

Research on the Strategies of Teaching English Reading in Middle Schools

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Abstract: Middle school English reading has always had an important position in teaching English. It takes up a high proportion of the score whether in domestic high school and college entrance examinations or IELTS, TOEFL and other foreign examinations. However, with the continuous deepening and full implementation of China's education reform, some of its problems gradually appear. This paper analyzes current situation and problems of teaching English reading in middle schools from the perspectives of teaching objectives, contents, difficulties and common teaching models, and puts forward relevant teaching strategies.

1. Introduction

Teaching reading plays a very important role in middle school English courses. It is an important way for students to increase their knowledge in English and improve their English reading skills. It is also one of the main tasks of learning English. At the same time, it's necessary to cultivate students' reading ability, so as to lay a foundation for the flexible use of English in the future.

In recent years, with the advancement of the new curriculum reform, more and more problems in the teaching of reading have emerged. There are four main problems. From the perspective of teachers, first, teachers attach importance to the explanation of linguistic knowledge and neglect the cultivation of ability. Second, teachers' teaching methods and contents are too simple [1,2]. From the perspective of students, first, students are often unable to play their subjectivity and are passive in learning. Second, it is difficult for students to reach the *Standard of English Curriculum in Compulsory Education* in terms of the amount and time of reading after class. The findings of these problems are of great help to our study of teaching English reading in middle schools. Teachers should aim at these problems, keep pace with the times, and explore more effective teaching strategies, striving to lay a good foundation for students' English learning in the future. This paper focuses on teaching English reading in middle schools, and is divided into five chapters. The first chapter mainly sorts out the research on teaching reading at home and abroad in recent ten years, affirming their achievements and putting forward the shortcomings. The second chapter briefly describes the teaching content, difficulties and objectives of middle school English reading. The third chapter is an overview of the four common teaching models. The fourth and fifth chapters are the current situation and problems of teaching, and the teaching strategies against these problems.

2. Relevant studies of teaching English reading in middle schools

Studies of reading began in Europe in the 1970s. In the past century, scholars at home and abroad have paid great attention to the research of the theories of teaching reading. Since the 1960s, the vigorous development of cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics pushed reading research to a new level, including the research on the teaching models, existing problems, and teaching strategies.

2.1. Teaching models

In the early 1980s, scholars put forward a series of teaching models of reading, which became an important aspect of the reading research, four of which have great influence, namely, the top-down model proposed by Goodman, the bottom-up model of Gough, the interactive-compensatory model proposed by Palincsar and the schema theory. Each model has its unique value in application. For example, although the top-down model has been criticized repeatedly, scholars have found that vocabulary learning is important for second language and foreign language readers. Scholar Adams proposed that accurate and rapid recognition of words was the most important predictor of reading ability. From the existing literature, scholars at home and abroad have paid great attention to the study of the teaching models of reading.

2.2. Problems in teaching reading

In the process of studying middle school English reading teaching, people gradually find problems in teaching reading, such as paying too much attention to the teaching of linguistic knowledge, and ignoring the cultivation of language ability and interest in reading. Jia Xiaona pointed out that teachers pay attention to exams and do not make students play the main role of in the classroom, often ignoring the cultivation of students' independent ability and their emotional needs. Ding Xizhen divided the problems existing in middle school English reading teaching into the teacher level and the student level, including simple teaching form and students' insufficient reading skills. The existence of these problems will greatly affect the effectiveness of teaching, seriously hindered the development of students' ability.

2.3. Teaching strategies

According to the requirements of the new English curriculum standard for middle schools, teachers need to focus on cultivating students' reading ability. Presently, teachers should gradually realize the important role and positive significance of English reading ability, take appropriate methods and measures to improve the quality of teaching English reading and ensure its effectiveness. The author found more than 100 related articles under the topic of "exploration of the strategies of teaching English reading in middle schools" in CNKI. Among them, the representative research results are *English Reading Teaching in Junior Middle Schools – A Case Study of Teaching English Reading to Grade 9 Students in Suzhou Jingfan Middle School* [3], *Research on the Effectiveness of English Reading Teaching in Middle Schools* [4], *The Application of Stratified Teaching in English Reading Teaching in Middle Schools* [5], etc. These strategies start from teaching methods and contents, which not only require the classroom to be lively and interesting, but also maintain the dominant position of students in learning.

To sum up, research on teaching middle school English reading has achieved remarkable results in the research status and strategies, but the author thinks that there are still shortcomings in the design of teaching activities. Teachers design reading activities according to the average level of all students, instead of considering the actual situation and different levels of students. Also, the

teaching method is simple and lack of vividness, thus cannot effectively improve students' interest in English reading.

3. Introduction of teaching middle school English reading

Teaching English reading in middle schools is divided into classroom teaching and extracurricular teaching. In-class reading is the teaching focus, which can be further divided into the teaching of linguistic knowledge and the cultivation and training of reading skills. The teaching of linguistic knowledge includes teaching vocabulary, grammar, and other basic knowledge. Solid linguistic knowledge is the foundation of developing students' reading ability. Reading skills include skimming, scanning, prediction, inference and so on. Appropriately teaching reading skills can improve students' reading efficiency.

The focus of teaching middle school English reading is not only to teach vocabulary, grammar and other basic knowledge according to the content of textbooks and reading materials, but also to cultivate reading skills and ability, develop students' interest in English reading, and give play to their initiative.

The *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education* (2011 Edition) puts forward the requirements from level 3 to level 5 for middle school students' reading skills. Level 3 puts forward five requirements for students' ability of reading skills, including reading the text correctly, understanding and implementing the written instructions related to learning activities, etc. Level 4 requires students to further study English reading on the basis of level 3. The specific requirements include reading the text smoothly and fluently, understanding the sequence of events in the text and the behavior of the characters, etc. The fifth level is the last target of compulsory education, which includes seven requirements, such as being able to infer the meaning of new words according to context and word formation (Appendix 1).

4. Common teaching models

In *Model of Teaching* published in 1972 by American scholars Joyce and Weil, the teaching model is defined as a model or plan that constitutes curriculum and schoolwork, selects teaching materials, and prompts teachers' activities, which is characterized by orderliness and operability. The four common teaching models for middle school English reading are top-down, bottom-up, interactive-compensatory model and the schema theory.

4.1. The top-down model

The top-down model was proposed by American psycholinguist Goodman in 1967. It refers to the process that the teacher guides the students to predict the context of the article by introducing the background knowledge of the article, and then forms a new prediction by reading, testing, and revising their own prediction. Different from the bottom-up model, students can only understand the article partially through words or phrases. This model focuses on the use of students' basic knowledge, language ability, and understanding of the theme to understand the main idea of the article. The students under the top-down teaching model can effectively activate the background knowledge, cultivate different reading strategies, and enhance the ability to summarize.

4.2. The bottom-up model

The bottom-up model is a systematic summary of the opinions of reading before the 1960s. Different from the reading after prediction in the top-down model, this model emphasizes the information of the article itself and considers that reading is a process of information processing.

Students need to decode letters, words, and sentences step by step, so as to understand the full text. This model focuses on teaching vocabulary, but it is limited to the decoding of analytical reading and cannot reach a higher level of understanding. At the same time, it also ignores the influence of students' own knowledge on the reading content.

4.3. The interactive-compensatory model

The interactive-compensatory reading teaching model was first proposed by Palincsar in 1982. This model is a combination of the above two models, which is ideal and scientific. It not only emphasizes the importance of background knowledge and context prediction, but also focuses on capturing the key information and understanding the article. In this model, students no longer play the role of passive decoding, but play their own initiative in the process of reading, constantly “communicate” with the article, so as to gradually have the simple understanding, deep understanding and evaluative understanding of the article [6].

4.4. The schema theory

Schema first appeared in Kant's works. In the 1980s, psycholinguists applied it to the field of teaching foreign languages, emphasizing that students should connect the new knowledge with the existing schema in their brain while learning. In the process of teaching middle school English reading, teachers can guide students to establish rich schemata by explaining the text and integrating background knowledge. Through the accumulation of cultural background, students can store more schemata in their minds, so as to understand the materials more deeply [7,8].

5. Current situation and problems

5.1. Current situation of teaching

In the senior high school entrance examination, the score of reading comprehension is 40, accounting for about 30% of the total score. Therefore, most teachers attach great importance to the courses of explaining basic reading knowledge and teaching reading skills. However, their teaching method is still firmly based on the teacher's explanation, and there are not many opportunities for students to think independently. The reading materials are limited, and most of them are textbooks and papers. The explanation of reading comprehension tests has become the main teaching content and one of the important means to cultivate students' reading ability. At present, English reading in middle schools in China generally adopts the three steps of teaching, practicing, and examining, but almost pays no attention to the training of language use, and students' learning enthusiasm and subjectivity could not be brought into full play [9,10].

5.2. Existing problems

Reading teaching not only emphasizes the teaching of linguistic knowledge, but also focuses on the cultivation and training of students' reading skills. Therefore, teachers should not only teach students vocabulary, grammar, and other linguistic knowledge, but also pay attention to the cultivation of their comprehensive ability. However, there are still many problems in teaching English reading in middle schools.

5.2.1. Ignoring the cultivation of students' interest in reading

Traditional English reading teaching often focuses on inculcating knowledge to students, but neglects whether students are interested in reading. This problem is embodied in the simple

teaching content and teaching model of teachers. The simple content of teaching is mainly reflected in most teachers' focus on the teaching of knowledge, thus ignoring the diversity and fun of reading materials. For a long time, students will lose interest in boring courses. The simple teaching model is reflected in the fact that teachers are still explaining articles word by word, and students only act as passive receivers, instead of using their mind to understand the articles and answer the questions [2].

5.2.2. Ignoring the cultivation of reading skills and communication ability

Nowadays, there are still some teachers whose teaching ideology and teaching methods are old and backward. They pay more attention to knowledge than practice. In the process of teaching, the cultivation of students' ability to take the exam is put in the first place. Through repeatedly explanation and repeatedly practice, the purpose of improving reading scores can be achieved. This makes students only answer questions mechanically and use what they have learnt to deal with the exams. They don't really master reading skills. They are helpless when the ability of communication is needed [1,2].

5.2.3. Poor implementation of students' initiative

In the teaching of reading, some teachers take themselves as the center and occupy most of the time of the course, and students can only read with the teacher's ideas as passive receivers without thinking on themselves. This kind of teaching method, in which teachers do the talking and students only listen, will lead to the students' gradual loss of independent thinking ability, and reduce the enthusiasm of self-learning. Moreover, because most of the reading materials in class are provided and designated by teachers, it is difficult for students to choose reading materials for themselves after class [11].

5.2.4. Students' lack of extracurricular reading

The *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education* specifies that by the end of Grade 9, students' extracurricular reading should be more than 150,000 words. However, in fact, current middle school English reading is still limited in the textbooks and most of the students' reading only comes from the reading materials and textbooks in class. In the long run, not only students' vocabulary is unable to be improved, but also it is difficult for them to understand foreign cultural backgrounds, which is not conducive to the accumulation of knowledge. It is also difficult to understand the differences between Chinese and Western expressions and culture [12,13].

5.2.5. Isolated vocabulary

Vocabulary is the basis of teaching reading, and is also the foundation of reading. The vocabulary is based on the text, and the same word will have specific meanings in different texts. In traditional English reading teaching, teachers teach vocabulary through the process of explaining the words, asking students to memorize them, and using dictation to check the teaching results. Although this method can let students remember more words, this kind of vocabulary is often isolated and out of the real context, and it is difficult to use in practical communication [14].

6. Teaching strategies

Through the analysis of the standard, it can be seen that using reading strategies is one of the important means to achieve the goal of reading teaching. Therefore, in the process of teaching English reading, teachers should incorporate teaching strategies into daily courses, and correctly

and appropriately use reading strategies to achieve the expected target, which is the most critical step of reading teaching [15].

6.1. Develop students' interest in study

Teachers can select some reading materials to enhance students' interest in reading, and use slides, audio, visual aids and other media to give students sensory stimulation. Teachers can also add interesting introduction before classes and better guide students into the teaching scenario by telling stories and watching videos.

6.2. Cultivate students' reading skills and ability

In daily classes, teachers should pay attention to the cultivation of students' skimming and scanning ability, so that students can grasp the main idea of the article and find the answers to the questions. Teachers should also teach different reading strategies according to different styles, including browsing, identifying substitution relations, etc. These strategies should be integrated into daily teaching, so that students can not only achieve better results in the reading comprehension of the exam, but also maintain the habit of efficient reading after class, so as to improve their reading ability.

6.3. Implement students' initiative

Teachers should put aside the traditional teacher-centered teaching method and always keep in mind the dominant position of students. They can encourage students to share their ideas in class by allowing students to discuss and choose reading materials independently. Teachers can guide students to learn independently step by step [2].

6.4. Combine in-class reading with extracurricular reading

Teachers should not only pay attention to teaching reading in class, but also strengthen the teaching of extracurricular reading. First of all, teachers should strengthen the guidance of students' extracurricular reading, selecting suitable extracurricular reading materials according to their different levels, characteristics, hobbies and other aspects, and formulating reasonable extracurricular reading plans to ensure the quantity. Teachers can also guide students to write reading notes and take down words and expressions to improve students' interest in extracurricular reading. Secondly, teachers can increase extracurricular reading activities in their spare time, and mobilize students' enthusiasm in extracurricular reading through book appreciation, sharing reading notes, and the competition of the book review of English classics.

6.5. Set real contexts for teaching vocabulary

In vocabulary teaching, instead of directly telling students the meaning and usage of words, teachers can present words in a real and specific context, then let students guess and infer the meaning of words in combination with cultural background and context. This can not only increase students' understanding of the meaning of words, but also improve their ability to use words [16].

7. Conclusion

Through the above series of research on English reading teaching in middle schools, it can be seen that English reading is widely valued in middle school examinations, but teachers still mainly teach basic knowledge and reading skills, and students' dominant position in learning is not well played.

At present, there are still problems in teaching English reading. For example, students' interest in learning is not developed, and teachers ignore the cultivation of reading skills and the ability of communication. Therefore, in the future, teachers should pay attention to the role of students' subjectivity in teaching, and focus on the cultivation of students' interest in learning. They not only need to teach the basic knowledge of reading, but also emphasize the cultivation of students' reading skills, so that students' proficiency in English and the ability of English reading can be greatly improved, so as to effectively promote the comprehensive development of the teaching of English reading in Chinese middle schools.

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Appendix 1

Standards for English Reading Classes in Middle School

Level	Target Grade	Standards
Level 3	Grade 7	1. Able to read texts correctly; 2. Able to understand and implement written instructions related to learning activities

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Able to read simple articles and understand the main idea 4. Able to use simple reference works 5. Over 40,000 words of extracurricular reading
Level 4	Grade 8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Able to smoothly read texts 2. Able to understand the sequence of events and characters' behavior 3. Able to find out relevant information and understand the main idea of the article 4. Able to guess the meaning of new words according to the context 5. Able to understand and explain the information in charts 6. Able to understand simple practical writing 7. Able to use reference works such as the English-Chinese dictionary for comprehension 8. Over 100,000 words of extracurricular reading
Level 5	Grade 9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Able to infer the meaning of new words according to the context and the rule of word construction 2. Able to understand the logic between sentences in the paragraph 3. Able to find out the theme, understand the plots, and predict the plot development and ending of the article 4. Able to understand reading materials at corresponding level 5. Able to acquire information with different reading strategies 6. Able to use dictionaries and other reference works in reading 7. Over 150,000 words of extracurricular reading