

Strategies for English Reading Teaching Based on the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning

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Abstract

Reading is one of the main sources of inputting information and an important way to learn a language. Improving English reading abilities is the focus of foreign language learning. The reading classroom, as the main place for reading teaching, helps students to improve their language abilities. However, the reading teaching in some schools still have the problems of focusing too much on the accumulation of language knowledge and neglecting the active participation of students, which is not conducive to the improvement of students' core competencies. In recognition of these problems, the General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020) proposed the notion of activity-based English learning to develop students' English subject core competencies. This paper explores strategies for high school English reading instruction based on the activity-based approach to English learning. Specifically, it takes the teaching design of a reading lesson on Longji Rice Terraces from Unit 1 of FLTRP Book 1 as a case study to elaborate on how the activity-based approach can be integrated into reading instruction. The paper highlights the importance of analyzing text, enhancing students' engagement in diverse learning activities, and incorporating effective evaluations throughout the teaching-learning process. The practical examples and analysis presented in this paper underscore the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing the activity-based approach in high school English reading classes. Thus, this approach not only addresses the aforementioned current problems of reading course but also contributes to the holistic development of students' English language abilities.

Keywords

Activity-based Approach to English Learning; Reading Teaching; Senior High; Teaching Strategies.

1. Introduction

In the realm of high school English education, fostering students' reading comprehension abilities is paramount, as it serves as the cornerstone for their academic success and future career development. Previous approaches to English reading instruction, however, have often been criticized for their superficial focus on literal comprehension, lacking in-depth exploration of textual themes and structures. This has hindered students' ability to engage in critical thinking and develop a profound understanding of English language and literature. In response to this challenge, the activity-based approach to English learning has emerged, advocating for an integrated and student-centered approach to reading instruction.

The activity-based approach to English learning emphasizes the integration of six essential elements: thematic contexts, text types, language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies. It posits that through a series of comprehensive, connected, and practical English learning activities, students can deepen their understanding of texts, develop language skills, and cultivate core competencies in English. By adopting the activity-based

approach, students are encouraged to actively engage with texts, explore thematic meanings, and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. This paper aims to delve into the instructional strategies for high school English reading teaching guided by the activity-based approach to English learning. By analyzing and discussing these strategies, this paper seeks to provide insights into how to effectively implement the activity-based approach in high school English reading classes, ultimately contributing to the holistic development of students' English core competencies.

2. The Activity-Based Approach to English Learning

The General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, revised in 2020) emphasize the importance of developing subject core competencies in English teaching. To this end, the adoption of an activity-based approach to English learning emerges as a meaningful enhancement, specifically targeting the development of these core competencies (Wang & Luo, 2019). In this section, we will delve into the definition and significance of the activity-based approach to English learning.

2.1. The Definition of the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning

The General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition) first introduced the activity-based approach to English learning, clarifying that activities are the basic form of English learning and the primary means for learners to acquire and attempt to use language to comprehend and express meaning, cultivate cultural awareness, develop multiple thinking skills, and form learning abilities. The Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) has adopted the fundamental concepts of English learning from the General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition) and further proposed the activity-based approach to English learning that emphasizes combining learning with thinking, and prioritizing application and creativity.

At this point, the connotation of the activity-based approach to English learning has become clear. It refers to a series of English learning activities that exemplify the characteristics of comprehensiveness, relevance and practicality, such as learning and understanding, applying and practicing, and transferring and creating. Under the guidance of the theme meaning, students can analyze and solve problems based on their current knowledge and relying on different types of discourse. This process is not only an integrated development process of learning language knowledge and language skills (Zhang, 2019), but also a continuous process of enhancing cultural awareness, improving thinking capacity, and improving learning ability (Mei, 2024).

The Activity-Based Approach to English Learning is characterized by several key features that significantly enhance the learning experience. Firstly, activity serves as the fundamental format for English learning (Zhang, 2019). Under the guidance of teachers, students actively participate in a range of activities centered around course content, including language practice, reflection and exploration, evaluation, and innovation. Secondly, the course content within this approach is comprehensive (Cao et al. (2024) The English curriculum encompasses six essential elements: thematic contexts, text types, language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies. These elements are closely integrated and exist as an integral part of all English learning activities. Thirdly, learning activities are designed with increasing difficulty and depth. Learning activities are categorized into three distinct levels: perceiving and understanding, applying and practicing, and transferring and creating. These levels build upon each other, starting with text-based information input, progressing to initial output that delves deeper into the text, and culminating in high-level output that transcends the text (Dilek, 2020).

2.2. The Significance of the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning

The activity-based approach to English learning is the practical pathway and the comprehensive development of English subject core competencies as the goal (Mei, 2014). It provides a clear direction and means for English language learning and teaching. The significance of the activity-based approach to English learning are as follows.

(1) Promoting the core competencies

English learning activities, as advocated in the new curriculum standards, are pivotal in fostering students' core competencies. These activities encourage holistic development, encompassing language knowledge and skills, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning abilities (Fan & Liu, 2022). Through engaging in activities such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, students not only enhance their linguistic prowess but also cultivate a global perspective and cross-cultural communication skills.

(2) Enhancing the learning motivation and interest

English learning activities often incorporate elements of fun and interaction, making the learning process more engaging and enjoyable (Hassan, 2018). By participating in activities like role-plays, debates, and simulations, students are more likely to develop a keen interest in learning English, which in turn motivates them to engage more deeply with the language and culture.

(3) Cultivating critical thinking and problem-solving skills

Many English learning activities require students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information (Hadley, 2004). For instance, reading comprehension exercises challenge students to infer meanings, make connections, and draw conclusions based on the text. These activities stimulate critical thinking and enhance problem-solving abilities, skills that are transferable to other subjects and real-life situations (Ge & Yin, 2020).

(4) Boosting Learning Strategies and Autonomy

English learning activities often require learners to adopt various strategies to comprehend and produce the language. This fosters self-directed learning, enabling learners to take charge of their own learning processes and become more autonomous learners. Moreover, by engaging in self-directed and collaborative learning activities, students cultivate strategies for lifelong learning (Zahoor). They learn how to effectively acquire, organize, and apply knowledge, preparing them for future academic and professional endeavors.

3. Instructional Strategies for High School English Reading Teaching Guided by the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning

To implement the the activity-based approach to English learning, teachers need to deeply interpret texts, set reasonable goals, design activities at the three levels of activities, and integrate teaching, learning and assessment. Taking the teaching design of a reading material of Longji Rice Terraces from Unit 1 of FLTRP Book1 as an example, the following sections will elaborate on reading teaching strategies guided by the activity-based approach to English learning.

3.1. Delving into Text Analysis

To effectively guide reading instruction based on the activity-based approach, teachers must first engage in thorough text analysis. This involves not only understanding the literal meaning of the text but also exploring its deeper themes, cultural contexts, and linguistic features. By focusing on what, why, and how of the text—what information is presented, why it is important, and how the information is conveyed—teachers can facilitate students' comprehension and appreciation of the text (Zhu, 2023). This approach helps students connect their prior

knowledge with new information, fostering a richer understanding of the text and enhancing their cultural awareness and critical thinking skills. The three key elements of text analysis are shown in the figure 1.

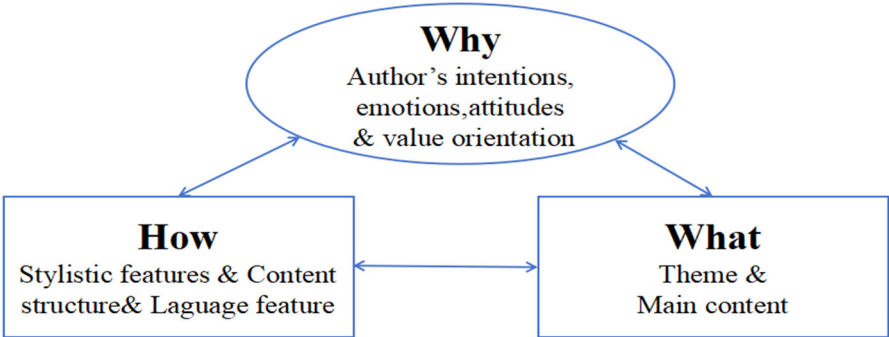


Figure 1. Key elements of text analysis

3.2. Setting Learning Objectives Oriented to the Activity-Based Approach

Guided by the activity-based approach, learning objectives for English reading instruction should be set at three levels: learning and understanding, applying and practicing, and transferring and creating (Li & Tian, 2021). These objectives align with the three dimensions of the activity-based approach: learning and understanding involves activities such as perceiving and noticing, acquiring and sorting, summarizing and integrating information; applying and practicing entails describing and interpreting, analyzing and judging, internalizing and applying knowledge; transferring and creating requires reasoning and arguing, criticizing and evaluating, imagining and creating. By setting these layered objectives, teachers can ensure that students progressively develop their language skills, cultural understanding, and thinking abilities, ultimately leading to the realization of core competencies (Padmavathi,2013). Taking Longji Rice Terraces from Unit 1 of FLTRP Book 1 as an example, the teaching objectives of this reading class are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The learning objectives for a reading course guided by activity-based approach

Learning Objectives 学习目标	By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:	
	Learning & Understanding	1.discern the uniqueness of Longji terraces; sort out its basic information through question chain and diagram.
	Applying & Practicing	2.illustrate the harmonious relationship that exists between man and nature in the terraces; discover the hidden values of the terraces;
	Transferring & Creating	3.transfer what they have learned in this lesson to create the profile of mulberry fish pond in Huzhou.

3.3. Designing Multi-layered Activities Focused on Core Competencies

To achieve the learning objectives outlined above, teachers should design a series of multi-layered activities that are centered on core competencies (Ji & Dai, 2018). Activities of learning and understanding focus on exploring text information and forming new knowledge structures. Activities of applying and practicing mainly involve in-depth text learning activities, such as interpreting meanings, analyzing relationships, and applying knowledge in new contexts. Finally, in the activities of transferring and creating, students are encouraged to evaluate the authors' attitudes and values, create new content based on the text, and solve problems in real-

life situations. These activities not only enrich students' cognitive structures but also cultivate their higher-order thinking and problem-solving abilities (Ali & Muhammad, 2018). The design of learning activities based on activity-based approach is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Learning activities based on activity-based approach

Steps	Activities	Levels of activities
Engage	Lead-in: Perceive the unique	Learning & Understanding
Explain	Activity 1 Catch the first sight	
	Activity 2 Form an image	
	Activity 3 Trace the history	
Explore	Activity 4 Uncover the story	Applying & Practicing
	Activity 5 Explore the principle	
Elaborate	Activity 6 Rediscover the tradition	Transferring & creating
	Activity 7 Take an overall view	
Evaluate	Activity 8 Seek other harmony	
	Activity 9 Do the checklist	

3.4. Promoting Learning and Teaching through Assessment

Assessment plays a crucial role in the activity-based approach to English reading teaching. It serves as a means to both promote learning and enhance teaching. Formative assessment, such as peer evaluations and self-reflections during activities, helps teachers gauge students' progress and adjust instruction accordingly (Chen, 2019). Summative assessment at the end of a lesson or unit assesses students' achievement of learning objectives and provides feedback for further improvement. By integrating assessment into the teaching process, teachers can ensure that students are actively engaged in learning, continuously reflecting on their progress, and ultimately achieving the desired core competencies. In the reading teaching design of Longji Rice Terraces, the integration of teaching, learning, and assessment permeates the entire process. Different learning activities are conducted, each followed by effective evaluations sourced from diverse evaluators, including the students themselves, their peers, and teachers. Additionally, and in the end of the class, students are asked to do a self-assessment checklist (Figure 2).

Self-assessment	
Exit Ticket	
By the end of this period, I can rate my performance 1(need to improvement), 2 (good), 3 (excellent)	
I have...	Rate
1.discern the uniqueness of Longji terraces; sort out its basic information through question chain and diagram.	
2.illustrate the harmonious relationship that exists between man and nature in the terraces; discover the hidden values of the terraces;	
3.transfer what they have learned in this lesson to create the profile of mulberry fish pond in Huzhou.	
Things I want to improve or learn more about next time:	

Figure 2. Self-assessment checklist in the teaching case

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the activity-based approach to English learning offers a comprehensive framework for designing instructional strategies in high school English reading teaching. By incorporating a variety of activities that are aligned with the three distinct levels of learning—perceiving and understanding, applying and practicing, and transferring and creating—teachers can effectively enhance students' learning motivation, critical thinking skills, and autonomous learning abilities.

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that the activity-based approach not only facilitates deep understanding of texts but also promotes the holistic development of students' English core competencies. Through engaging in activities such as role-plays, debates, simulations, and text analysis, students are able to actively participate in the learning process, thereby developing a keen interest in learning English and improving their reading comprehension abilities.

Furthermore, the practical examples and case studies discussed in this paper underscore the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing the activity-based approach in high school English reading classes. These examples show how teachers can design and implement activities that are contextually relevant, culturally appropriate, and cognitively challenging, thereby fostering a learning environment that is conducive to deep learning.

In summary, the activity-based approach to English learning provides a valuable framework for instructional strategy design in high school English reading teaching. By adopting this approach, teachers can create engaging and effective learning experiences that contribute to the overall development of students' English core competencies.

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