Countermeasures of Teaching English Reading in High Schools in Response to the English Reform of the College Entrance Examination

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Abstract: By analyzing the countermeasures taken in high school reading lessons to realize *Gaokao* English reform, this paper describes the design of two reading teaching activities aimed at improving students' reading, critical thinking, and communication skills. Activity 1 activates students' foreknowledge through prediction and verification, develops their prediction ability, and improves the purposefulness and interactivity of reading. Activity 2 deepens students' understanding of the text through detailed comprehension and discussion and hones their critical thinking and cooperative communication skills. Both activities focus on students' subjectivity and participation and emphasize the teacher's guiding and facilitating role in the process.

Keywords: Reading teaching; Activity design; Prediction and verification

1. Introduction

Reading is an important part of language education, aiming to cultivate students' comprehension, language proficiency, and cultural literacy. However, traditional reading teaching methods often focus on the instillation of knowledge but neglect students' subjectivity and participation, resulting in students' low interest in reading and limited improvement of reading skills. Therefore, this paper proposes two innovative reading teaching activities designed to stimulate students; interest in learning through prediction and verification, detailed comprehension and discussion, enhance reading skills and critical thinking, and cultivate communication skills.

2. Teaching reading in the context of the reforming of *Gaokao* English examination
2.1. Comparing the characteristics of general English lessons in high school and those of *Gaokao*

There are significant differences in teaching objectives, contents, and methods between general English reading and *Gaokao* English reading. General English reading focuses on cultivating students' language literacy and

cultural awareness, in which teachers will guide students to read texts of various topics and genres, emphasizing the understanding of the text. General English reading also encourages students to broaden their horizons, learn about different cultures, and develop intercultural communication skills through reading. Meanwhile, high school reading teaching for *Gaokao* is more focused and test-oriented. The teaching objective is to help students familiarize themselves with the types of questions and texts for the college entrance examination and to master problem-solving skills and strategies. The teaching content often centers on the real questions and exercises of *Gaokao*, focusing on reading speed, information extraction, and logical reasoning. In *Gaokao* preparation classes teachers will more often use a combination of explanation and training to improve students' performance.

2.2. Challenges of high school reading teaching in the context of *Gaokao* reform

The reform of the college entrance examination has put forward new requirements and challenges for high school reading teaching [1]. One prominent issue is the selection and updating of reading materials. Often, teachers and students gravitate towards materials resembling gaokao questions, resulting in homogenization and outdated content. The lack of diverse reading materials fails to engage students' interest and meet their varied reading needs. Furthermore, the singularity of teaching methods is also a pressing issue. Some teachers emphasize too much on test-taking skills instead of cultivating reading and critical thinking skills. This approach leads to an indoctrination method of teaching, in which the students' subjectivity is diminished. This single teaching method not only fails to improve students' reading skills but also inhibits the development of their innovative and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the *Gaokao* reform calls for updated evaluation methods. Traditional assessment based solely on exam results no longer suffices. Establishing a scientific, comprehensive, and diversified evaluation system is essential to accurately gauge students' reading proficiency and overall literacy.

2.3. Measures to optimize high school reading teaching

Aiming at the problems faced by high school reading teaching under the Gaokao reform, a variety of countermeasures can enhance teaching quality. Teachers should proactively refresh reading materials, selecting articles that reflect contemporary themes, ideologies, knowledge, and student interests. This approach ensures the diversity and novelty of the materials, thereby stimulating students' enthusiasm for reading. Reading materials should be chosen systematically to ensure that each student benefits from the reading experience. Teachers should innovate teaching methodologies, move away from traditional lecture-based approaches, and embrace diverse methods such as inspiration, discussion, and collaboration. Encouraging students to actively engage in reading activities through rich and varied teaching practices, including role-playing, small group discussions, debates, and more, fosters improvement in both reading comprehension and language proficiency [2]. Creating an effective evaluation system is essential for enhancing reading teaching. In addition to conventional test scores, factors like students' reading attitudes, habits, and strategies should be integrated into the evaluation process. This comprehensive approach ensures a balanced and objective assessment of students' reading proficiency and overall literacy skills. Emphasizing both formative and summative evaluation methods allows us to track students' performance and progress throughout their reading journey. Providing timely feedback and guidance enables students to continuously enhance their reading abilities.

3. Background of *Gaokao* English reform

Gaokao English reform has put forward new requirements and challenges for high school reading teaching. The background of this reform is multifaceted, including social development, educational reform, and the development of the English subject itself. This study focuses on 100 Chinese sophomore students who

possess a foundational understanding of English and reading skills but require further development in reading skills. These students are facing the challenge of the English language reform of Gaokao, which necessitates enhancements in their reading and comprehensive language abilities. Given the increasing globalization of society and economy, coupled with rapid advancements in information technology, English has emerged as a crucial tool for international communication. Consequently, cultivating a solid English foundation and proficient reading skills has become a pivotal objective in high school English education. The ongoing progression of education reform significantly influences high school reading instruction. The adoption of new curriculum standards and the refinement of Gaokao criteria underscore the importance of students' roles and the nurturing of their capabilities. This necessitates educators to prioritize students' individual differences and interests during instruction, fostering their innovative and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the evolution of the English subject itself introduces novel demands for high school reading instruction. Through extensive exploration of linguistics, pedagogy, and related disciplines, our understanding of reading instruction deepens, leading to the emergence of innovative teaching concepts and methodologies. These advancements offer a wider array of options for high school reading instruction, enriching its effectiveness and adaptability in modern educational contexts [3]. In the context of reading instruction, it's crucial to prioritize the student's central role and foster their abilities. This involves recognizing individual differences and interests among students and employing a variety of teaching methods and resources to enhance their reading skills and overall language proficiency.

4. Designing teaching activities

4.1. Teaching materials

Article title: The Power of Perseverance

Thomas Edison once said, "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration." This statement rings true for anyone who has ever achieved success through hard work and perseverance. The story of Edison's invention of the light bulb is a prime example of the power of perseverance.

Facing numerous failures, Edison never gave up. Instead, he viewed each failure as a step closer to success. His assistants grew discouraged, but Edison remained optimistic. Finally, after hundreds of attempts, he succeeded in creating the first practical light bulb.

This story teaches us an important lesson about perseverance. Success is often achieved not through a single brilliant idea, but through repeated efforts and continuous improvement. Perseverance means continuing to work hard even when faced with difficulties and setbacks.

In the realm of academics, perseverance is equally important. Students who persevere in their studies are more likely to achieve success than those who give up easily. The road to academic excellence is often long and challenging, but with perseverance, it is achievable.

The same principle applies to other areas of life as well. Whether it's a career, a hobby, or a personal goal, perseverance is the key to success. It requires discipline, focus, and an unwavering belief in oneself.

In conclusion, the power of perseverance cannot be overstated. It is the driving force behind every successful individual and accomplishment. As Edison aptly said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." So, let us embrace perseverance and never give up on our dreams.

4.2. Reading activities

4.2.1. Pre-reading activities

(1) Activity 1: Predicting content

This activity aimed to stimulate students' interest in the article they are about to read and to predict its

content. The title of the article "The Power of Perseverance" and some related images, such as a picture of Thomas Edison inventing the light bulb or an image of perseverance and fortitude are displayed. Students are prompted to write down their predictions and then share them with their peers at their tables. Afterward, a few students are selected to share their predictions and explain the reasoning behind them.

(2) Activity 2: Vocabulary warm-up

The objective of this activity is to help students familiarize themselves with vocabulary that may be relevant to the article. A list of vocabulary related to perseverance, success, failure, and invention (e.g., perseverance, success, failure, invention, inspire, discourage, etc.) is given. They work in pairs or small groups to define these words and provide examples or scenarios illustrating each term. Afterward, the class shares their definitions and examples, with the teacher offering correct explanations and usage for each term.

4.2.2. While-reading activities

(1) Activity 1: Skimming for main ideas

The goal of this activity is to develop students' ability to read rapidly and grasp the main points of a text efficiently. Students are instructed to skim through the article swiftly and identify the topic sentence of each paragraph. Upon completion, they collaborate with their peers at their tables to discuss and determine the topic of each paragraph. The class then reviews and verifies their answers collectively, with the teacher offering guidance and clarification where necessary.

(2) Activity 2: Detailed Reading with Questioning

The purpose of this activity is to deepen students' understanding of the details of the text and develop their critical thinking. Students engage in careful reading of the article as they prepare to respond to previously provided reading questions, including factual, inference, and vocabulary inquiries. Once students have completed the task independently, they collaborate with their group members to discuss their answers. Selected groups then present their answers and reasoning to the class. The teacher offers feedback, clarifies any misconceptions, and explains the correct answers along with the rationale behind them.

These well-designed reading activities aim to stimulate students' interest in reading and motivate them to participate more actively in the reading process. By predicting the text's content, introducing relevant vocabulary, skimming for the main idea, and delving into detailed reading, students not only become acquainted with the text's material but also hone their ability to extract essential information. This sequence of activities is instrumental in enhancing students' reading comprehension and nurturing their critical thinking skills. Consequently, it establishes a good foundation for their academic and professional growth, enabling them to refine their language proficiency and cognitive abilities through enjoyable reading experiences.

5. Summary

This paper discusses the characteristics, problems, and countermeasures of reading teaching under *Gaokao* reform. The goal is to provide guidance for high school reading teachers to improve their teaching methods, resources, and activities. By doing so, students can better prepare for the challenges of the college entrance exams and enhance their reading skills.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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