

Reading Instruction under the Core Competencies of the English Subject

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Abstract: This article aims to explore reading instruction under the framework of core literacy. Core literacy refers to language ability, cultural character, thinking quality, and learning ability. Reading instruction is one of the important ways to cultivate students' core literacy. Students need to read in order to understand different cultural backgrounds and values, broaden their horizons and knowledge. At the same time, reading can also improve students' language expression and communication abilities, cultivating excellent cultural inheritors and cross-cultural communicators. Reading instruction also needs to focus on developing students' thinking literacy. Students need to use reading to develop critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Reading instruction should be closely integrated with core literacy, improving students' comprehensive quality through developing their language ability, cultural character, thinking quality, and learning ability.

Keywords: Comprehensive Quality; Core Literacy; Reading Instruction.

1. Introduction

The “Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition)” categorizes the core competencies of the English subject into four aspects: language ability, cultural character, thinking quality, and learning ability[1]. With the ongoing advancement of high school English curriculum reform, the curriculum goals have shifted from developing students' comprehensive language ability to cultivating their core competencies in English. Consequently, teaching tasks have gradually focused on fostering virtues and core competencies[2]. Reading instruction is a crucial part of English teaching; however, there are still some factors in reading instruction that are not conducive to cultivating core competencies, such as a mechanized, superficial, and formulaic approach to classroom teaching, and a lack of in-depth analysis of text[3].

Reading instruction aimed at developing core competencies in English requires teachers to delve deeply into texts, uncovering the deeper meanings and themes, and focusing on the main line of meaning. This makes the reading process serve the exploration and construction of thematic meaning, and designing teaching activities based on the vitality of the language content itself[2]. Reading instruction should not just help students understand textual information but also cultivate their ability to construct meaning, acquire knowledge, and guide them to enhance cross-cultural understanding, promote diverse thinking, gain aesthetic experience, and form positive attitudes and good habits through reading. This is the specific manifestation of cultivating students' core competencies in reading classes [4].

This study aims to explore reading instruction oriented towards the core competencies of the English subject, clarifying the essential character and key abilities students need to adapt to lifelong development and social needs, helping students master reading skills, and improving the effectiveness of English learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language Capacity

Language ability, one of the essential components of core competencies in the English subject, refers to the ability to understand and express meaning through language in social contexts. This involves using listening, speaking, reading, and writing to comprehend and convey meaning. For example, in Huang Xuexiang's lesson on Unit 6 “I'm Watching TV.” Section B 2a-3a from the seventh-grade English textbook by Ren Jiao Press, the design of reading activities based on the development of language ability is explored. Specifically, the lesson describes and analyzes the teaching content through vocabulary and structure, follows pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading teaching steps, and focuses on students' graphical organization of textual information in the classroom to make the content more vivid and intuitive. Additionally, through precise understanding of sentence meanings, students are encouraged to engage in deep reading, thereby developing their language ability and thinking quality[11].

The activity design at each stage targets the goal of developing language ability. The pre-reading activities aim to improve reading comprehension speed, introduce the reading topic, stimulate students' enthusiasm for reading, overcome vocabulary obstacles, and help activate background knowledge. The while-reading activities should match reading skill training, enhance the depth of text understanding, and promote the accumulation of students' reading experiences. Post-reading activities focus on helping students consolidate their understanding of the text; these activities should be appropriate and encourage student expression. Teachers should also craft questions based on the text to further develop students' language abilities.

Some researchers combine the hierarchical nature of context in English reading with the cultivation of language ability. Taking the four award-winning lessons from the 2017 Zhejiang Province high school English classroom teaching competition as examples, they explore how to design reading activities based on context to cultivate students' language

abilities. The authors argue that context includes literal context, implied context, and expanded context, which form an organic whole. Creating situational contexts based on reading texts involves integrating different levels of text processing with specific perspectives. First, teaching activities based on the literal context mainly involve organizing text information, sensing language while processing text information, and cultivating students' logical thinking. Second, based on the implied context, students can use referential questions to deepen understanding and internalize the learned language through in-depth text processing, thereby developing critical thinking skills. Finally, in the expanded context, students move from within the text to beyond it, using the learned language to express themselves[6].

2.2. Cultural Awareness

English is a unity of instrumental and humanistic qualities [1]. However, if we “emphasize only the instrumental aspect of language while neglecting its humanistic side and the cultural factors involved in language use and communication, such language teaching lacks vitality and sustainability”[7]. Currently, the cultivation of cultural awareness in high school English reading instruction is far from satisfactory: it focuses solely on textbooks with little cultural input, emphasizes the linguistic expression of cultural knowledge while ignoring the interpretation of cultural connotations, and mechanically instills culture without considering students' experiential context[8]. In response, Xu Zuqing explored how to cultivate students' cultural awareness in reading instruction. Using a text from the 2019 Ren Jiao Press English textbook as an example, he appropriately supplemented cultural knowledge to promote in-depth exploration, conducted cultural comparisons to perceive and appreciate differences, and created cultural learning scenarios to facilitate understanding and internalization through experience[8].

Some researchers believe that reading classes are an important type of English instruction, as many reading texts contain rich cultural knowledge. Cultivating cultural awareness is inseparable from understanding this cultural knowledge and exploring its connotations[9]. In reading instruction, cultivating cultural awareness should revolve around exploring thematic meanings, enhancing the exploration and extension of the text's inherent culture, and promoting deeper understanding of the text from easy to difficult and from shallow to deep[10]. For example, some researchers have examined the practical paths for cultivating students' cultural awareness in reading instruction using the “Reading and Thinking” section of Unit 3 in the compulsory English textbook (2019 edition) by Ren Jiao Press. First, they activate background knowledge and conduct cultural warm-ups before reading. Then, during reading, they delve into the cultural connotations to deepen cultural cognition. Finally, after reading, they transfer knowledge to cultivate cultural character.

2.3. Learning Ability

“Learning ability refers to students' awareness and ability to actively apply and adapt English learning strategies, broaden learning channels, and strive to improve learning efficiency[1].” Learning ability is a developmental condition of core competencies, helping students manage their English learning, develop good study habits, and learn independently and efficiently[12]. Chinese teachers seem to have endless

strategies or methods to teach learning ability. For instance, situational context strategies can be used to cultivate students' learning abilities. High school students often have issues understanding, memorizing, and using vocabulary. In the understanding stage, teachers can provide micro-contexts in vocabulary instruction to develop students' ability to discern meanings and use article contexts to cultivate their ability to infer meanings. In the memorization stage, teachers can create situational contexts to teach vocabulary, aiming to transform dull characters in students' minds into vivid images, possibly animated, exaggerated, and peculiar, stimulating their brain functions and enhancing memory. Vocabulary size and reading ability are also strongly correlated[13].

For students with learning difficulties, learning ability in reading is also crucial. First, it is essential to stimulate positive emotions in struggling students to enhance their learning ability. Conducting diverse oral English activities can increase their interest and ability in learning. Various forms of encouragement can activate their motivation to participate in English learning. Using multiple strategies can boost their confidence in learning English. Developing cognitive strategies can enhance their awareness and ability to accumulate language knowledge[14].

2.4. Thinking Quality

Thinking quality reflects the mental characteristics of core competencies in the English subject, referring to the abilities and levels of thinking in aspects such as logic, critical thinking, and creativity[15]. Reading is an active information processing process, involving a series of complex mental activities such as judgment, reasoning, analysis, and synthesis, where the brain uses both verbal and non-verbal information[16]. However, in current English reading instruction, teachers tend to focus more on sorting out surface information from the text and explaining language knowledge, while neglecting deeper analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of the thinking, culture, emotions, and values behind the text. This neglect is detrimental to the development of students' thinking quality and reading literacy[17].

Researchers use Lesson 30 “The Death of a Ghost” from New Concept English Book 3 as an example to explore how to cultivate students' thinking quality in reading instruction to achieve deep learning. First, predicting the text based on the title encourages readers to continually predict and verify their predictions during the reading process, demonstrating a range of active exploratory behaviors. Next, understanding the text through word meaning summarization requires students to capture deeper meanings beyond surface information and express implicit thinking results with explicit language, which is a higher-order thinking skill. Then, designing a chain of questions to analyze the text allows teachers to convert textbook knowledge into a series of systematic and clearly layered teaching questions[18].

Researchers believe that the cultivation of thinking quality includes three dimensions: logical thinking, critical thinking, and creative thinking. First, sorting out the text and analyzing the language cultivates logical thinking. Second, understanding the text and evaluating its semantics cultivates critical thinking. Finally, exploring the text and using reading to promote writing cultivates creative thinking. In high school English reading instruction, teachers should clearly define the goals for cultivating thinking quality and design teaching activities accordingly[12]. Additionally, the design of reading questions aimed at cultivating thinking quality is also crucial.

Researchers have summarized several questioning strategies: pre-reading activities should stimulate interest, create suspense, and activate background knowledge; during-reading activities should promote understanding, encourage generation, and delve deeper; post-reading activities should relate to life, focus on emotions, and elevate the theme. The ultimate goal of reading is to develop students into efficient and independent readers[13].

Teaching should strive to be guided by thematic meaning exploration. Language serves meaning, and under the guidance of themes, relying on discourse, focusing on pragmatics, and following the main thread of meaning, helps students organically integrate fragmented knowledge, form structured knowledge, and cultivate their language proficiency. Moreover, guiding reading instruction with thematic meaning exploration helps students independently explore and construct meaning during the learning process, internalize it into self-awareness, enhance their humanistic cultivation, and achieve the dual goals of moral and intellectual education. This teaching approach also aids in cultivating students' interest in reading and enhancing their sense of achievement in reading.

The design of reading tasks and the discussion prompted by post-reading questions are intended to guide students to actively respond to the text they have read. This approach enables students to not only comprehend the text but also engage in their own thinking, judgment, analysis, and evaluation of the content, thereby genuinely encouraging critical reading. The process of students expressing themselves around these questions is an interaction with the text and its author, emphasizing the interpersonal significance of the discourse. The goal is to cultivate readers who are adept at thinking critically, enjoy expressing themselves, and possess independent thoughts.

3. Conclusion

The reading instruction aimed at developing core competencies in the English subject requires teachers to delve deeply into the text, focus on the main themes, and design teaching activities based on the text content. At the same time, in classroom teaching, teachers should dare to let go, centering on students, respecting their autonomy, and focusing on classroom interactions. Only through cultivating students' core competencies can we truly enhance their reading abilities and levels. This requires teachers to focus on curriculum design, innovate teaching methods, and integrate the principles and practices of core competency education. In reading instruction, inspiring students' thinking, cultivating their innovation awareness, and enhancing their communication skills are all important means based on core competencies. We should emphasize guiding students to think critically during the teaching process and improving their reasoning abilities. Moreover, we should teach students how to read and understand different types of texts, enabling them to better meet the reading demands of today's information age. Finally, it's important to stress that developing core competencies is a long-term process, requiring teachers to continually refine and enhance their teaching abilities through continuous practice and reflection. Only through ongoing learning and practice can we better guide students toward a successful path in reading.

This study aims to explore how teachers design and implement high school English reading classes based on core competencies. Through a semester-long longitudinal survey

of the research subjects, the researchers meticulously documented transformations in their teaching practices. These changes primarily manifested in two aspects: teaching content and teaching methods. In terms of teaching content, Teacher Z, guided by thematic leadership, integrated text content based on discourse, organically combining language learning with meaning exploration. This approach enabled students to extract, integrate, analyze, and evaluate text content while learning language knowledge, understanding emotional attitudes, developing language proficiency, and shaping cultural character. Regarding teaching methods, Teacher Z's classroom shifted from teacher-centered to student-centered. The teacher's role evolved from a leader to a facilitator, elevating students' autonomy and empowering them with greater independence. This shift was advantageous for enhancing students' thinking quality and developing their learning abilities. The transformation in teaching content benefited from Teacher Z's focus on text interpretation, while the change in teaching methods benefited from Teacher Z's attention to student learning.

In conclusion, reading instruction aimed at developing core competencies in the English subject requires teachers to delve deeply into the text, focus on the main themes, and design teaching activities based on the text content. Simultaneously, in classroom teaching, teachers should dare to let go, center on students, respect their autonomy, and focus on student engagement.

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