

Study of English Reading Instructional Design in Senior High School Based on the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

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Abstract

The perspective of English learning activities provides significant support for achieving the educational goal of core competence and also offers theoretical guidance for the practical teaching of front-line English teachers. The understanding of the concept of English learning activities by high school English teachers and the degree of alignment with the implementation of this concept have a significant impact on the effectiveness of classroom teaching and further influence the new progress of curriculum reform. The learning activities based on the perspective of English learning activities have the special connotation of “integrating six elements”, which is of great significance to the development of both teachers and students. To implement the activity-based view of English learning, teachers need to follow four fundamental concepts: consistently emphasizing “meaning exploration”, conducting “text interpretation” well, ensuring that “activity design” is logical, and making “goals of the activity” oriented towards competence. These concepts are illustrated in the reading teaching design of Unit 1, A Student of African Wildlife, in the compulsory volume 4 of the People's Education Edition of high school English textbooks.

Keywords

Activity-based Approach to English Learning; Core Competencies; Activity Design; English Reading Teaching.

1. Introduction

General Senior High School Curriculum Standards for English (2017 edition, 2020 revised) defines the activity-based approach to English learning as “under the guidance of thematic meaning, teachers lead students to participate in a series of English learning activities such as learning and understanding, application and practice, and transferring and innovation”, and clearly states that its purpose is to promote the development of students' core competence[1]. With the development of society, China has comprehensively deepened curriculum reform and proposed to implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue and nurturing people. The overall goal of the English curriculum in senior high school is to gradually promote the development of students' core competence in the English subject, and cultivate socialist builders and successors with patriotic sentiments, international perspectives, and cross-cultural communication abilities. For this reason, General Senior High School Curriculum Standards for English (hereinafter referred to as the New Curriculum Standard) have proposed consistent curriculum content and teaching methods, namely the “the activity-based approach to English learning”, promoting the transformation of English education from “knowledge-centered” to “learning-centered”, and gradually achieving remarkable results.

Reading teaching has always occupied an important position in English teaching. Learning any language requires a large amount of reading, and English is no exception. Among the four basic skills in English teaching, “reading” is one of the important skills. The requirements proposed

by the curriculum standards for the development of students' English language skills include: extracting main information and viewpoints from texts, understanding the main ideas of texts; grasping major events in texts, seizing key concepts and key details in texts, etc. The process of reading is an important means of absorbing written information, a psychological process in which people deconstruct and construct a deeper understanding of written information, and an important process in language development. Reading ability is a comprehensive application of language, and it is the ability to actively obtain information through text in written communication[2]. With the introduction of new textbooks in recent years and the addition of the new question type of reading and writing continuation in the English college entrance examination reform, the requirements for students' reading comprehension ability and comprehensive application ability have been greatly increased. However, the main problems that senior high school students face in English reading are many new words, high difficulty, and slow speed. The scope of the examination of reading comprehension in the college entrance examination is also constantly changing from testing basic word meaning guessing to understanding the macro theme of the article, from understanding specific details of the article to determining the central idea of the article, judging the author's emotional attitude, and making logical inferences, etc. The themes and genres of the articles are also gradually diversifying. The themes cover various aspects of information that keep pace with the times, such as science and technology, politics, and the environment, and the genres have gradually expanded from the original narrative texts to various texts such as advertisements, notices, and scripts. It can be seen that the English reading in the college entrance examination not only requires higher reading speed but also deeper understanding from students. To meet such requirements, it is necessary to deeply understand the text and apply the activity-based approach to English learning to comprehensively enhance students' language application ability.

2. Concept and Teaching case Under the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

2.1. Defination of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

The activity-based approach to English learning refers to the concepts and views held by teachers and students regarding English learning. Activities are the fundamental form of English learning. English classroom teaching is composed of a series of activities, and English learning is achieved through these activities to consolidate the basic language skills, enhance cultural awareness, improve thinking quality, and enhance learning ability[3]. What kind of activities are they in the activity-based approach to English learning? Are they activities where teachers lead students to translate a text once to understand its meaning in Chinese? Are they activities where teachers explain and expand the vocabulary, grammar and other language knowledge in the text in detail in class and then ask students to memorize and write them down? Are they activities where teachers design several questions for students to do after reading to better match the reading comprehension tasks in standardized tests? Whether these activities belong to the activities under the activity-based approach to English learning depends on whether they integrate the six elements of the English curriculum content.

From the perspective of integrating the six elements, activities under the activity-based approach to English learning should be a series of activities based on texts and aimed at exploring the "thematic meaning"[4]. In these activities, teachers focus on thinking capacity, language knowledge, cultural awareness, and learning ability to help students consolidate the basic language skills and knowledge, understand culture, develop thinking, and optimize strategies, thereby promoting the formation of core subject literacy. Examining the learning activities listed above from this integrated perspective, it can be found that they either ignore

the exploration of thematic meaning and cultural connotations, or explain language knowledge out of context, or substitute teaching with testing, confining the activities of understanding and applying language to “practicing and answering questions”. In short, they all break the integrated learning process of “language – culture - thinking”. Therefore, although these activities can also prompt students to think, memorize, discuss, and express, they are one-sided and even mechanical and rigid, and thus do not fall under the activities in the activity view.

In fact, such activities are quite common in front-line teaching. For students, this kind of teaching cannot effectively promote the synchronous development of language, thinking, and culture, resulting in fragmented learning content and largely mechanical and rigid memorization in learning forms, ultimately causing students to lose interest in learning. At the same time, this teaching design also has significant drawbacks for teachers. It turns teaching into the dissemination and practice of language knowledge, causing teachers' development in aspects such as “text interpretation, theme expansion, and context creation” to stagnate, ultimately leading to the stagnation of teachers' development. Thus, it is of great significance to guide teachers' teaching and students' learning with the activity-based approach to English learning. It enables students to achieve more comprehensive development and allows teachers to make progress in their profession. It pays attention to the humanistic aspect of the English subject.

2.2. The concept of Reading Teaching Based on the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

It is of great significance for teachers to do a good job in teaching design by studying the discourse deeply and accurately grasping the form, meaning and language resources of the discourse. The mode of carrying out discourse study from the three aspects of What, Why and How is prone to problems in the actual operation. The most obvious problem is polarization. Some teachers cannot accurately grasp these three basic issues, while some teachers mechanically interpret texts from these three aspects, which will affect the actual classroom teaching effect[5].

When preparing the lesson, teachers should not only consider how to study the text from the perspective of teaching, but also think about how to conduct reading teaching at different levels from the perspective of guiding students to interpret the text. Specifically, they can do as follows. First, obtaining the text information, sorting out and integrating the knowledge structure of the text, and grasping the main idea of the text. Second, understanding and inferring the author's writing intention, thinking about what viewpoint the author wants to convey, and what kind of thinking or discussion the author can lead the students to do. Third, analyzing the stylistic form and organizational structure of the text, and paying attention to the author's writing logic. Lastly, appreciating and evaluating the text, and thinking about the transfer and application of the text after interpretation, that is, what impact the text will have on students and what development students can have after interpretation of the text.

“The content of English curriculum contains six elements: thematic context, discourse types, language knowledge, cultural awareness, thinking capacity and learning ability. These six elements are interrelated, integrating, promoting and transforming each other.” Therefore, reading teaching should change knowledge learning out of context and fragmented teaching methods. After in-depth study of text, teachers should create a real and reasonable situation, guide students to immerse themselves in classroom teaching, actively participate in learning activities that highlight the main theme meaning and integrate the six elements of course content, and promote students to consolidate and increase language knowledge, acquire and improve language skills. To enhance the core quality of English subject, students should develop and enhance cultural awareness, explore and develop diversified thinking, and acquire and apply learning strategies.

What kind of learning activities should teachers consider and design to guide students to learn language knowledge, develop language skills, gain cultural experience, enhance cultural awareness, improve thinking quality, use learning strategies, and finally realize migration and innovation in the process of problem solving? The three levels of learning activities advocated by the activity-based approach to English learning are logical and reflect the progressive process of thinking. Zhang Qiuhui, Wang Qiang and Jiang Jingli et al. (2019) pointed out that "Teachers can optimize the question setting around the theme on the basis of text interpretation, and in the process of English learning activities at three levels, they can raise step-by-step questions from logical to critical and then to innovative, so as to provide students with a path of thinking development. Guide students to actively analyze and solve problems, form correct values and realize the improvement of thinking ability and level [5]." Based on teachers' expectation that students can eventually realize migration and innovation, teachers should consciously use tools such as information structure graph and structured knowledge graph when designing learning activities to help students form and internalize structured knowledge in learning activities, help them transform knowledge into ability and accomplishment, and effectively analyze and solve problems.

2.3. A Teaching Case of Reading Class Guided by the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

The following is an example of the learning activities of A Student of African Wildlife in the reading text of Unit1 Women of Achievement, a compulsory module for senior high school English, to explain the teaching design based on the activity view of English learning. This article is part of "History, Society and Culture" under the theme of "Man and Society" and is a biography of Jane Goodall. The first lesson is a warm-up speaking and writing lesson. The author led the students to pay attention to some successful women, and let the students describe and tell their own "heroine".

2.3.1. In-depth Interpretation of the Text

[What]: A Student of African Wildlife is a narrative expository, narrating in the first person, that is, introducing Jane Goodall as an observer. The text is divided into four paragraphs, the first paragraph describes Jane's daily work, the second paragraph describes her new discoveries in the work, the third paragraph describes her hopes, and the last paragraph describes her achievements. The first three paragraphs are presented in parallel, and the fourth paragraph is summarized, so that the whole text presents the logical relationship of "points - total". In terms of emotional value, through the introduction of Jane Goodall, the text conveys the personality charm of great women, and also conveys the value initiative of "man and nature should coexist in harmony".

[Why]: This text is used as a close reading text for the following reasons. First of all, the language form of the text can provide a model for senior high school students, whether it is words or discourse, it can provide materials for students' input and output. Secondly, as a case study of the unit theme "Female achievement", this discourse highlights the theme of "human and self", which can effectively promote students' self-discovery and self-exploration. Finally, from Jane Goodall's work mission, it also highlights the theme of "man and nature should live in harmony", which has more profound significance in the contemporary era of rapid industrial development.

[How]: In order to express content and convey ideas, the following strategies are used. First, "A student" in the title is actually inconsistent with the role of Jane reflected in the text content. The reason why "student" is used is that "student" conveys Jane's "modesty" and "respect for nature". This is the value orientation that should be advocated when dealing with the relationship between "man and self" and "man and nature". This title is wonderful and worth making good use of in teaching, for example, using the title to predict before reading, and analyzing the title again after reading. Secondly, the text is clear and logical. Three paragraphs

are used to introduce three aspects of Jane Goodall's work in parallel, and the character of Jane Goodall runs through them. At last, the text uses "behave, behavior, observe, outspoken, respect" and other key words with communicative value, as well as grammar items such as adverbial segmentation and inversion.

The content interpreted from the text should be transformed into students' learning experience through activity design, leading students to perceive, absorb, internalize and transfer in the process of exploring the meaning of the theme of the text[6]. After reading the text, we should determine the teaching objectives according to the students' situation, and then think about how to convert the content of text reading into classroom learning activities to implement the concept of the activity-based approach to English learning.

2.3.2. Determine the Teaching Objectives

Based on the text interpretation and learning experience, the teacher determined the following teaching objectives. First, through reading, students can understand the basic information of Jane Goodall, such as occupation, work place, animals studied, etc. At the same time, students can summarize the three roles played by Jane Goodall in the text, and make use of necessary vocabulary and necessary logical conjunctions, such as "chimp, behave, worthwhile, observe, outspoken, respect, argue", and "at first, then, before long" and other words describing Jane Goodall in her three roles. Second, based on text information analysis and reasoning, students can use adjectives to summarize Jane Goodall's fine qualities. Thirdly, evaluating the title of the article, and evaluating the meaning of the word "student" in the title. Finally, students prepare a speech of "Man and nature" based on the factual information of the text and their own cultural understanding, combined with the current social reality.

The above goals are presented in the way of activities and behaviors, which not only emphasize the process of learning, but also show the results of learning. It can be operated, achieved, and evaluated at the same time. By observing the verbs in teaching objectives, we can find that the first objective belongs to the activities of learning and understanding level. The second objective is the activity of application practice level. The last two objectives are the activities of the migration innovation level. Each teaching goal is an advance of the previous teaching goal, reflecting the process from the literal to the word, and beyond the text.

2.3.3. Design and Implementation of Teaching Activities

According to the teaching objective and the logical level of activity, the teacher designed three levels of activity.

The learning and understanding activities including students' perception and attention, acquisition and combining, generalization and integration, usually involve the introduction in teaching, macro-speed reading and detailed reading based on information acquisition. Teachers should actively understand students' cognition and emotion, and design high-quality introduction. At the same time, teachers should conduct necessary macro and micro discourse analysis to help students acquire structured knowledge and detailed description[4]. First, perception and attention. The author briefly reviewed the content of the last lesson in the form of a question and answer, and then moved from the conclusion of "Today, we are going to learn about another great woman" to the relevant pictures of "Goodall", thus tying out "chimp, respect, behave" and other core words in the text. Next, students are asked to guess the general idea of the text by combining pictures and text titles, thus demonstrating the important role of "guessing" in reading. Second, acquisition and combining. The teacher asked the students to do a quick reading, and on the basis of "verifying the speculation", further obtain and sort out the relevant information to find the answers to the following questions. "Who is this woman? What's her job? Where does she work? What does she work for? Is she a woman of achievement?" Through the students' answers, the teacher can timely understand their grasp of the text information and give guidance. Third, generalization and integration. The aim of

“generalization and integration” is to obtain clear structured knowledge and detailed support. On the basis of obtaining the basic idea, the author proposes the teaching activities of this link with a “main question”. “What roles does Jane Goodall play in the passage?” This problem is the core of summarizing the structured knowledge of the article. The answer to this question cannot be found directly, but needs to be summarized and refined. So here's another backup plan. If students can't distill the answer directly, the corresponding prompt should be given immediately. That is to turn the question into a multiple choice question. For example, “Does Jane play the role of a guide, a researcher, a protector, a teacher, a worker?” That makes it easier. In fact, the author does provide such an option in teaching, which helps students form structured knowledge. After acquiring structured knowledge, the author continues with the question “What did Jane do in each role?” When guiding students to summarize and integrate these details, the author fully taps the opportunity of “developing thinking and penetrating culture” and tries to set some deep questions that require students to think and transform. For example, when focusing on Jane Goodall as a “guide” to lead the author and others to observe the daily life of “gorillas”, the author asked students to describe the author's observation itinerary logically, so as to combine language application with thinking training and guide the purpose of teaching to improve the quality of thinking. Applied practice activities mainly include students' in-depth discourse description and interpretation, analysis and judgment, internalization and application of learning activities. On the basis of learning and understanding, teachers should guide students to carry out communication activities such as description, interpretation, analysis and judgment around the theme and the new knowledge structure formed, so as to gradually realize the internalization of language knowledge and cultural knowledge, consolidate the new knowledge structure and promote the automation of language use [8]. The text in this case is not to praise Jane Goodall, but to achieve a “self-evident” effect through the description of Jane Goodall's work activities, working environment and initial difficulties. In my opinion, this kind of “silence” just provides a good opportunity for “analysis”. Therefore, the author in this level of activities, “what brilliant qualities can you find in Jane?” This open question leads students to re-examine the text, analyze and reason the information, and then draw their own conclusions. At the same time, excavating and summarizing the good qualities of Jane, which is also a spiritual culture guidance.

The transferring and innovation activities mainly include students' reasoning and argumentation, criticism and evaluation, imagination and creation and other learning activities beyond discourse. The teacher guides the students to reason and demonstrate the value orientation or the author's attitude behind the text, appreciate the stylistic structure and rhetorical devices of the text, explore the relationship between the text and the meaning of the theme, criticize and evaluate the author's point of view, etc., so as to deepen the understanding of the meaning of the theme, and then enable the students to learn independently, cooperatively and through inquiry in a new context based on the new knowledge structure[8]. In this case, the author designs the following two activities at the migration innovation level. First, the teacher guides the students to step out of the text and rise to the level of critical evaluation. The object of critical evaluation is the title of the text. After the first two levels of learning activities, students should be clear about the three roles played by Jane Goodall in the text, including a guide, a research and a protector, but the title is A Student of African Wild-life. Does the definition of Jane Goodall as a student not match the text? Is this a good title? If not, can you come up with a suitable topic? These open questions are a good opportunity to develop students' critical thinking. Secondly, the author creates the following situation. “roots and shoots, an initiative initiated by Jane Goodall to promote human care for the environment, animals and communities, has flourished around the world. Roots and Shoots organizations have also been set up in many places in China. You have now been invited to speak on Jen's behalf by Roots & Shoots in Shanghai, China.” When students complete this activity, they should

not only make full use of the language form and cultural connotation of the text, but also combine the current social reality, which is an effective activity to promote students' "migration and innovation".

3. Literature References

3.1. The Activity-based Approach to English Learning

The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition, 2020 Revision) (hereinafter referred to as the "New Curriculum Standards") defines the concept of English learning activities as "teachers guide students to participate in a series of English learning activities such as learning understanding, application practice, transfer and innovation under the guidance of the theme significance", and clearly points out that its purpose is to promote the development of students' subject core literacy. Zhu Xun and Ma Wenjing pointed out that reading is a kind of cognitive activity that uses the mind and existing knowledge to understand the text, and the division of cognitive level has a certain correspondence with reading ability, which is a spiral structure of gradual accumulation. Sun Pan and Zhou Rong mentioned that English classroom teaching is composed of a series of activities, through which English learning can achieve the consolidation of both language bases, the enhancement of cultural awareness, the improvement of thinking quality and the improvement of learning ability. Zhang Qiuhui, Wang Qiang and Jiang Jingli et al. (2019) pointed out that "Teachers can optimize the question setting around the theme on the basis of text interpretation, and in the process of English learning activities at three levels, they can raise step-by-step questions from logical to critical and then to innovative, so as to provide students with a path of thinking development. Guide students to actively analyze and solve problems, form correct values and realize the improvement of thinking ability and level[5]. Xie Yi mentioned that on the basis of learning and understanding, teachers should guide students to carry out communication activities such as description, interpretation, analysis and judgment around the theme and the new knowledge structure formed, so as to gradually realize the internalization of language knowledge and cultural knowledge, consolidate the new knowledge structure and promote the automation of language[6].

3.2. English Reading Teaching

Reading class is one of the most important classes in senior high school English curriculum. Reading not only plays an important role in daily teaching, but also is an important way for students to absorb texts, internalize knowledge and renew ideas. In all kinds of English tests, reading is also the largest proportion of a question type. In a word, reading is very important in English teaching, and reading teaching can also become a key resource to cultivate students' core literacy. Chen Yuxin mentioned that teachers should take the core quality of English subjects as the goal, in-depth analysis of the problems existing in high school English reading teaching, and solve the current predicament of English reading teaching in ordinary high school[9]. Teachers should rely on the guiding role of the new curriculum standards, abandon the backward teaching concepts, change the traditional teaching mode, build an efficient high school English teaching classroom, and implement the cultivation of students' core quality of English from all aspects. Wang Yue and Zhao Yan mentioned that reading ability is an important part of students' learning ability and an indispensable ability for students. Therefore, as teachers, we should be aware of the important position of reading teaching in English learning[10]. Therefore, at this time, choosing the correct and scientific method of teaching reading is definitely the top priority. Especially in the context of the great changes in the dual-base conversion of three-dimensional goals and core literacy, we should pay more attention to the changes in the cultivation methods of reading ability. Therefore, how to explore this research theory from the perspective of real implementation in classroom teaching rather than

empty talk on paper is more urgent. That is, how to implement English reading teaching in senior high school under the guidance of English learning activity view.

4. Conclusion

The activity-based approach to English learning is an important measure to cultivate the core quality of students and realize the discipline education. It changes the fragmented teaching which is dominated by knowledge and skills in the past and injects new vitality into the teaching. Under the guidance of the activity-based approach to English learning, the teaching activities at the three levels of learning and understanding, application and practice, and innovation and transferring reflect different cognitive dimensions of foreign language learning, which can effectively help students carry out independent, cooperative and inquiry learning, integrate learning content under the guidance of the theme meaning, and gradually realize the exploration of the theme meaning. In this process, we cultivate language ability, develop thinking quality, establish correct cultural awareness, and enhance students' core quality of discipline. Therefore, English teachers should consciously improve their professional basic skills and implement the ideas advocated in the activity view into all aspects of teaching, so as to make English classes more vivid and meaningful.

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