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An Investigation of Teaching Strategies for Senior High School English Reading in the Context of New Curriculum Standard

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Abstract

New English Curriculum Standards for General High School (2020) states that the ultimate goal of English teaching in senior high schools is to cultivate students' English subject core competences. Students' learning and teachers' teaching are a process of mutual promotion. Therefore, teachers need to adopt effective reading teaching strategies to develop students' reading skills in the context of the NECS. At present, English reading teaching in China is restricted by many reasons. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the application of teaching strategies for English reading for senior high school English teachers. Three English teachers with different teaching experience were selected randomly to conduct interviews and their reading lessons were observed in order to investigate the current situation of reading teaching strategies used in Wen' jiang No. 2 senior high school. Through data collection and analysis, the author mainly addressed three questions: 1) What are the teaching strategies used by English teachers in reading classes? 2) What are the difficulties that teachers encounter in using reading teaching strategies? 3) What are the main causes of these difficulties? The application of English reading teaching strategies in senior high schools is generally good, but there are still some teachers who are deeply influenced by traditional teaching concepts and lack of teaching experience, making it difficult for them to be truly student-centered in the classroom. In addition, the teachers' teaching designs are fixed and teaching methods are modeled, which leads to the implementation of the NECS only superficially. Based on the issues identified in the research, it is necessary to enhance teachers' professional competence in concepts, strategies, and resource utilization through diversified training.

Keywords

New curriculum standards; Teaching strategies for reading; Senior high school English

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of information technology, the frequency of

foreign interactions has increased and English has become an international lingua franca. However, Chinese students lack an English language environment, so among the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, foreign language teaching in China is based on cultivating students' reading skills. Thus, reading becomes the main way for Chinese students to perceive, understand, apply the language.

In terms of English teaching reform in high schools, the Ministry of Education promulgated the latest version of New English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School (2020). The concept of core competences in the English discipline is further elaborated. It refers to correct values, indispensable qualities and key abilities that students gradually develop through learning English courses, and mainly includes language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity and learning ability. Since the English textbooks of various versions in high schools have been updated according to the NECS, teachers are required to keep up with the needs of the situation and pay more attention to the use of reading teaching strategies. In teaching activities, "the success of teaching reading depends largely on teaching strategies". As Anderson (1999) argues, "reading is an essential skill for English as a second or foreign language students; and the most important skill to master. With strengthened reading skills, ESL/EFL readers will make greater progress and attain greater development in all academic areas". Actually, the reasonableness of the teaching strategies adopted by English teachers is closely related to the reading learning strategies of students, thus influencing the final effect of English class.

According to some current surveys, senior high school students in China have poor reading ability. These students only try to figure out the meaning of each word and sentence but lack reading strategies. Then, how to use the new teaching textbooks rationally under the guidance of the new curriculum standard to efficiently complete the task of teaching English reading has become a thorny problem that senior high school English teachers need to solve nowadays. Therefore, it's essential to find out the specific implementation of the new curriculum standard in teaching English reading. The results may provide a more reasonable way for teachers to carry out English reading teaching. It may also confirm the extreme importance of teachers' adherence to student-centred and encouraging students to actively construct their own cognitive structures.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in two pivotal educational theories: Humanism and constructivism. While emerging from distinct intellectual traditions, these theories share a fundamental, student-centered ethos that aligns seamlessly with the core principles of the New English Curriculum Standards (NECS). Their integration provides a robust theoretical lens through which to examine high school English

teachers' reading teaching strategies.

Humanistic learning theory, which gained prominence in the late 1950s through the work of Maslow, Rogers, and Fromm, posits a "people-oriented" philosophy. Rogers (1983) held that the teacher's role is to facilitate the learner's progress towards the goal of self-actualization, rather than to deliver an externally imposed standard curriculum. It asserts that students are the true masters of the classroom, with teachers serving primarily as guides and facilitators. This perspective marks a significant departure from traditional teacher-centered pedagogy, which often renders students passive. Instead, humanism emphasizes the critical role of students' emotions, intrinsic motivation, and individual differences. The teacher's key responsibility is to cultivate a supportive learning environment that nurtures creativity and guides students toward becoming independent learners, thereby enabling them to better adapt to societal needs.

Complementing this view, modern constructivism, notably advanced by Piaget and further developed by scholars like Vygotsky, focuses on the active process of knowledge construction. Piaget argued that knowledge is not passively received but constructed through the interaction between the individual and their environment. Vygotsky (1978) developed the concept of social constructivism further with the proposition that learning is not an individual exercise but is developed through social interaction and couched in language. Learners enter the classroom with rich prior experiences and continuously build new understanding upon existing knowledge through both self-construction and social interaction. Social constructivism, particularly associated with Vygotsky, emphasizes the vital role of dynamic collaboration and interaction with others in knowledge acquisition. Two of its core concepts are instrumental for teaching: the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) and "scaffolding". The ZPD delineates the gap between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance. Effective teaching, therefore, should target this zone to stimulate learning potential. "Scaffolding" refers to the tailored support teachers provide to help students climb to higher levels of understanding, which is gradually withdrawn as students gain competence, ultimately fostering independent learning. Vygotsky' s best-known concept is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance. Scaffolding is the temporary support that a More Knowledgeable Other gives a learner to do a task.

2.2. Teaching strategy

The concept of "teaching strategies" was first proposed by the American philosopher of language, Goodman (1967), and has been widely used in the theory and practice of English language teaching since then. The term "teaching strategies" often describes the approaches and conduct that teachers use to accomplish specific

learning goals. Different scholars have different interpretations of the meaning of "teaching strategies".

According to Wang Du-Qin (2002), teaching strategy is "the sequential arrangement of teaching activities and continuous substantive communication between teachers and students, as well as a series of useful teaching behaviors to achieve the desired results." According to Lu Zi-Mian and Kang Shu-Min (2008), teaching strategy refers to "the systematic behavior of teachers in regulating teaching activities under the guidance of certain teaching concepts and according to their own understanding and knowledge of specific teaching tasks and teaching situations in order to achieve the best teaching effectiveness." It can be seen that although these two expressions are different, their core meanings are relatively similar.

2.3. Research gaps

In review of related studies, we have identified the following gaps that need to be addressed in research. First, research on teachers' strategic pedagogical knowledge and practice in China remains nascent and often disconnected from classroom realities. Second, while student strategy use has been widely studied, the systematic examination of teachers' teaching strategies requires further exploration. To narrow these research gaps, this study looks at the diverse reading teaching strategies employed by high school English teachers in their reading classes, as well as the difficulties encountered during implementation and their underlying causes , guided by the following questions:

1) What are the teaching strategies used by English teachers in reading classes?

2) What are the difficulties that teachers encounter in using reading teaching strategies?

3) What are the main causes of these difficulties?

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

This study was conducted on senior high school English teachers in Wen' jiang No. 2 Middle School. As the English textbook in this senior high school has been changed from PEP to FLTRP recently, teachers have some troubles in teaching reading. Three teachers with different teaching experience and teaching styles were selected to be interviewed and observed.

3.2. Instruments

This study adopted a mixed methods approach, using semi-structured interview and classroom observation to collect data.

Semi-structured interview. Three English teachers in this senior high school were selected to attend an interview. There were five questions focusing on three dimensions, namely, factors influencing teachers' choice of reading teaching

strategy, the use of reading teaching strategies, and possible problems. The interviews with each teacher were conducted one by one in accordance with the outline of the interviews.

Classroom observation sheet for teaching strategies for English reading. To save time, observation sheet should be used during classroom observations. It aims to systematically and objectively collect empirical data on teachers' application of reading teaching strategies in authentic classroom settings. The observation form consists of four main sections. First, the background information section records basic contextual details such as the teaching staff, school, date, teaching content, observation phase, and lesson period to ensure data traceability and contextualization. Second, the teaching process description section requires observers to chronologically summarize key classroom activities, capturing overall structure and pacing. Third, the core section, strategy application quantification, categorizes reading strategies into pre-reading, while-reading, post-reading, and general dimensions. Predefined observation indicators allow observers to record the frequency of each strategy during corresponding phases, generating analyzable quantitative data. Finally, the overall evaluation and reflection notes section provides an open-ended qualitative recording space. It captures classroom interaction details, immediate teaching effects, notable events, and the observer's overall impressions and reflections. This section offers rich qualitative material for in-depth analysis. By integrating quantitative statistics with qualitative descriptions, this observation sheet strives to comprehensively and meticulously reconstruct the actual application of reading teaching strategies.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Three English teachers with varying years of experience were selected randomly for interviews. With their consent, the conversations were recorded, and the collected audio transcripts were processed. Subsequently, the English reading classes of these three teachers were observed and documented.

To address the first question, classroom observation serves as the core tool for identifying which strategies teachers actually employ. Then, structured observation sheets are used to quantitatively record the frequency and sequence of teachers' teaching behaviors, supplemented by qualitative descriptions, thereby providing direct behavioral evidence of strategy usage.

For the second and third questions, both tools work together to provide answers. Interviews serve as the primary method, directly eliciting teachers' subjective experiences of challenges, specific descriptions, and attribution analyses through in-depth dialogue. Classroom observation functions as a critical validation and contextualization tool, capturing difficulties in strategy implementation, thereby grounding causal analysis in authentic classroom settings.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Teachers' Understandings of Teaching Strategies for English Reading

It revealed that the English teachers had a relatively good understanding of English reading teaching strategies in this interview. Three of the teachers believed that English reading teaching strategies are appropriate teaching methods chosen to improve teaching efficiency. One of the English teachers did not have a comprehensive enough understanding of what teaching strategies are and could not give an appropriate definition. However, he listed his own approaches to teaching reading. For example, he usually uses pictures, audio and video related to the reading materials as teaching resources. Therefore, students can gain the background knowledge related to the reading materials.

According to the teachers' answers, all of them have known the importance and relevant requirements of teaching strategies. They began to realize that their teaching strategies affected students' development and thus they tried to change their teaching methods, paying attention to the importance of background knowledge.

4.2. Current Application of Reading Teaching Strategies

By analyzing the interview records, there's still a teacher using bottom-up reading mode in while-reading stage, with the teacher translating word by word to explain the whole text. In addition, the teacher only asks students to discuss simple questions in the part of practice, without digging deeper into the meaning of the theme. Such traditional teaching is conducive to students' mastery of basic language knowledge, but it fails to guide students to read by themselves.

Meanwhile, the other two teachers, who were relatively experienced in teaching reading, used a variety of reading teaching strategies in their class. They took PWP model, where a reading lesson has three stages: Pre-reading, While-reading and After-reading. Before-reading, they use interesting ways to introduce topics, such as questioning, background activation, pictures, videos, and other ways related to the reading materials. Grabe (2009) promotes introducing key vocabulary or a key idea before reading. This key vocabulary or idea should be used to lead students to make relevant associations between what they already know and what they are going to read. During reading, practice and reinforcement are carried out using skimming, scanning, intensive and extensive reading strategies. During reading, instructors should provide students with the opportunity to semantically map the main ideas of the text as well as explicitly modeling how to do this. This will facilitate making explicit connections between student background knowledge and details of the text. After reading, students are organized to carry out activities such as role-plays or to retelling the text through the mind maps.

4.3. Major Difficulties Encountered

Through in-depth interpretation of interview transcripts and meticulous analysis of classroom observations, this study reveals that high school English teachers are encountering a series of interlinked practical challenges while implementing the new curriculum standards and reading teaching strategies. The foremost challenge lies in students' lack of intrinsic motivation for participation and the formalization of teaching evaluations. Even among teachers who are experienced and committed to innovation, carefully designed interactive activities often face silence and disengagement from some students. This uneven participation makes it difficult for subsequent evaluation to accurately capture each student's thought processes and cognitive growth. As a result, evaluation often remains limited to simple assessments of oral output or final answers from a few active students, failing to fulfill the formative evaluation function that promotes deep learning.

In an interview, one teacher candidly admitted that while she fully recognized the importance of cultivating critical thinking, the substantial increase in academic texts in the new edition of the textbook and the wide disparity in English proficiency within her class forced her to allocate significant class time to vocabulary explanations and complex sentence analysis. This was done to ensure most students could keep up, repeatedly compressing the originally planned reading reflection and transfer activities. This is not an isolated case. It reflects how, in many real teaching situations, textbook difficulty, student diversity, and time constraints force teachers to compromise their progressive ideas in favor of traditional, safe teaching approaches.

Consequently, this compromise and pressure foster a tendency toward rigid and formulaic application of teaching strategies in practice. Classroom observations reveal that while the three reading stages framework is widely adopted, its internal implementation remains highly uniform. This one-size-fits-all approach undermines the flexibility and creativity inherent in teaching strategies.

The ultimate manifestation of this dilemma is the superficiality of teaching design and implementation, leading to shallow and passive cognitive engagement among students. A common scenario observed is as follows: A teacher successfully sparked students' interest in a travel blog using a set of exquisite foreign landscape images. However, after displaying the images, the teacher immediately shifted to mechanical tasks like “Read the first paragraph and identify five verbs,” failing to design an effective bridge to guide students in transforming their visual impressions into deeper exploration of the text's linguistic style and the author's emotional stance. The result is classroom activities that appear rich and lively on the surface but fail to guide students across the cognitive chasm from knowing to understanding and from understanding to evaluating. Students' thinking remains perpetually confined to the surface of the text.

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