

Empowering New Transformations in Junior High School English Reading Teaching Through the Activity-Based Learning Approach

Tianyi Deng

China West Normal University, Nanchong, 637000, China

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Abstract

This paper explores the new transformations in junior high school English reading teaching guided by the Activity-Based Learning Approach, aiming to enhance students' reading abilities, thinking qualities, and cultural awareness through diverse learning activities. The article analyzes the limitations of traditional reading teaching, elaborates on the core principles of the Activity-Based Learning Approach and its application strategies in English reading teaching, and demonstrates its practical effects with specific cases. Research indicates that the Activity-Based Learning Approach can effectively stimulate students' interest in learning, promote deep reading, and provide new ideas and methods for junior high school English reading teaching.

Keywords

Activity-Based Learning Approach; Junior High School English; Reading Teaching; Core Competencies

1. Introduction

In the field of junior high school English teaching, reading instruction holds a significant position. Reading passages not only help students accumulate language knowledge and improve language skills but also cultivate their thinking qualities, cultural awareness, and learning abilities, thereby fostering their core competencies in English. The Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) emphasizes the central role of reading teaching in junior high school English courses, explicitly stating that reading is an important way for students to acquire information, broaden their horizons, and develop comprehensive language skills.[2]

However, junior high school English reading teaching still faces many challenges. On the one hand, traditional teaching methods are deeply entrenched, with teachers often dominating the class while students passively listen and memorize mechanically, like containers being filled with knowledge. This leaves little space for independent reading and thinking, stifling students' enthusiasm and initiative.[6] On the

other hand, the selection of reading materials is narrow, mostly limited to textbooks and accompanying exercise-books, with outdated and monotonous content that fails to active students' interest in reading. Moreover, under the pressure of exam-oriented education, reading teaching has become utilitarian. Teachers overly focus on reading techniques and answer-seeking drills, while students merely concentrate on finding correct answers, neglecting the deeper meanings of texts. Reading is reduced to a mechanical task, which contradicts the goal of cultivating core competencies in English.

Faced with these challenges, the Activity-Based Learning Approach brings new vitality and hope to junior high school English reading teaching. It centers on students, advocating that under the guidance of thematic meaning, students actively participate in a series of progressive and interconnected learning activities, including learning and comprehending activities, application practice activities, and innovative activities. This allows students to learn through experience, grow through practice, and transcend through innovation.

2. Analysis of the Activity-Based Learning Approach

2.1. Interpretation of Core Elements

The Activity-Based Learning Approach is fundamentally student-centered, positioning students as active explorers and constructors of knowledge. The Curriculum Standards (2022) propose a teaching pathway for organizing and implementing curriculum content through three types of activities: learning comprehension, application practice, and transfer innovation, collectively referred to as the Activity-Based Learning Approach.[5] The Activity-Based Learning Approach is essentially a unified term for teaching philosophies and methods that organize and implement English teaching around activities.[3] Superfine pointed applying activity-based teaching to children's English education, as children are "doers." The process of English teaching not only develops students' language knowledge and linguistic intelligence but also cultivates other intelligence, emphasizing curiosity, creativity, and collaboration.[1]

In the learning comprehension stage, students focus on thematic meaning, relying on diverse discourses to perceive and notice, acquire and comb, organize key information. They connect scattered knowledge points to build a systematic knowledge framework, laying a solid foundation for subsequent learning.

After preliminary knowledge accumulation, students come to application practice. They use acquired knowledge and skills to deeply process passages through description, interpretation, analysis, judgment, internalization and application. They describe vivid scenes in the text, explain underlying profound meanings, and analyze the author's intentions and logical structure, refining knowledge into their own competencies and achieving the transformation from "knowing" to "capacity."

In the transfer innovation stage, students through reasoning, critical evaluation, im-

agination, and creation, they flexibly apply learned knowledge to new contexts, creatively solving complex real-life problems and expressing personal perspectives, attitudes, and value judgments with unique insights.

Importantly, throughout this process, language, thinking, and culture are tightly interwoven, achieving each other. While learning language knowledge, students' thinking abilities develop comprehensively, from the rigorous construction of logical thinking to the sharp insights of critical thinking and the bold breakthroughs of creative thinking, advancing layer by layer. They appreciate the charm of different cultures, absorb the essence of multiculturalism, and learn to embrace differences and respect diversity in cross-cultural exchanges. This harmonious integration of language learning, thinking development, and cultural inheritance continuously injects vitality into the cultivation of core competencies in English.

2.2. More Beneficial than Traditional Teaching

Compared with traditional junior high school English reading teaching, the Activity-Based Learning Approach demonstrates significant advantages. In traditional teaching, teachers often dominate the classroom, while students passively listen and memorize mechanically, severely suppressing their enthusiasm and initiative. Classrooms lack effective interaction between teachers and students or among peers, resulting in a dull atmosphere that gradually extinguishes students' interest in learning. In contrast, the Activity-Based Learning Approach places students at the center of the classroom. Under the strong attraction of thematic meaning, students enthusiastically engage in various learning activities.

Traditional teaching emphasizes isolated language knowledge learning and skill drills, making it difficult for students to construct a complete knowledge system. Their understanding of knowledge remains superficial, and their comprehensive application abilities are weak. The Activity-Based Learning Approach breaks down knowledge barriers, emphasizing integration, relevance, and practicality of knowledge. It uses themes as a bridge to organically combine language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies, enabling students to master solid language fundamentals while understanding the cultural connotations behind the language, thereby improving comprehensive application abilities.

Under the constraints of traditional teaching, students' learning is often confined to classrooms and textbooks, making knowledge transfer and application more difficult. When faced with real-life problems, they struggle to effectively apply what they have learned. The Activity-Based Learning Approach, however, emphasizes the close connection between knowledge and life, guiding students to transfer classroom learning to extracurricular practices and solve real-life problems with English. For example, after reading content on environmental protection, students can actively participate in campus or community environmental projects, writing slogans or planning activities in English, extending English learning from the classroom to the

broader society, which achieves knowledge transfer and innovation, truly applying learning to practice and making English a powerful tool for global communication and problem-solving.

3. Insights into the Current State of Junior High School English Reading Teaching

3.1. Outdated Teaching Methods and Passive Learning

In traditional junior high school English reading classrooms, take a reading lesson as an example: the teacher first explains new words in the text sentence by sentence, while students busily take notes. Next, the teacher translates the text line by line, analyzing the grammatical structure of each sentence, occupying most of the class time. Students passively listen and memorize mechanically, with little opportunity for independent thinking or questioning.

In post-reading exercises, teachers typically provide multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blanks, or short-answer questions related to the text, asking students to find answers by rereading the text to reinforce knowledge. However, this approach often merely repeats textual details without fostering deeper comprehension or broadening students' thinking.

Throughout the class, students appear busy but are actually passive and disengaged, students have no chance to cultivate a genuine love for English reading or independent reading abilities. Some students find English increasingly challenging, losing interest and motivation. Meanwhile, their reading proficiency improves slowly, leaving them ill-prepared for future English learning and application.

3.2. Fragmented Knowledge and Lack of Systematic Integration

A predominant issue in current junior high school English reading teaching is the fragmentation of knowledge. On the one hand, in vocabulary and grammar instruction, teachers often explain word meanings, usage, and grammar rules in isolation, neglecting their application in specific contexts and their interconnections. As a result, students memorize grammar rules but struggle to accurately determine tense connotations in actual reading, failing to grasp the correct temporal information conveyed in texts.

On the other hand, in processing reading materials, teachers mostly focus on analyzing textual details, overlooking the overall structure, logical flow, and thematic meaning of the text. The knowledge students acquire is scattered and fragmented, lacking a coherent thread to connect it into a complete, systematic framework. This severely limits their ability to transfer and apply knowledge. When faced with new reading materials or real-life language scenarios, students often cannot flexibly mobilize their knowledge to solve problems.

3.3. Neglect of Thinking Cultivation and Lack of Authentic Contexts

In current junior high school English reading teaching, many teachers focus primarily on extracting surface-level information from texts, severely neglecting the development of students' higher-level thinking qualities. A common classroom routine involves teachers guiding students to skim texts for basic information, followed by simple, direct questions to test comprehension. For deeper meanings—such as the values the author conveys through the protagonist's experiences, the profound impact of these experiences on the protagonist's growth process, or how the social phenomena reflected in the text manifest in real life and how we should respond—teachers rarely guide students to explore. These methods encourage students' reading habits to remain superficial, leaving students lacking in critical thinking and creative comprehension. Their reading skills remain at a low level, failing to meet the core competency requirements for thinking quality in English. Moreover, English classrooms often lack communicative contexts and cultural backgrounds. The complexity of English knowledge at the junior high school level inevitably creates barriers to language comprehension.[7] Many teachers' attempts to create contexts are overly formalistic, neglecting to cultivate students' ability to grasp entire texts and flexibly transfer knowledge to real-life situations.

4. Practical Application Strategies of the Activity-Based Learning Approach

4.1. Learning Comprehension Activities to Stimulate Reading Interest

4.1.1. Contextualized Warm-Ups to Activate Prior Knowledge

For example, in teaching the reading section of Unit 3 “Could you please clean your room?” (Section B 2b) in the eighth-grade textbook. During the Warm-Up, students guess the teacher's profession (using images as hints, such as the teacher dressed like a journalist holding a microphone), sparking their interest. The teacher adopts the role of a daily newspaper reporter for contextual teaching, presenting reading tasks as work assignments, with subsequent reading activities built around this theme.

Teachers can leverage multimedia resources, such as playing a news interview video on “Should kids do homework at home?”, immersing the class in a real-world scenario. After watching, students form their own opinions, and the teacher asks, “Think about this mother——did she think kids should do chores?” Students' attention is quickly captured, and they eagerly share their views based on personal experiences. This sparks interest and creates a lively classroom atmosphere. Through lively discussions, students' background knowledge about family life and chores is activated, naturally transitioning to the reading theme——family responsibilities and chore-sharing——laying a solid emotional and cognitive foundation for deeper reading.

4.1.2. Predicting Reading Content to Develop Inference Skills

Teachers first guide students to focus on the title “Could you please clean your room?” and the accompanying images. Then, they prompt students to think: “From the title and the pictures, can you guess what the writer will talk about in this passage?” Students brainstorm and predict that the text might discuss why Nancy and her mother hold different views or how to develop good habits. With these questions and hypotheses in mind, students embark on their reading journey, continuously verifying or revising their predictions. This process effectively practices their inference skills, significantly boosting their reading initiative and focus, transforming them from passive knowledge recipients into active knowledge explorers.

4.2. Application Practice Activities to Deepen Understanding

4.2.1. Role-Playing to Strengthen Expression and Text Comprehension

After students familiarize themselves with the text, teachers organize role-playing activities. For instance, boys play Mr. Smith, and girls play Ms. Miller, working in pairs to embody these roles. The teacher frames Mr. Smith and Ms. Miller as parents in a family, helping students understand the different roles fathers and mothers play. The teacher asks, “Why do Mr. Smith and Ms. Miller have different opinions, reasons, and conclusions?” The teacher then summarizes why parents might hold different views, ultimately highlighting that their shared goal is love—though their roles differ, both express love for their children, tying back to the theme of Love in the lesson.

To perform well, students delve into the text, analyzing characters' emotions and language styles. During role-playing, they mimic tones, expressions, and actions, vividly recreating dialogues. This immersive experience deepens their understanding of characters' situations and emotions while enhancing their oral expression and ability to flexibly use English in communication.

4.2.2. Organizing Information to Build Knowledge Frameworks

Teachers guide students to focus on text structure and key information. First, students skim the two letters and match names with their viewpoints. Next, they quickly identify the main idea by reading the first sentence of each letter. Then, they locate Ms. Miller's and Mr. Smith's reasons in the respective letters. After extracting information, students create mind maps, categorizing reasons into pros and cons, systematizing scattered knowledge into a clear framework. This helps them grasp the text's logical flow and master efficient learning strategies like summarize key points. Mind maps visually present abstract information, serving as intuitive learning tools that make reading more engaging and effective.[11]

4.3. Transfer and Innovation Activities to Enhance Comprehensive Competencies

4.3.1. Post-Reading Debates to Improve Critical Thinking

Teachers organize debate competitions using target language with topics like "Should kids do homework at home?" Students are divided into pros and cons, with four representatives from each side presenting arguments. This student-centered activity sharpens critical thinking as students choose debate angles, research information, and share opinions, exercising autonomy and freedom in learning. Autonomous learning helps students develop good study habits, as they take responsibility for planning tasks, managing time, and applying effective strategies.[9]

4.3.2. Thematic Extended Writing to Foster Creative Thinking

After class, teachers assign writing tasks like "Should kids do homework at home?", encouraging students to draw on personal experiences. Students fully utilize their knowledge and imagination, crafting unique family stories in English. Reading and writing are complementary, both central to junior high school English learning. "Continuation writing," where students expand on original texts with their own ideas, enriches the narrative.[10] After writing, students share their writing, learning from peers and broadening their perspectives. This interactive environment nurtures innovative and logical thinking, improving literacy skills and laying the groundwork for advanced writing training.

5. Conclusion

The Activity-Based Learning Approach is a new concept proposed in the New Curriculum Standards. It is student-centred and implements progressive English learning activities from comprehension to practice, and from analysis to evaluation. Therefore, English teachers must firmly believe that activities are the fundamental form of English learning, actively guiding students to participate in language application, thinking development, and value judgment, thereby enhancing their problem-solving abilities.[8] The Activity-Based Learning Approach has brought significant changes to junior high school English reading teaching, transforming students from passive recipients into active explorers of knowledge. Through diverse learning activities, students achieve coordinated development in language proficiency, thinking qualities, cultural awareness, and learning abilities.

However, the journey of teaching exploration is endless, and teachers must continuously reflect and improve. They should understand individual differences and design activities tailored to students' needs, adjusting difficulty levels and pacing. Optimizing group collaboration models ensures every student grows in the English classroom. Expanding student participation fosters confidence in learning, achieves teaching objectives, assesses knowledge application, and elevates the quality of junior high school English teaching.[4] In the future, with evolving educational philosophies and advancing teaching technologies, junior high school English reading teaching, guided by the Activity-Based Learning Approach, will continue to innovate,

opening more exciting and efficient English learning journeys for students. This will empower them to become new-era talents with international perspectives and cross-cultural communication skills, writing a new chapter in English teaching.

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