Education and Social Work
ISSN Print: 3079-515X
ISSN Online: 3079-5168
https://doi.org/10.63313/ESW.9152

A Study on Senior High English Reading Teaching Oriented to Deep Learning

Yaling Zeng
China West Normal University, Nanchong 637000, China
Email: 2992822748@qq.com

How to cite this paper: Zeng, Y. (2026). A Study on Senior High English Reading Teaching Oriented to Deep Learning. Education and Social Work, 5(1), 47–55. ISSN Print: 3079-515X, ISSN Online: 3079-5168.
https://doi.org/10.63313/ESW.9152
Published: 2026-07-16

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Erytis Publishing Limited.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/



Abstract

Deep learning is an effective approach to cultivating students' key competencies and fulfilling the educational value of the English subject. By analyzing varied interpretations of deep learning, this paper summarizes its four core features and corresponding teaching implications from objectives, content, activities and assessment. Taking Sharks: Dangerous or Endangered as a carrier, this study puts forward targeted deep-reading teaching strategies. The strategies can resolve common superficial reading problems and support the all-round development of students' key competencies, supplying practical teaching references for frontline senior high English teachers.

Keywords

Deep Learning; Senior High English; Reading Teaching; Key Competencies; Activity-Based Approach to English learning

1. Introduction

The New English Curriculum Standards for Senior High (2017 Edition, Revised 2025) (hereinafter referred to as the Standards) clearly identifies four key competencies for the English subject: language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. Reading instruction is a core carrier for fostering these competencies, and the depth of students' reading learning directly shapes their thinking development and the effect of competency cultivation (Fan Xiaojing, 2020). However, surface learning remains widespread in current senior high school English reading classes. Teaching objectives often focus narrowly on memorizing vocabulary and grammar, with little emphasis on building thinking skills or cultural awareness. Text analysis mostly stays at the level of fact-finding, lacking in-depth exploration of the unit's thematic meaning. Classroom activities are dominated by basic comprehension tasks, with limited student participation and few progressive challenges. Assessment relies heavily on summative tests and one-sided teacher judgment, with little timely feedback or guidance for student self-assessment.

The concept of deep learning aligns well with the educational goals of the *Standards*, and offers a practical way to address the superficiality of reading teaching. While existing studies have covered the theoretical basis and general teaching strategies of deep learning in English education, detailed, full-process lesson designs tied to specific textbook texts are still relatively scarce. For this reason, this paper sorts out the definition and features of deep learning, extracts its implications for reading instruction, and constructs deep reading strategies from four dimensions based on the text from the understanding ideas part in unit 6 of Book 2 published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1. Deep Learning

Scholars have explored deep learning from varied research angles, and no unified academic definition has been formed so far.

From the perspective of learning state, deep learning is regarded as a comprehensive learning state with active learner engagement. Kang Shumin (2016) describes it in terms of learners' participation level, thinking hierarchy and cognitive experience. Wen Xue (2017) further expands this view, noting that complete deep learning involves learning objectives, internal motivation and learning attitude, and helps learners balance their relationships with knowledge, their inner self and the external environment.

Studies focusing on the full learning process define deep learning as understanding-based learning supported by higher-order thinking. An Fuhai (2014) explains that deep learning covers the whole chain of knowledge acquisition, content integration, knowledge construction and practical application, and differs essentially from rote memorization in surface learning.

When applied to real classroom scenarios, deep learning shows clearer practical attributes. Guo Hua (2016) discusses its performance in teaching objectives, learning content, learners, learning methods and learning outcomes. The American basic education deep learning research project also proposes a three-dimensional competence framework covering cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal domains (Kristina et al., 2014), extending the value of deep learning from single subject learning to all-round competence cultivation.

Overall, existing studies share basic consensus: deep learning is both a higher-order learning approach and an engaged learning state, running through the full process of teaching and learning. Combined with senior high school English reading scenarios, this paper defines it as an integrated, theme-based learning mode: it guides students to integrate text information, interpret content critically and apply knowledge flexibly through active thinking, to develop language competence, thinking quality, cultural awareness and learning ability in a coordinated way.

Four core features run through this learning process: all-round competence

development, essential knowledge construction, student-centered inquiry experience, and process-based reflection and adjustment. These features directly respond to the prominent pain points of superficial reading teaching, and provide clear theoretical references for teaching optimization.

3. Implications of Deep Learning for Senior High School English Reading Teaching

Against the current situation of superficial English reading teaching, the core features of deep learning can be transformed into targeted teaching guidance. From the four key links of objectives, content, activities and assessment, the practical enlightenment of deep learning for reading instruction can be summarized as follows.

3.1. Teaching Objectives: Aligning with All-Round Competence Development

In line with the feature of all-round competence development, the three-dimensional framework of cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal domains matches well with the four key competencies of the English subject (Li Fei, 2018). This means reading teaching objectives should not be limited to language knowledge and skills. Teachers need to take into account the cultivation of thinking quality, cultural awareness and learning ability, to break the one-sided goal setting in traditional surface reading classes.

3.2. Teaching Content: Digging into Texts Under Thematic Context

The feature of essential knowledge construction requires learners to grasp the core of learning content and clarify the internal logical connections between knowledge points. For reading instruction, this reminds teachers not to explain vocabulary and sentences in isolation. Instead, they should take the thematic meaning of the unit as the guide, dig into the text at multiple levels, and help students build a complete cognitive chain around the unit theme.

3.3. Learning Activities: Designing Progressive Tasks Centered on learners

Deep learning emphasizes learner-centered inquiry experience, which requires changing the teacher-dominated class mode. Reading activities should be designed based on students' actual learning level, with progressive inquiry tasks set layer by layer. This leaves enough space for students to participate independently and communicate cooperatively, instead of passively receiving knowledge.

3.4. Learning Assessment: Focusing on Formative Assessment and Self-Assessment

Corresponding to the feature of process-based reflection and adjustment, deep learning values learners' self-reflection and adjustment in learning, which breaks the limitation of taking summative assessment as the only assessment method. Reading teaching should build a multi-dimensional assessment system, pay attention to timely in-class feedback, and guide students to conduct self-assessment, to cultivate their ability of independent learning reflection.

4. Teaching Strategies for Senior High School English Reading Instruction Oriented to Deep Learning

The four dimensions of teaching guidance outlined above provide clear directions for optimizing reading lessons. To turn these ideas into practice, this paper takes the reading passage Sharks: Dangerous or Endangered from the Understanding Ideas section of Book 2 unit 6 edited by FLTRP as a practical case, and develops targeted classroom activities around teaching objectives, text analysis, learning activities and assessment.

4.1. Teaching Objectives: Formulating Hierarchical Objectives based on English Subject Key Competencies

To achieve deep learning in English reading teaching, the first step is to refine teaching objectives. The objectives of English subject key competencies focus not only on improving students' subject knowledge and skills, but also on cultivating their thinking quality, sound values and problem-solving ability, which aligns well with the goals of deep learning.

In English reading teaching, the formulation of key competency-based teaching objectives should first reflect the comprehensiveness of students' key competencies. Second, it should present a hierarchical structure based on the Activity-based Aproach to English Learning. Meanwhile, it must be adapted to students' actual learning conditions and the analysis of the text.

Based on the analysis of students' learning situation and the text, and under the guidance of the Activity-based Aproach to English Learning, the following learning objectives are formulated:

(1) Grasp the main idea of the text and summarize its "dangerous-endangered-protection" structure through fast reading. (Language ability, learning ability) (Learning and understanding)

(2) Sort out the influence of the film Jaws on public perception of sharks and analyze the reasons why sharks are considered dangerous through careful reading. (Thinking quality) (Applying and practicing)

(3) Identify changes in people's attitudes and behaviors towards sharks through careful reading. (Thinking quality) (Applying and practicing)

(4) Express views on the necessity of shark protection and discuss relevant protection measures. (Cultural awareness) (Transferring and creating)

As shown above, through the learning and understanding activities in Objective (1), students can acquire the text's main idea and structure, form a structured knowledge system, develop language ability, and improve learning ability through training in skimming and scanning strategies. Through the applying and practicing activities in Objective (2) and (3), students can gradually gain an in-depth understanding of the shift in people's attitudes towards sharks from "dangerous" to "endangered", and build up their analytical and judgmental thinking. Through the transferring and creatingt activity in Objective (4), students can achieve deep comprehension of the text and put forward specific reasons and measures for shark protection.

4.2. Teaching Content: In-depth Text Exploration Guided by Thematic Meaning

Text analysis and exploration should be completed before setting teaching objectives, and serve as the basis for objective design. To achieve a deep understanding of the text, teachers must conduct a thorough analysis of the passage under the guidance of the unit's thematic meaning.

Under the thematic context of "human and nature", the text is analyzed from three dimensions: what, why and how.

What:

(1) The overall thematic context of the unit is human and nature, and this passage specifically focuses on changes in the relationship between humans and marine animals and the reasons behind such changes.

(2) As the second teaching period of the unit, this passage reveals the causes of the intensified conflict between humans and nature. It centers on the topic of whether sharks are dangerous or endangered, to draw attention to marine animal protection.

Why:

Through this passage, the author intends to make readers recognize the harm of human activities to sharks and even the entire natural world, and raise readers' awareness of shark and nature conservation.

How:

(1) Text type: exposition

(2) Structure: Focusing on the two key words "dangerous" and "endangered", the article explains the harm and threats human activities pose to sharks. The whole passage is divided into three parts: Paragraphs 1–2 explain why sharks are considered dangerous; Paragraphs 3–4 analyze why sharks are endangered; Paragraph 5 introduces emerging efforts to protect sharks.

Guided by the unit's thematic context, the three-dimensional analysis of what, why and how helps students fully grasp the theme of human and nature, gain an in-depth understanding of the sub-theme of environmental protection, and clarify the relationship between humans and marine animals.

4.3. Learning Activities: Designing Challenging Tasks with Students as the Focus

Deep learning attaches great importance to students' subject status and emphasizes their full engagement in learning. Therefore, English reading activities should be designed based on students' learning conditions and guided by teaching objectives. They are divided into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading sections to mobilize students' enthusiasm and encourage their active participation.

4.3.1. Creating Authentic Situations

Authentic situations help students better engage in learning activities, and guide them to participate actively and think positively in the learning process. For example, in the lead-in session before reading, teachers can play clips of shark documentaries, so that students can form initial impressions of sharks visually and auditorily. Students can also describe their understanding of sharks with relevant adjectives. This activity aims to build a real context, help students develop preliminary understanding of sharks, inspire their active thinking about the image of sharks, and prepare them cognitively for subsequent reading.

4.3.2. Guiding Deep Understanding Step by Step

Deep understanding can be promoted from two aspects: the formation of knowledge structure and the development of higher-order thinking.

4.3.2.1. Associating text information to form knowledge structure

The feature of "association and structure" proposed by Guo Hua (2016) encourages students to connect existing experience with new knowledge and promote the structuring of new knowledge. In reading teaching, teachers should not only build connections between students' prior experience and new knowledge in pre-reading activities, but also gradually help students construct structured new knowledge in while-reading sessions.

For example, in the prediction session, students make predictions about the content and structure of the text based on pictures and the title Sharks: Dangerous or Endangered, to form reading expectations. Then in the fast reading session, students identify the main idea and framework of the text through skimming, namely the logic of "dangerous-endangered-protection". Finally, in the careful reading session, following the clue of time sequence, students first analyze the influence of the film Jaws on sharks in Paragraphs 1–2, and summarize people's attitude of regarding sharks as "dangerous" after 1975 as well as relevant behaviors. Then they analyze the reasons why sharks become "endangered" in Paragraphs 3–4, and the change in Peter's attitude towards sharks after 1980. At last, they analyze people's shift to a "protection" attitude towards sharks in Paragraph 5. The whole process is closely connected, helping students gradually understand changes in people's attitudes

towards sharks, and paving the way for thinking about shark and marine life protection in the post-reading session. Throughout the reading process, teachers guide students to complete the blackboard design step by step, so that they can have a clear grasp of the text content. From prediction to fast reading and then to careful reading, the three activities guide students to grasp the essence of the reading material from phenomenon to essence, from abstraction to concretion, and finally form a structured system of text content.

4.3.2.2. Developing higher-order thinking with question chains as the guide

Progressive question chains with different levels can guide students to dig out and extract the meaning behind the text, and realize in-depth processing of the passage.

For example, in this lesson, Paragraphs 1–2 describe people's attitudes towards sharks and corresponding behaviors after the release of the film Jaws in 1975. To help students understand this part, the following question chain is designed:

Q1: What happened in 1975?

Q2: What does the opening scene of the film Jaws describe? Who? When? Where? What?

Q3: Why does the author present the opening scene of the film Jaws?

Q4: What was people's attitude towards sharks before and after watching the 1975 film Jaws?

Q5: How did people react after watching the 1975 film Jaws?

Q6: What consequences will the killing of so many sharks lead to?

The above questions guide students to understand people's attitude of regarding sharks as "dangerous" and the behaviors driven by this attitude, and lay a foundation for the consequence of "endangerment". Q1 points out the key event — the release of Jaws in 1975, and guides students to think along the clue of time sequence. Q2 and Q3 help students analyze the opening scene of the film and understand the attitude towards sharks conveyed by the film. Q4 guides students to sort out the change of people's attitude towards sharks from normal fear to more frightened after the film's release. Q5 helps students identify people's behaviors towards sharks after watching the film. Q6 guides students to summarize and judge the consequences of large-scale shark hunting, and prepares for the reading of the "endangered" section. In this way, students can deeply understand that human activities are the main cause of shark population decline, and that it is humans rather than sharks that pose a threat to the other.

4.3.3. Internalizing knowledge and deepening thematic understanding through communication

Deep learning requires internalization activities centered on descriptive, interpretive and communicative practices around the theme and new knowledge structure, to consolidate the new knowledge system, realize deep learning, and

achieve the goal of transforming knowledge into ability and ability into competencies (Wang Qiang, 2021). Therefore, teachers can guide students to gain in-depth understanding of the text and deepen the thematic meaning through group discussion and exchange.

In the post-reading session of this lesson, students are organized to discuss two questions in groups: Why should we protect sharks? and How should we protect sharks?, to help students form a deep understanding of the unit theme. By guiding students to think about the reasons and measures of shark protection, and reflect on the intensified conflict between humans and marine life, as well as between humans and nature, students' awareness of nature protection can be strengthened. Therefore, internalization and communication can further deepen the thematic meaning of the unit and realize the educational purpose of deep learning.

4.4. Learning Evaluation: Timely Feedback and Promotion of Student Self-Assessment

Deep learning focuses on students' reflection during the learning process. This kind of reflection means that students constantly examine and reflect on their own learning outcomes, identify gaps and absorb new knowledge, and form active self-check, evaluation, regulation and improvement of learning. Therefore, deep learning emphasizes sustainable evaluation and highlights learners' subject status in evaluation.

For this reason, teachers should provide timely feedback for students and guide them to conduct self-evaluation. During teaching activities, teachers can understand students' mastery of knowledge through their explicit performance, and give targeted feedback in time.

For example, in this lesson, students can discuss the reasons for shark protection based on the text and personal experience through group work. According to the discussion results, teachers can grasp students' mastery of the lesson content and their ability of transfer and innovation, and give feedback accordingly. This can encourage students to think deeply, understand the thematic meaning thoroughly, and better achieve the educational goal. After class, teachers can also guide students to fill in a self-checklis(as shown inTable 1.) , to help them know their own learning situation, including the mastery of knowledge and ability, and further improve their learning ability.

Table 2. Student's Self-checklist

Self-checklist			
1.	I can summarize the structure through "Read for Structure".	Yes	No
2.	I can tease out the influence of the film Jaws on sharks through "Read for Dangerous".	Yes	No
3.	I can analyze the reasons why sharks are endangered through "Read for Endangered".	Yes	No
4.	I can judge the change of Peter's attitude and behaviour towards sharks through "Read for Endangered".	Yes	No
5.	I can express their idea about how to protect sharks through think and share.	Yes	No

5. Conlusion

This paper sorts out deep learning's core traits and corresponding teaching inspirations, and puts forward a full-set reading design taking Sharks: Dangerous or Endangered as an example. The four-dimensional strategies covering objectives, texts, activities and assessment can ease superficial reading problems and boost students' all-round key competencies. It offers operable lesson references for senior high English teachers, while further classroom practice is needed to refine these schemes.

References

[1] An, F. H. (2014). Classroom teaching strategies for promoting deep learning. Curriculum, Teaching Material and Method, 34(11), 57–62.

[2] An, F. H., & Chen, Y. L. (2017). Research on in-depth teaching and its approaches. Educational Exploration, (5), 6–10.

[3] Fan, X. J. (2020). A preliminary study on junior high school English reading teaching strategies based on deep learning. Foreign Language Teaching in Schools (Middle Edition), 43(4), 25–29.

[4] Guo, H. (2016). Deep learning and its significance. Curriculum, Teaching Material and Method, 36(11), 25–32.

[5] Kang, S. M. (2016). Research on deep learning based on discipline literacy cultivation. Educational Research, (7), 111–118.

[6] Kristina, L. Z., James, T., Jordan, R., & Michael, S. G. (2014). Evidence of deeper learning outcomes. American Institutes for Research.

[7] Li, F. (2018). An analysis of senior high school English reading teaching focusing on deep learning. Foreign Language Teaching in Schools (Middle Edition), 41(10), 40–45.

[8] Liu, Y. X. (2021). Teaching improvement oriented to "deep learning": Making learning happen authentically. Primary and Secondary School Management, (5), 13–17.

[9] Lu, Z. H. (2021). English reading teaching design based on the concept of deep learning. Foreign Language Teaching in Schools (Middle Edition), 44(11), 19–24.

[10] Wang, Q., Sun, W. W., Cai, M. K., et al. (2021). Holistic unit teaching design of senior high school English oriented to deep learning. Frontiers of Foreign Language Education Research, 4(1), 17–25, 87–88.

[11] Wen, X. (2017). A review of research on deep learning: Connotation, teaching and assessment. Global Education Outlook, (11), 39–54.