

Research on the Application of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning in Senior English Reading Teaching

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Abstract

The activity-based approach to English learning, as a breakthrough point for implementing core competencies goals, plays a vital guiding role in reading teaching. How to apply the activity-based approach to English reading teaching has become an important topic in current English teaching. The research analyzes the connotation of senior English reading teaching from the perspective of the activity-based approach to English learning and value of the activity-based approach to English learning, explores the reading teaching strategies guided by the activity-based approach to English learning based on the problems in reading activity design, so as to provide some inspiration for improving the current situation of reading teaching and enhancing the effectiveness of reading teaching.

Keywords

The activity-based approach to English learning; English reading teaching; Senior high school English.

1. Introduction

Throughout the entire process of English teaching, reading instruction plays the greatest role in cultivating students' core competencies, which is determined by the unique function and value of reading instruction (Zhang, 2018). Reading, as one of the five language skills, provides an efficient approach for the development of students' language knowledge and comprehensive language proficiency. However, in current high school English reading teaching, there still exists the phenomenon of "shallow learning" and "separation of learning and application". Many teachers misunderstand the meaning of reading teaching as the imparting of language knowledge, some monotonous and mechanical traditional reading teaching methods have reduced students' interest and initiative in learning English. Classroom activity, as an indispensable part of English reading teaching, its design affects the efficiency of the classroom. They are not only a vital way for students to acquire knowledge and skills, but also an essential platform for enhancing their outlook on life, worldview, and values. Besides, They are crucial for cultivating students' core competencies. Therefore, how to design teaching activities that are efficient and close to students' cognition has become an important task in English reading teaching.

In order to address this challenge, English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools (2017 version revised in 2020) proposes a curriculum content consisting of six components: thematic context, discourse type, language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies, as well as the activity-based approach to English learning aimed at developing core competencies of the subject (Ministry of Education, 2020). In the English reading teaching system aimed at core competencies, English learning activities provide actionable pathways for the transformation of students' learning methods and the

implementation of core competencies (Chen, 2019). Through activities, students can not only enhance their mastery of language knowledge and skills, more importantly, activities help develop their thinking capacities and learning abilities. Therefore, it is reasonable and necessary to apply the activity-based approach to senior high school English teaching practice. Teachers should design effective and interesting classroom activities based on the integration of course content, attracting students to actively participate. At the same time, teachers should also implement in-depth teaching to promote students' internalization and transfer of learned knowledge, stimulate students' creativity and learning interest through activities, so as to improve classroom teaching efficiency and effectiveness.

Therefore, the study aims to apply the activity-based approach to high school English teaching. The purpose of this study is to verify the practical effectiveness of the activity-based approach, explore feasible paths for cultivating core competencies in reading teaching, provide new perspectives for the design of reading teaching activities for high school English front-line teachers, and provide some inspiration for the correlation between the activity-based approach to English learning and reading teaching research. For teachers, this study is helpful for the professional development of high school English teachers, helping them update teaching concepts, optimize teaching activity design, and make up for the shortcomings of traditional teaching, thereby improving teaching efficiency. For students, classroom teaching activities based on the perspective of the activity-based approach to English learning can help them improve their reading habits, enhance their reading comprehension ability, improve their reading strategies, and develop their reading effectiveness, thereby comprehensively promoting their self-learning ability.

2. Problems in the Design of Reading Teaching Activities

2.1. Unclear Activity Objectives

The classroom teaching objective is a specific statement of the intention or purpose of the teaching and learning in the lesson, which clearly specifies some expected changes that should occur in certain aspects of the student after the learning of this lesson (Rao, 2022). At present, many teachers can clearly express their teaching objectives, but they do not know how to achieve the objectives through teaching activities. In the teaching process, many teachers artificially separate the objectives from the activities. There may be situations where the activity runs counter to the goal, or where the activity design does not achieve the goal. In addition, when setting teaching objectives, many teachers can consciously associate the four core competencies proposed by the New Curriculum Standard, but they still know little about the relationship and gradient between the four core competencies. The lack of teaching goal gradient may also lead to the loss of teaching effectiveness.

2.2. Lack of Cognitive Activities

Reading instruction should be based on reading texts, students' reading experiences, and cognitive patterns. Activity design should be targeted, relevant, expansive, and diverse (Ji & Dai, 2018). At present, many teachers focus their teaching on language knowledge and skill learning, and the design and implementation of activities tend towards mechanization and singularity. Teachers focus on imparting and consolidating knowledge points, while neglecting the needs of students' thinking and emotional development, which reduces the effectiveness of activities and fails to mobilize students' enthusiasm. In addition, under the exam-oriented trend, in the actual classroom, as teachers pay more attention to the training of surface knowledge and test points, the activity design gradually turns to the systematic training of language point, lacking activities of transferring and creating, which is not conducive to the improvement of students'

critical thinking and innovative thinking, and cannot achieve the goal of students' core competencies and comprehensive language quality.

2.3. Lack of Contextual Activity

In traditional reading teaching, many teachers do not pay attention to the context design or the activity does not conform to the context. The teaching based on the activity-based approach should create a reasonable situation according to the thematic meaning (Zhang et al., 2019). If the context is inconsistent with students' cognition, life experience and text theme, it will hinder the efficiency of reading teaching, this kind of activity design is ineffective and meaningless. A reasonable context is conducive to students' transferring and innovation, which helps students to improve their problem-solving ability in a new situation, further develop their thinking, and release their potential.

2.4. Monotonous Activity Evaluation

A complete teaching activity includes three aspects: teaching, learning, and evaluation. Teachers need to handle the relationship between these three aspects well and promote the implementation of integrated teaching, learning, and evaluation (Huo, 2020). Teaching evaluation plays an important role in classroom teaching, serving as a vital platform for feedback from both sides. The teaching evaluation based on the core competencies of English subject should focus on the diversification of evaluation subjects and forms, in order to improve the effectiveness of teaching. Currently, many teachers give students a brief and immediate evaluation after activities, which is relatively simple and mostly based on fixed praise. However, during this process, students do not have a complete understanding of their own overall performance, which can lead to a decrease in learning outcomes. Therefore, teachers should increase the depth of their activity evaluation to promote learning. Meanwhile, teachers should also establish the consciousness of multiple evaluation subjects and increase the opportunities for students to participate in evaluation, so as to enhance the initiative of students to participate in activities.

3. The Connotation of Senior English Reading Teaching from the Perspective of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

The activity-based approach to English learning refers to a series of English learning activities that reflect comprehensiveness, relevance, and practicality, guided by thematic significance, such as activities of learning and understanding, applying and practicing, transferring and creating. Based on existing knowledge and different types of discourse, students can promote their own language knowledge learning, language skills development, cultural connotation understanding, diverse thinking development, value orientation judgment, and learning strategy application in the process of analyzing and solving problems (Ministry of Education, 2020). In traditional teaching, many teachers still retain outdated educational concepts and simplify English activities into knowledge questioning or grammar training. Teachers have become the master of classroom, lacking active participation from learners. In addition, in the context of the college entrance examination, many teachers prioritize vocabulary and grammar as the primary issues in reading teaching, lacking exploration of thematic meaning and cultural connotations. Teachers do not guide students to conduct in-depth reading of the text, and students only understand surface knowledge, with little knowledge of the deep meaning behind the words, the author's intention, writing techniques, and so on. In this case, learners' motivation and confidence decrease, leading to a continuous increase in learning anxiety.

Therefore, in reading teaching based on the activity-based approach to English learning, teachers should first follow up on the teaching philosophy of the activity-based approach to English learning. Secondly, teachers should integrate curriculum content, deeply interpret

discourse, conduct text analysis, construct knowledge frameworks, and explore the educational value and cultural connotations. Then, teachers should also design diverse classroom activities to help students update their English learning methods and stimulate their learning potential. Finally, teachers should also pay attention to cultivation of students' thinking. Language is the foundation of thinking, and reading is an important way to cultivate students' thinking. Students can interpret and apply different types of texts to develop their logical thinking, critical thinking, and innovative thinking.

4. The Value of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

Based on the analysis of the activity-based approach to English learning, it can be seen that there are four fundamental values. Firstly, the activity-based approach to English learning contributes to the cultivation of students' core competencies. Developing the core competencies of the subject is the purpose of learning activities (Fan & Liu, 2022). The activity-based approach to English learning aims to design meaningful activities in which students can acquire knowledge, enhance their abilities, develop their thinking, and continuously cultivate their core competencies.

Secondly, the activity-based approach to English learning helps teachers improve their ability to design activities. Activities of learning and understanding require students to accurately locate and extract information. Activities of applying and practicing are based on information extraction and require students to solve problems by combining their learned knowledge. Ultimately, activities of transferring and creating are the advanced output of knowledge and experience (Wang, 2016). Therefore, when designing activities, teachers should clarify the significance and function of different types of activities, consider the difficulty and gradient of the three types of activities, and predict the effectiveness of activity implementation.

Thirdly, the activity-based approach to English learning helps establish students' subject status. In traditional teaching, due to the long-term dominant position of teachers, the subject status of students is oppressed, and many students cannot get opportunities to perform in various classroom activities, which limits their thinking vitality.

Fourthly, the activity-based approach to English learning attaches importance to the differences in learning abilities (Huo, 2020). Therefore, the activity-based approach to English learning is able to meet the needs of learners at different levels. The activity-based approach to English learning is guided by themes and based on discourse. When designing activities, teachers first start with the real situation of students and design problems with gradient and hierarchy for students of different levels, achieving flexible cultivation of students at different levels (Huo, 2020).

5. Reading Teaching Practice under the Guidance of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

The reading teaching design based on the perspective of the activity-based approach to English learning should focus on designing diverse and meaningful activities to stimulate students' learning motivation and enthusiasm. Therefore, teachers should design appropriate activities to help students internalize and transfer, continuously improving their language proficiency. This study will verify the specific effectiveness of the activity-based approach to English learning in high school English reading teaching by combining understanding ideas in Unit five of Book One, Senior English Compulsory Course by FLTRP (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press). The topic of this unit is wildlife, and the selected text is a reading class titled *The Monarch's Journey*. The main idea of this lesson is the migration of monarch butterflies,

which is related to animal protection and can guide students to deeply reflect on the way humans interact with animals.

5.1. Interpreting the Text Deeply

Before teaching, teachers should conduct in-depth interpretation of the text, grasp the thematic significance, explore cultural values, analyze the stylistic and linguistic features, and their correlation with the thematic significance (Rao, 2022). This passage will be interpreted from the following three aspects. From perspective of what, the thematic context of this text is man and nature, and it is classified under the thematic group of environmental protection. The text introduces the definition of migration, the migration situation of monarch butterflies, the ways in which monarch butterflies migrate, the reasons for the decline in their numbers, and measures to protect monarch butterflies. From perspective of why, the writing intention of the text is help students understand the survival situation of the monarch butterflies, reflect on the threats posed by human behavior to the monarch butterflies, and establish awareness of protecting the monarch butterflies. In terms of value orientation, this lesson aims to help students think dialectically about the way humans interact with animals, handle the relationship between human development and animal protection, and enhance their awareness of harmonious coexistence with animals. In terms of the author's attitude, the author expresses his love and concern for the monarch butterfly through an introduction to its current survival status, and calls on people to pay attention to the protection of the monarch butterfly and raise awareness of protecting its habitat. From perspective of how, this text is an exposition, consisting of five paragraphs with clear structure and progressive layers. The language is concise and accurate, which can broaden students' knowledge about migration. Besides, this article employs attributive clauses, present perfect continuous tense and non-predicate. In addition, the sentence pattern "there may come a time when" appears multiple times in the article.

5.2. Establishing Teaching Objectives

The teaching objectives of this lesson are established from the four dimensions of core competencies under the guidance of the activity-based approach to English learning. After learning this lesson, students will improve in all four dimensions of core competencies. In terms of language ability, students are able to understand the general idea of the article, sort out the structure of the article, analyze the author's writing intention, judge the source of the article. In terms of cultural awareness, students are able to understand the survival situation of monarch butterflies and the impact of human behavior on their survival, and establish the awareness of animal protection and correct values. In terms of thinking capacity, students are able to develop logical thinking by clarifying the logical relationship of the article, critically express their views between human development and animal protection, and creatively apply the language and cultural knowledge of this lesson to context. In terms of learning ability, students are able to improve their collaborative learning and problem-solving abilities through activities such as discussion, debate and role play.

5.3. Reading Teaching Activity Design from the Perspective of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

5.3.1. Conducting Activities of Learning and Understanding

Activities of Learning and understanding are text-based (Jiang, 2023). They aim to help students perceive the text initially and construct the structure of the text. In this process, students continue to interact with the discourse, and gradually move towards the exploration of thematic meaning.

Firstly, the teacher asks the students to watch a video about animal migration. After watching, the teacher asks the students, "What is the behavior of the animals in the video?" After students

identify animal behavior in the video, the teacher asks the students to have a free talk, “Do you know any other animals that have migratory behavior?” “Why do animals migrate?” “What other information do you know about migration?” This activity aims to introduce the theme, stimulate students’ prior knowledge, and provide opportunities for students to express their opinions. Through free talk on migration, students can accumulate relevant vocabulary and develop cultural knowledge.

The second activity is prediction, the teacher asks students to observe the title and illustrations of text to predict the main idea of the text. This activity is simple but necessary. The passage presents several pictures of the monarch butterfly and its flight path. The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to engage in conscious observation, improve their observation ability, and cultivate their skills of viewing.

The third activity is skimming, the teacher asks students to read the passage quickly and identify the theme of the text, discourse type, writing purpose. Afterwards, the teacher asks students to match key words with each paragraph. The purpose is to help students understand the main idea, structure the article, and identify the source of the text. Besides, this activity can help students quickly grasp the key points of the article and lay a foundation for exploring the thematic meaning.

The fourth activity is scanning. Firstly, the teacher asks the students to read the first paragraph and define the “migration”, which helps to train their ability to summarize. During this process, teachers can guide students on how to define and what elements need to be included in the definition. Then, the teacher guides the students to read the second paragraph and asks them to find specific information about the migration of monarch butterflies, such as time, distance, direction and destination. This activity can help students sort out specific information about the migration of monarch butterflies and expand their cultural knowledge. Additionally, the teacher guides students to read the third paragraph and asks them to answer two questions: “What adjectives did the author use to describe the migration of the monarch butterfly?” and “How did the monarch butterfly migrate?” After answering, the teacher asks students to complete a “cause-effect” flow chart. The “cause effect” flow chart plays an important role in cultivating students’ logical thinking. The purpose is to help students understand the principles of monarch butterfly migration and improve their logical thinking. What’s more, the teacher guides students to read the fourth paragraph and asks them about the reasons for the decline in the number of monarch butterflies, which helps students reflect on the harm caused by human activities to monarch butterflies. Finally, the teacher guides students to read the fifth paragraph and asks them to summarize the measures taken by humans to protect the monarch butterfly, which helps to enhance students’ ecological awareness and deepen their understanding of animal protection.

5.3.2. Conducting Activities of Applying and Practicing

The goal of activities of applying and practicing is to delve into the discourse (Jiang, 2023). The interaction in this part requires students to internalize knowledge and explore the thematic meaning.

The fifth activity is further thinking, the teacher asks students to work in pairs and think about the question “What can people do to help protect the monarch butterflies in our daily life?” It is a deep reflection on the theme of this lesson and helps to enhance students’ practical abilities. Students can engage in divergent thinking by referencing existing measures in the article, which helps to enhance their logical thinking.

The sixth activity is discussion. The teacher divides the students into groups of four and asks them to discuss in the group, “What other animals do you know that are facing similar problems to the monarch butterfly?” “How do we protect them?” This question is an extension of the lesson, from the protection of monarch butterflies to the protection of other animals, which

helps to deepen students' understanding of the thematic meaning, assists students in relating the knowledge they have learned to the problems in daily life, and cultivates students' ability to draw inferences from one another.

5.3.3. Conducting Activities of Transferring and Creating

Activities of transferring and creating aim to deepen students' understanding of the thematic meaning. In this part of activities, teachers should promote the extension of thematic significance, encourage students to relate what they learn to reality, and develop students' ability to solve real problems.

The seventh activity is debate, the teacher divides the entire class into two groups and sets up five spokespersons for each group. The teacher asks the students to think about "Which should we choose between human development and animal protection?" Two groups of students are asked to identify supporting evidence within their groups and engage in a debate based on their respective viewpoints. The purpose is to enable students to accurately express their opinions when facing controversial issues, thereby improving their problem-solving skills and enhancing their critical thinking.

The eighth activity is role play, the teacher asks students to work in pairs and discuss with their partners, "If your foreign friend Mike receives a photo of the monarch butterfly you sent and wants to learn more about it, how would you introduce the monarch butterfly to him?" Considering the difficulty of this task, the teacher demonstrates with a student and points out that students should pay attention to the use of linking words in the introduction. Then, the teacher asks the students to perform independently. This activity sets up a life-like context for students. How to introduce monarch butterflies to friends is an important task of students' ability to express. In this process, students need to sort out and integrate the content of the text. So it is another form of retelling the main points. The purpose is to help build real-life contexts for students, broaden their thinking, and cultivate their innovative thinking.

The ninth activity is homework. The teacher presents three different assignments, and students can choose according to their own mastery. Option one is to design a poster about the monarch butterfly, which should include its appearance, migration status, living conditions, and protection measures. It can encourage more people to protect this species. Option two is to write an exposition with the structure of this text to introduce the migration of monarch butterflies. Option three is a group presentation. Group members assign tasks and collect information to introduce the current situation of wildlife conservation and share the results of wildlife conservation. Increasing homework options can cater to more students, students choosing homework within their abilities can enhance their self-efficacy and improve homework quality.

6. Conclusion

Under the guidance of the activity-based approach to English learning, reading teaching gives the initiative of classroom back to the students. With the continuous deepening of activities of learning and understanding, activities of applying and practicing, and activities of transferring and creating, students' thinking gradually shifts from low-level to high-level. During this process, students gradually move from simply understanding information to expressing their opinions and innovative thinking, continuously deepening their understanding of thematic meaning. Therefore, high school English teachers should follow the requirements of the activity-based approach to English learning, deeply explore the thematic significance of texts, carry out diversified learning and evaluation activities, continuously promote the development of students' language awareness and thinking quality, ultimately form students' core competencies, and improve the effectiveness of learning (Rao, 2022).

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