

A Case Study on the Teaching of Senior High School English Reading Classes Based on the English Learning Activity Concept

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Abstract: One of the most important inputs in language learning is reading. Reading plays a pivotal role in developing students' core literacy. However, there are still many problems in the current high school English reading teaching, such as fragmented teaching out of context, shallow reading, etc. In the The English Curriculum Standard for Senior High School (2017, revised in 2020), it proposes the concept of English learning activities integrating six elements. And it is clear that activities are the basic form of English learning. Teachers should design contextual, hierarchical, and effective English learning activities for students in the classroom to provide an actionable way to implement core literacy. This paper takes the *City or Country* teaching in the Reading Club section of English Compulsory 1 Unit 1 *Life Choices* of Beijing Normal University as an example, and analyzes its progressive teaching activities according to the concept of English learning activities, so as to promote the cultivation of students' English core literacy.

Keywords: Activity-based Language Learning Approach; Senior High English; English Reading Class; Core Competencies; Teaching Case

1. Introduction

The "English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools (2017 Edition)" (hereinafter referred to as the "Standards") delineates the fundamental requirements for the core competencies of the English discipline (language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning capacity). It emphasizes the cultivation of language and language learning, pointing out that language should achieve a harmonious unity between the individual and society, the integration and unification of instrumental and humanistic

qualities, and the synchronous development of language ability and cultural awareness [1]. Consequently, the demands on teachers will be higher: teachers are required to guide students in acquiring knowledge, focus on the practical teaching value of English language training, cultivate essential skills and necessary character for individual sustainable development, promote the development of students' English core competencies, and simultaneously enhance learning and understanding, application and practice, as well as transfer and innovation.

Traditional high school English teaching has predominantly focused on the explanation of knowledge points, often resulting in English classroom activities that are information-heavy, chaotic, and fragmented, lacking standardized activity designs to cultivate students' abilities. This form of spoon-feeding education can lead students to feel bored, find it difficult to digest the information, and even develop a resistance to learning English. English classrooms should integrate the six elements of the curriculum standards into the learning activity process, conducting learning and understanding activities based on texts, application and practice activities that delve deeper into texts, and transfer and innovation activities that go beyond texts [2].

In response to the aforementioned issues, this paper, by integrating the connotations and characteristics of the English learning activity perspective, elucidates the design philosophy of a three-stage progressive teaching activity that is comprehensive, interconnected, and practical through specific lesson examples. It also explores the design idea and strategies for English reading activities, aiming to enable students to effectively master English knowledge and skills through a variety of multi-level activities [2].

2. Definition

From a broad perspective, the concept of

English learning activities pertains to the fundamental views and perspectives held by teachers and students regarding English learning activities, essentially addressing "which learning activities are the most effective" or "how to conduct effective English learning activities," thereby answering the questions of "what" or "how." From a philosophical standpoint, the concept of English learning activities serves as both epistemology and methodology. It not only represents an understanding of English learning activities but also acts as a practical guide for these activities [2]. In this paper, the concept of English learning activities is discussed in a narrower sense, as proposed in the "New Curriculum Standards," which aims at the core competencies of the English discipline and integrates six elements: thematic context, text types, language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies. This concept refers to a series of English learning activities characterized by comprehensiveness, interconnectedness, and practicality, such as learning and understanding, application and practice, and transfer and innovation, all guided by thematic significance. Students, based on their existing knowledge and through various types of texts, promote their own language knowledge acquisition, language skill development, cultural understanding, diverse thinking development, value orientation judgment, and learning strategy application in the process of analyzing and solving problems [1]. This process not only facilitates the integrated development of students' language knowledge and skills but also enhances thinking quality, strengthens cultural awareness, and improves learning ability. Specific learning activities can be categorized into three types: learning and understanding, application and practice, and transfer and innovation. These three types of activities progress in layers, collectively serving to cultivate students' core competencies [3].

3. The Analysis of Teaching Example

This paper takes the teaching of "City or Country" from the Reading Club section of Unit 1 "Life Choices" in the Beijing Normal University Edition English Compulsory 1 as an example. The teaching case is selected from

the instructional video of Ms. Liu Wanqing at the 15th National High School English Teachers' Teaching Skills Competition in December 2021. The design of teaching activities is based on the concept of English learning activities, aiming to guide students to deeply experience different lifestyles on the basis of understanding the content of this text, to contemplate their pros and cons, to enhance students' dialectical thinking awareness of viewing issues, and to establish a positive outlook on life.

3.1 Analysis of Teaching Content

This unit revolves around the topic of "Life Choices," presenting various life decisions through multiple forms of discourse. It guides students to reflect on their own lifestyles and future life development choices, falling under the theme of "Self and Personal Development."

[What] This lesson is based on an online reading text in which the author, writing in the first person, describes the characteristics of different lifestyles in the city and the countryside and expresses their own views on choosing to live in either urban or rural areas.

[How] This text consists of three parts. The first part presents the author's description and perspective on urban life; the second part provides the author's description and viewpoint on rural life; and the third part involves the author refuting the notion that "urban life can be lonely." Finally, the author expresses their opinion that there is no inherent superiority or inferiority between urban and rural life, emphasizing that the key lies in personal choice. In this discourse, the author uses descriptive language and logical connectors (such as "because," "because of," "for the reason that," etc.) to articulate their viewpoint.

[Why] Through the author's narration of their personal experiences, this text expresses their views on urban and rural life and explains the reasons behind them. It guides students to think dialectically about different lifestyles and encourages them to adopt a positive attitude toward life, choosing a lifestyle that suits them best.

3.2 Teaching Aims

This instructional design follows the three levels of the English learning activity concept

and incorporates the three aspects of discourse interpretation suggested by the "Curriculum Standards." It aims to achieve the following objectives through this lesson: 1) Organize the characteristics of urban and rural life. 2) Compare and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of urban and rural life. 3) Orally express opinions on choosing to live in the city or countryside and provide reasons. 4) Compare the characteristics of cities and countryside in China and abroad, and select a suitable lifestyle.

The instructional design is centered around the exploration of thematic meaning, threading through multiple levels such as "description and views on urban life—description and views on rural life—there is no superiority or inferiority in rural life, the key lies in personal choice." This ensures that the three levels of teaching activities are logically clear and progressively in-depth. During the teaching process, emphasis is placed on cultivating students' ability to read news report-style texts and enhancing their comprehensive language proficiency.

3.3 The Design of Teaching Activities

Teachers should thoroughly study the text and grasp the teaching content to reasonably structure the levels and design English learning activities. According to the English learning activity concept that integrates the six elements, the three levels of classroom activities target different goals for student development. Teachers should appropriately construct learning activities at these three levels and follow the interconnectedness of learning activities to guide students in engaging in progressively challenging and step-by-step learning activities.

3.3.1 Learning and understanding activities

Learning and understanding activities primarily include perception and attention, acquisition and organization, summarization and integration, and other text-based learning activities. At the beginning of the class, to capture students' attention, teachers can introduce the new lesson using pictures, songs, or videos to stimulate students' interest and learning expectations. This also sets the stage for natural teacher-student and student-student interactions in subsequent parts of the class [4].

Step 1: Create a context around the theme to

attract attention.

The teacher plays a video of Zhang Tian from the previous lesson and shows pictures of a mountain village in Guizhou, then asks questions based on the school appearance presented in the video:

Q1: How many classrooms do they have? (3classrooms.)

Q2: How is the playground over there? (Small and dirty).

Q3: How did the playground become on rainy days? (Muddy, dirty and wet).

Q4: What about our classroom? Is it big? (Big tidy and clean).

Q5: What about our playground? (Large, Bright).

Q6: Does our playground get dirty on rainy days? (No.)

[Purpose] Using the current situation of the rural school from the previous lesson as an introduction, this activity aims to activate students' background knowledge about urban and rural school life. This activity falls under the category of perception and attention within learning and understanding. By introducing the topic through videos and pictures, it sparks students' interest and activates relevant schemas.

Step 2: Organize, summarize, and integrate textual information

Reading the title and illustrations – predicting textual content

The teacher asks students to read the title of the article and the accompanying illustrations in the textbook, and then poses questions: Can you predict what's the text mainly about?

[Purpose] Prediction is an essential reading skill. Teachers can guide students to focus on the main title, subtitles, pictures, and other elements of the text through appropriate questioning, thereby encouraging them to predict the content of the article [4]. This activity falls under the category of organizing, summarizing, and integrating within learning and understanding, as it involves inferring the main content of the article based on the title and illustrations to gather information.

3.3.2 Application and practice activities

Application and practice activities mainly include describing and interpreting, analyzing and judging, internalizing and applying, and other in-depth text-based learning activities. Building on the foundation of learning and understanding activities, teachers guide

students to engage in communication activities such as describing, interpreting, analyzing, and judging around the theme and the newly formed knowledge structure. In other words, through participating in application and practice activities, students can delve deeper into the text and establish connections between the language of the text and its meaning [4].

Step 3: Describe and interpret detailed textual information

Activity 1: The teacher guides students to read the first part of the article and complete a mind map, identifying the author's views on urban life. Students are then asked to answer the following questions.:

Q1: Does Cassie love living in the city?

Q2: What are the reasons?

[Purpose] Guide students to perceive the text and pay attention to the expression of language; organize the reading information of the first paragraph, analyze the characteristics of urban life; identify the author's viewpoint, analyze its causes, and evaluate their perspective. This activity falls under the category of describing and interpreting within application and practice. By reading the first part, students describe and interpret the author's views on urban life to obtain detailed information.

Activity 2: The teacher guides students to provide examples of the words "recreation" and "entertainment."

Q1: What about recreation? (We are having the opportunities for recreation means you can do lots of some fun things after school or after work.)

Q2: So can you give me an example? (Watch TV or do sports.)

Q3: What about entertainment? (We do for fun after work or it is provided by a group of people.)

Q4: Can you give me an example? (Going to the concert. Going to the museum.)

[Purpose] Guide students to understand new words in context, helping them better comprehend the content of the article.

Activity 3: The teacher guides students to summarize the advantages and disadvantages of living in the city according to the mind mapping, and then asks questions: Can you can summarize the first part of reading by looking at the map we have done?

[Purpose] Consolidate the language learned.

Step 4: Analyze and judge the textual information

Activity 4: The teacher guides students to independently read the second part of the article and draw a mind map, so as to list the author's views on the advantages and disadvantages of living in the countryside. Then, based on the mind map, students summarize the author's viewpoints.

Q1: Does she love living in a rural area?

Q2: Draw a mind map to list the advantages and disadvantages of country life.

[Purpose] Help students apply the learned reading methods to sort out the textual information in the second part, and internalize reading skills and language knowledge. This activity falls under the category of analysis and judgment in application and practice. By reading the second part, students analyze and judge the author's views on living in the countryside, thereby internalizing their reading skills.

Activity 5: Students read the article critically and raise questions:

Q1: Why did the writer find peace and calm at parks? Do you agree?

Q2: Can you survive without the internet?

[Purpose] Deeply understand the text and appreciate the author's viewpoints. This activity belongs to the category of analysis and judgment within application and practice. Through the author's language expressions, students judge the author's viewpoints.

Step 5: Internalize and apply the information in the discourse

Activity 6: Guide students to read the first paragraph of the last part ("City life can be lonely.") and then hold a mini debate within groups. Divide into two sides, the affirmative and the negative, with each side having 90 seconds for presentation. During the presentation, viewpoints and reasons should be given.

[Purpose] Guide students to think dialectically about the view that "city life is lonely", deepen the exploration of the theme's meaning, internalize and apply the information in the discourse. This activity falls into the category of internalization and application within application and practice. By organizing a debate, the content and expressions in the article will be involved during the activity, thus achieving the internalization and application of the language.

Activity 7: Guide students to read the remaining content of the last part and answer

the following questions:

Q1: What is the writer's opinion for city and country life?

Q2: What does the writer mean by "I think it isn't about where you live-it's about how you live."?

Q3: Do you agree with it? Why or why not?

[Purpose] Guide students to dialectically evaluate the author's viewpoints, reflect on different lifestyles, describe the lifestyle that suits them, and internalize and apply the discourse knowledge.

3.3.3 Transfer and innovation - type activities

Transfer and innovation - type activities mainly include learning activities beyond the discourse, such as argumentation and reasoning, evaluation and critique, imagination and creation. Through such activities, students can transform from having mere abilities to possessing comprehensive qualities. When designing argumentation and reasoning activities, teachers can ask students to consider the emotional attitudes conveyed by the author through the text and the value orientation behind the discourse, and find evidence in the text to support their views. Evaluation and critique activities are aimed at cultivating and developing students' critical thinking. Teachers can ask students to evaluate the author's viewpoints, put forward their own opinions on the topic, and explain the reasons. Imagination and creation activities are mainly manifested in forms with a high degree of freedom, such as continuing to write or imitating writing. These activities aim to enable students to give full play to their imagination, make flexible transfers, and solve problems creatively [5].

Activity 8: The teacher plays a video. After watching the video, students are required to write an article recommending the urban or rural life in Anhui to the author.

[Purpose] The teacher presents a real - life scenario where a foreign exchange student is coming to study at the school and is undecided between living in the city or the countryside near the school. After reading the relevant text about urban and rural life, students are required to write a letter to this exchange student. In the letter, they should draw on the knowledge and perspectives from the text, combine with the local real - life situations around the school, and present the advantages and disadvantages of urban and rural living. They need to clearly state that there is no

superiority or inferiority between the two lifestyles, and it all boils down to personal choice. This activity belongs to the transfer - innovation - type activities. By creating this new piece of writing based on a real - life context, students can express their own viewpoints, which helps to enhance their dialectical thinking ability.

4. Summary and Reflection on Lesson Study

This teaching design is closely centered around the English learning activity concept, with the exploration of the theme's meaning serving as the key thread in teaching activities. Through the design of a series of progressive learning activities, it aims to consciously cultivate students' English learning and application abilities. This teaching design reflects the three characteristics of the English learning activity concept integrating the six key elements under the core literacy, namely relevance, practicality, and comprehensiveness [6].

The relevance is reflected in the following facts: The English learning activities designed by the teacher are linked to students' existing cognitive levels and their own experiences [7]. When students experience different lifestyles through watching videos and drawing on their own experiences, new knowledge can be associated with their lives, forming a new knowledge structure, so that the knowledge they have learned can ultimately return to life. This also means that various activities are interrelated and gradually transition from simple to complex. First, there are learning and understanding activities, that is, obtaining information based on the discourse, predicting the content of the article according to the title, sub - titles, and textbook illustrations to attract students' attention. Then come the application and practice activities, such as describing the respective characteristics of urban and rural life, internalizing the relevant vocabulary and expressions for describing different lifestyles to form language application abilities, and expressing their own viewpoints [8]. Finally, there are transfer and innovation activities, such as writing and publishing articles, using the learned knowledge and skills to creatively solve problems in real - life situations, exploring the theme's meaning in real - life contexts, promoting the transformation of

students' abilities into qualities. Moreover, the previous activity should lay the foundation for the subsequent one, helping students make a natural transition in the theme context and enabling the development of students' thinking from the shallow to the deep level.

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In terms of comprehensiveness, under the guidance of the theme of lifestyle choices, students have enriched their language knowledge (mastering vocabulary and expressions related to daily life status and lifestyle); improved their language proficiency (being able to use the learned vocabulary to describe personal lifestyles, share their living conditions and thoughts and feelings); cultivated cultural awareness (understanding the characteristics and significance of different lifestyles and life choices, learning to feel and

appreciate different cultures and lifestyles), developed thinking qualities (by understanding different lifestyles, thinking about their advantages and disadvantages, enhancing students' dialectical thinking awareness in looking at problems); and cultivated learning abilities (through thinking and discussing various language phenomena after reading, learning group cooperation and inquiry - based learning, and improving learning initiative) [10].

To sum up, the design of English classroom activities based on the English learning activity concept is highly practical and operable, which can effectively create a classroom atmosphere and cultivate students' core competencies. However, there are also deficiencies in the activity design of this class. First of all, in the learning and understanding activities, when acquiring and sorting out the article, only the prediction activity was designed. After that, instead of skimming the article to understand the general idea and check whether the predictions were correct, the text was directly intensively read in parts. Secondly, it is difficult to fully balance the distribution of the three levels of learning activities within a class. There are a wide variety of specific activity forms, and defining the activity types at the three levels in this model can cause certain difficulties for teachers when designing activity classification. Currently, in language teaching, the most frequently carried out activities are the relatively shallow - level learning and understanding activities, followed by the application and practice activities that delve into the discourse, and the transfer and innovation activities that go beyond the discourse are the least. The above - mentioned problems still need to be explored and solved [6].

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposal of core competencies reflects the emphasis on students' all - round development and is a powerful measure for cultivating talents in the new era. Front - line teachers should guide students' all - round development, construct a good hierarchical structure for classroom activities during the process of designing English classroom activities, and think about and explore the ways and methods for

cultivating students' core competencies in English subjects in actual teaching. This enables students to truly develop in the classroom, laying a solid foundation for their future English learning and for coping with global challenges, and promoting the development of students' core competencies in the subject.

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