

The Application and Exploration of Activity-based Teaching Method in Junior High School English Reading Teaching

Zhang Luwen

[**Abstract**] This paper focuses on improving the quality and efficiency of junior high school English reading teaching and deeply explores the crucial role of the activity-based teaching method in enhancing the effectiveness of reading teaching. Currently, junior high school English reading teaching is faced with challenges such as students' low reading interest and weak reading comprehension ability, and there is an urgent need to innovate the teaching model. Starting from both theoretical and practical dimensions, this paper will first analyze the current situation and pain points of junior high school English reading teaching, and sort out the relevant research achievements at home and abroad regarding activities and the activity-based teaching method, laying a theoretical foundation for subsequent research. The study will focus on analyzing the core elements of the activity-based teaching method and its specific application strategies in junior high school English reading teaching. For example, how to stimulate students' reading interest and improve their reading comprehension ability, critical thinking ability, and language application ability through activities such as group cooperation, role-playing, and situation simulation. Through in-depth research, this paper aims to demonstrate the positive significance of the activity-based teaching method in improving the effectiveness of junior high school English reading teaching, and provide new ideas and practical guidance for the innovation of English reading teaching models. Ultimately, it aims to enhance the comprehensive English ability of junior high school students.

[**Key words**] activity-based teaching method; junior high school English reading; activity theory; teaching innovation

[**About the author**] Zhang Luwen (2004—), female, from Tongling, Anhui, China, affiliated with School of Foreign Languages, Anqing Normal University, bachelor of arts in English. Research interests: English language teaching methodologies and applied linguistics.

[**DOI**] <https://doi.org/10.62662/kxwxy0207002>

[**Website**] www.oacj.net

1 Introduction

In the grand scheme of language learning, reading stands as a solid foundation, bearing a crucial and irreplaceable role. As early as 1970, Bright, through in-depth research and practical observation, asserted that language learning lacking a reading component is like water without a source, or a tree without roots. In 1978, Strang, based on her rich teaching experience, also emphasized the fundamental position of reading in the language acquisition process, likening it to the foundation of a language learning edifice. Specifically in the field of English learning, English reading instruction plays a direct and key role in improving students' language abilities, including vocabulary accumulation, grammar comprehension, and sentence application. At the same time, English reading is an indispensable and important means to comprehensively develop students' core English competencies, such as language ability, thinking quality, cultural awareness, and learning ability.

In recent years, with the accelerating pace of globalization and increasingly frequent international exchanges, English education has ushered in a period of vigorous development. Against this backdrop, the importance of English reading has become increasingly prominent. Whether it is the increased proportion of reading comprehension assessment in English exams, or the frequency of using English reading in daily life, both indicate

that English reading ability has become a key indicator for measuring students' overall English proficiency. However, on the journey of improving students' English reading ability, many challenges and problems arise.

Currently, junior high school English reading teaching faces many pressing dilemmas. First, students' interest in reading is generally low, and they have a certain degree of resistance to English reading. Traditional teaching models often focus too much on grammar analysis and vocabulary explanations, lacking fun and interactivity, making it difficult to stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning. Second, students' reading comprehension ability is relatively weak, making it difficult for them to accurately grasp the main idea and details of articles. Due to insufficient vocabulary, weak grammar foundations, and a lack of effective reading strategies, students often feel strained during reading and find it difficult to understand the deeper meaning of the articles.

From student's perspective, vocabulary deficiency has always been a problem that plagues reading. Vocabulary, as the basic element of reading, is like the bricks in a building; if the quantity is insufficient, it is difficult to construct a tall building for understanding the article. Students frequently encounter new words during reading, which seriously hinders their fluent understanding of the text content, thereby reducing reading efficiency and reading experience. In addition, the lack of reading skills cannot be ignored. For example, lacking effective skimming and scanning skills, failing to quickly grasp the main idea and key information of the article, or being unable to accurately infer the meaning of new words based on context, etc., these can easily cause students to feel frustrated when reading and gradually develop a fear of reading. Over time, they may even lose confidence in the development of their own English literacy and fall into a vicious cycle.

From teacher's perspective, although the current English education environment is changing rapidly, and new educational technologies and teaching resources are constantly emerging, providing more convenience and possibilities for teaching, the teacher's teaching responsibilities remain arduous and heavy. In limited classroom time, teachers not only have to efficiently impart rich knowledge and practical skills to students, but also face many realistic difficulties. Among them, some teachers' understanding of new teaching concepts remains only superficial, and they fail to deeply grasp their connotation and essence. In teaching practice, they still over-rely on traditional reading teaching methods, such as simply conducting vocabulary explanations and grammar analysis, ignoring the students' main role and personalized needs in the reading process, thereby leading to students' lack of initiative and creativity in the learning process, neglecting the comprehensive development of students' core competencies, making it difficult for students to adapt to the requirements of the new era for comprehensive English abilities.

Against this backdrop filled with challenges and opportunities, exploring more effective English reading teaching methods that are tailored to students' actual needs has become increasingly urgent. TBLT, as an emerging teaching philosophy, brings new hope and unlimited possibilities to junior high school English reading teaching. It breaks the inherent pattern of traditional teaching, emphasizing students' active participation and practical experience, and stimulating students' learning interest and enthusiasm through designing diverse teaching activities.

2 International research

Since the mid-20th century, the global education sector has undergone unprecedented transformations, raising the bar for language teaching. The traditional teacher-centered, lecture-based teaching model has shown increasing limitations. This model often overlooks the development of students' practical language application, self-directed learning, and collaborative communication skills, making it difficult for students to truly master language skills and cope with real-life language challenges. In response to this dilemma, educational researchers have actively explored more dynamic and effective teaching methods to meet the diverse learning needs of students and enhance the overall quality of language education.

Concurrently, the field of second language acquisition has flourished, providing a solid theoretical foundation

for new teaching methods. Researchers have come to understand that language learning is not merely about memorizing knowledge and mechanical practice but involves constructing language abilities through interaction and practice in real contexts. This shift emphasizes the active participation of learners and the integration of language learning with real-life situations.

With English solidifying its status as an international lingua franca, the focus has shifted to helping learners acquire English more effectively. Reading, as a crucial component of English learning, is key to enhancing language proficiency and broadening knowledge horizons. Therefore, improving English reading teaching methods has become a hot topic. International educators have continually integrated new educational concepts and psychological research findings into English reading teaching practices, with the concept of “activities” gaining widespread attention. This shift aims to design diverse classroom activities to stimulate students’ learning interest, increase participation, and ultimately enhance learning outcomes.

The development of English reading activity-based teaching has not been straightforward but has evolved through behaviorism, cognitivism, and social constructivism. Different theoretical foundations have guided various activity design concepts and practices, significantly impacting English reading education.

Early activity-based teaching research was influenced by behavioral learning theory, which emphasizes stimulus-response associations and views learning as a process of forming habits through reinforcement and repetition. In English reading education, activity designs based on behaviorism focused on mechanical practice, such as vocabulary memorization and sentence pattern imitation. Through extensive repetition, students were helped to master basic language knowledge like vocabulary and grammar. For example, repeatedly writing words to memorize spelling or practicing sentence patterns to familiarize oneself with grammatical structures.

While behaviorism has some value in accumulating basic knowledge, its limitations are evident. It overemphasizes external stimuli and mechanical training, neglecting students’ cognitive processes and intrinsic motivation. Students passively receive knowledge, lacking active thinking and exploration, making it difficult for them to truly understand the essence of language and apply learned knowledge flexibly in real situations. This teaching method can lead to decreased learning interest and even boredom.

As psychology advanced, cognitive learning theory emerged, significantly impacting teaching research. Cognitive learning theory emphasizes the internal psychological processes of learners, viewing learning as an active process of constructing cognitive structures in the mind. Learners do not passively receive information but actively select, organize, process, and store information to form their own knowledge systems.

In English reading education, activity designs based on cognitive theory focus more on cultivating students’ reading strategies and thinking abilities, such as prediction, inference, and analysis. For example, designing pre-reading prediction activities where students predict the content of an article based on the title and images, stimulating curiosity and the desire to learn, prompting them to actively construct reading expectations. During reading, guiding students to engage in inferential activities, guessing the meanings of unknown words and understanding the implicit meanings of the text based on context, cultivating logical thinking abilities. Post-reading, guiding students to analyze and evaluate the article’s themes, structure, and viewpoints, enhancing critical thinking abilities.

This activity design emphasizes activating students’ cognitive participation, guiding them to think actively, cultivating reading skills and strategies, and ultimately improving reading comprehension. It stresses that learners actively construct meaning during reading rather than passively receiving information.

Social constructivism theory posits that knowledge does not exist independently in individuals’ minds but is constructed through social interaction and cooperation. Learning is a social process where learners, through interaction and communication with others, jointly construct their understanding of knowledge.

This theory provides a new perspective for activity design in English reading education, emphasizing the social

and situational nature of learning. In classroom activities, it's necessary to encourage students to collaborate in small groups, discuss, and share viewpoints, mutually learning and jointly constructing their understanding of the reading text. For example, organizing group reading discussions where students discuss the article's themes, with each student having the opportunity to express their views and listen to others, broadening their thinking and deepening their understanding of the article. Role-playing activities can also be designed, where students assume different roles to interpret the article's content from various angles, promoting a deeper understanding of the text.

Social constructivism emphasizes learning in real situations, closely linking language learning with real life. By creating real language situations, students can apply learned knowledge in interactive communication, enhancing language application abilities.

In 1983, Hammer pointed out that activities describe what happens in the classroom and focus more on students' behaviors. This view reflects the emphasis on students' subjectivity in classroom activities, aligning with the ideas of cognitive learning theory and social constructivism that stress students' active participation in the learning process.

In 1986, Wilson focused more on the appropriate behavioral patterns students acquire with teacher's assistance, reflecting the mutual interaction between teaching activities and student learning. This is a concrete manifestation of social constructivism theory in teaching practice. Teachers are no longer mere knowledge transmitters but facilitators and guides, providing necessary support and assistance to students, guiding them in self-directed learning.

In 1989, Nunan believed that learners should actively participate in classroom activities and interact with new knowledge in the target language, paying attention to meaning rather than just form. This aligns with the cognitive learning theory's emphasis on understanding and constructing knowledge meaning. Learners should actively explore the meaning of language in interaction, integrating language learning with practical application.

In 1991, Brown proposed that classroom activities are based on understanding tasks, covering the generation and interaction of the target language, including listening, speaking, competitions, and games. This further enriches the content of classroom activities, incorporating various activity forms based on different learning theories into English reading teaching practice. This reflects the diversity and comprehensiveness of activity-based teaching, emphasizing the selection of appropriate activity forms based on different teaching goals and learning content to enhance teaching effectiveness.

3 Domestic research

In the domestic education sector, TBLT (Task-based Language Teaching) is a relatively new concept. Since its introduction in 2018, it has attracted the attention of many educators. However, research on its application in teaching design is still in its exploratory and improvement stages.

In 2014, Li Chi pointed out that the learning activity theory proposed by Soviet psychologists Leonidev, Gari Pelin, and Tarekina has profound implications. This theory views students as the core of learning activities, emphasizing that students are not passive knowledge receivers but active participants in the learning process. During various learning activities, each student's unique personality, such as character traits, interests, and thinking styles, gradually emerges. Moreover, students' learning participation is not instantaneous but involves stages, including initial contact with knowledge, understanding, application, deep mastery, and reflection. Only by experiencing these stages can learning goals be truly achieved. This theory provides a solid theoretical foundation for domestic educators to understand the learning process, prompting them to re-examine teaching activity design and implementation from the students' perspective.

In 2005, Yang Kaicheng conducted a more in-depth exploration based on activity theory. Through extensive teaching practice and theoretical research, Yang systematized the teaching design concept based on learning activities and authored the book "Teaching Design Theory with Learning Activities as the Core". In this book,

Yang detailed how to design teaching around learning activities, from setting activity goals, selecting activity content, and arranging activity processes, to evaluating activity effects, and providing specific guiding principles and methods. This book offers a valuable reference framework for activity design in teaching, providing detailed operational guidelines for educators to implement activity-based teaching.

By 2012, Lu Qiang re-examined curriculum learning activity design from the unique perspective of activity theory. Lu emphasized that in the current education sector, several issues in learning activities must be addressed. Notably, the absence of activity subjects is a prominent problem; in some teaching activities, students' subjectivity is not fully realized, remaining in a passive state of knowledge reception. The uniformity of activity media (tools) is also a concern; often, teaching activities rely on a single teaching tool or medium, failing to meet diverse teaching needs and limiting students' learning experience and effectiveness. The closed nature of activity processes is another common issue; teaching activities are often confined to fixed procedures and models, lacking flexibility and openness, making it difficult to stimulate students' innovative thinking and active participation.

In the field of junior high school English reading education, with the continuous advancement of educational reforms and the increasing emphasis on cultivating students' core competencies, some domestic experts and scholars have keenly recognized the limitations of traditional teaching methods, proposing the guiding ideology of "TBLT". This ideology aims to stimulate students' English reading interest and enhance their reading abilities and comprehensive competencies through diverse activity forms, such as role-playing, group discussions, and reading competitions. However, in actual reading teaching practices, English learning activity methods still face the challenge of lacking effective methods and strategies. For example, when selecting reading materials, it is difficult to cater to the interests and English proficiency levels of different students. When designing activity segments, it is challenging to balance the difficulty and pace of activities, leading to activities that are either too simple to meet students' challenge needs or too complex for students to start.

Additionally, how to design reading learning activities that are both diverse, meeting the learning styles and interests of different students, and relevant, closely aligned with reading texts and teaching goals, while also being logical, with clear and reasonable activity flows, remains a key issue to be addressed. Therefore, the comprehensive promotion and effective implementation of TBLT still require further exploration and research by educational researchers and frontline teachers, continuously summarizing experiences in practice, and improving teaching methods and strategies.

4 Application exploration

In the realm of English language teaching, English reading learning activities demand rigor in terms of diversity, relevance, and logic. In light of this, numerous domestic experts and scholars have conducted in-depth research and exploration, proposing "Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)" to provide scientific and effective guidance for English teaching. Since its introduction to China's educational sphere in 2018, TBLT has garnered attention from educators to some extent; however, research on its practical application in instructional design remains relatively limited. Both domestically and internationally, relevant research findings are scarce, and the exploration of its practical significance for English language learning activities is notably insufficient, with mature and comprehensive theoretical and practical system yet to be formed.

However, TBLT is not losing its advantages. Its theoretical foundation stems from activity theory, emphasizing the central role of students in the learning process. This characteristic makes it possess considerable potential application value for solving various problems existing in current junior high school English reading teaching. Through the careful design of diverse activities, it is expected to successfully stimulate students' interest in reading and change their inherent perception of English reading as monotonous and boring.

For example, organizing role-playing activities allows students to transform into characters from the reading text, deeply understanding character personalities and story development through vivid scenario performances.

Conducting group discussion activities encourages students to express their opinions freely, sparks intellectual insights through the collision of ideas, and cultivates critical thinking and collaboration skills in communication and interaction. Holding reading competition activities creates a tense and challenging learning atmosphere, stimulating students' competitive awareness, and prompting them to actively improve their reading speed and comprehension ability, thereby effectively cultivating reading skills and comprehensively promoting the development of students' core English literacy.

When teachers specifically apply TBLT in junior high school English reading teaching, they must, in accordance with activity theory, fully consider students' learning characteristics and actual needs. Students of different age groups have significant differences in cognitive levels, interests, and learning styles, and teachers should implement differentiated instruction. In designing activity formats, in addition to the aforementioned role-playing, group discussions, and reading competitions, one can also design story continuation activities, allowing students to use their imagination based on understanding the original text and exercise their language creation ability; organize reading sharing sessions to allow students to share their reading insights and broaden their reading horizons.

At the same time, special attention should be paid to the relevance and logic of activities. Activities must be closely centered around reading teaching objectives and text content. Every activity link should be closely linked to the teaching objectives, avoiding situations where activity content is disconnected from the teaching objectives and eliminating the blindness and randomness of activities. In addition, teachers should fully play the role of facilitator, actively guiding students to participate in activities, encouraging students to bravely express their views and ideas during the activities, and providing timely affirmation and encouragement for students' unique insights, thereby cultivating students' cooperation skills and innovative thinking, allowing TBLT to truly exert its maximum effectiveness in junior high school English reading teaching.

5 Concluding remarks

Through a review of relevant research both domestically and internationally, as well as an in-depth analysis of the theory and practice of TBLT in junior high school English reading teaching, we have confirmed its inherent great potential. It aligns with modern educational concepts, respects the central role of students, and changes the traditional teacher-dominated situation. At the same time, its diversified teaching activities help to comprehensively cultivate students' core English literacy, such as language expression, collaborative communication, thinking quality, and learning ability.

However, TBLT still faces many challenges in practical application. In terms of theoretical research, although there are activity theory and learning activity theory as foundations, specific theoretical research on junior high school English reading teaching is still insufficient, and there is an urgent need to deeply explore its unique operational laws and efficient application models. In terms of practical operation, teachers' understanding and mastery of this teaching method vary, and there is a lack of systematic and effective implementation strategies and rich teaching resource support, which makes it difficult to fully exploit its advantages.

TBLT brings new opportunities and challenges to junior high school English reading teaching. Through continuous research and practical exploration, we are expected to overcome existing problems, comprehensively improve the quality of junior high school English reading teaching, and lay a solid foundation for students' English learning and future development. This requires the joint efforts of educational researchers, front-line teachers, and related resource developers to realize its true value.

References:

[1] Bloom, B. S. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals*[M]. Boston: Addison-Wesley Longman Ltd. , 1956.

- [2] Bloom, B. S. *Mastery Learning*[M]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- [3] Bright, J. A., McGregor, G. P. *Teaching English as a Second Language*[M]. London: Longman, 1970.
- [4] Hammer, J. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*[M]. New York: Longman, 1983.
- [5] Krashen, S. D. *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*[J]. *Language*, 1988, 64(1): 171-173.
- [6] Nunan, D. *Designing Tasks for Communicative Classroom*[M]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- [7] Strang, R. *The Nature of the Reading Process*[A]. Chapman, J., Czerniewska, P. (ed). *Reading from Process to Practice*[C]. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. Ltd., 1978.
- [8] Daniels, H. *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*[M]. Portsmouth: Stenhouse, 2002.
- [9] Li Chi. *Foreign Language Reading Teaching and Strategy Research*[M]. Guangzhou: Guangdong World Book Publishing Company, 2014.
- [10] Li Fangyuan. *Foreign Reading Theories and English Reading Teaching in China*[J]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 1993(3): 61-64.
- [11] Lu Qiang. *A Review of Curriculum Learning Activity Design: A Perspective of Activity Theory*[J]. *Curriculum & Teaching*, 2012(7): 95-101.
- [12] Lu Qian. *An Action Research on Junior High School English Reading Teaching Based on the Perspective of English Learning Activity*[D]. Shenyang: Shenyang Normal University, 2021.
- [13] Qian Zhaoming. *Foreign English Reading Teaching*[J]. *Foreign Education Trends*, 1981(2): 10-15.
- [14] Wang Li. *Research on Senior High School English Reading Teaching Strategies Based on the Perspective of Core Literacy of English Subject*[J]. *Journal of Heilongjiang Institute of Education*, 2019(7): 76-78.
- [15] Wang Qiang. *Action Research for Foreign Language Teachers*[M]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2003.
- [16] Wang Qiang. *From Comprehensive Language Application Ability to Core Literacy of English Subject: New Challenges in Senior High School English Curriculum Reform*[J]. *English Teachers*, 2015, 15(16): 6-7.
- [17] Wang Qiang. *English Reading Teaching under the Background of Core Literacy: Problems, Principles, Objectives and Approaches*[J]. *English Learning (Teacher Edition)*, 2017(2): 19-23.
- [18] Yang Kaicheng. *Teaching Design Theory Centered on Learning Activities*[M]. Beijing: Electronic Industry Press, 2005.
- [19] Yao Ximing, Mei Xiaoyu. *The Development of Reading Theory Research in China*[J]. *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching*, 2003(6): 15-18.
- [20] Zhang Xianchen. *Strengthening English Discourse Teaching to Improve English Reading Efficiency*[J]. *Curriculum, Textbook, Teaching Method*, 2009, 29(6): 51-57.
- [21] Zhang Xiang. *A Study on Schematic Interactive Visualization in English Reading Teaching*[J]. *China Educational Technology*, 2014(3): 123-128.
- [22] Zhang Zhengdong. *Research Methods in Foreign Language Teaching Methods*[A]. *Review and Prospect: A Collection of Papers Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Foreign Language Teaching Professional Committee of the Chinese Society of Education*[C]. Beijing: People's Education Press, 2001: 40-55.
- [23] Wang Qiang. *Interpretation and Teaching Guidance of the General High School English Curriculum Standards in 2019*[M]. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 2019.