports more purposeful reading and reinforces the need for instructional approaches that emphasize phrase- and discourse-level comprehension over traditional translation-based practices. This approach is particularly beneficial for vocational students who often struggle with the dense technical vocabulary found in their specific fields of study. Consequently, integrating chunking into the daily English curriculum can bridge the gap between basic linguistic proficiency and the specialized reading demands of vocational industries.

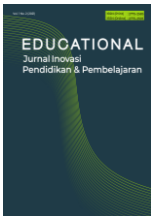
From a pedagogical perspective, the study underscores the importance of guided implementation, including explicit teacher modeling and appropriate scaffolding techniques to support learners with limited linguistic proficiency. From a research perspective, this study contributes to the limited body of research on chunking in vocational EFL contexts through a Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework, offering context-specific, practice-based evidence. Future research may explore its sustained impact across more diverse student cohorts or its integration with digital learning environments to enhance engagement. Additionally, while this study reached its success criteria in a single cycle, future investigations could examine the long-term retention of these reading strategies through longitudinal designs or comparative studies with other instructional models.

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