

# A Research on Activity Design in English Reading Class in Qinglai Junior High School

**Zheyuan Zhang**

*University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 50603*

**Abstract:** *With the promotion of China's new curriculum reform and the development of English teaching, reading activity design in China is playing an increasingly important role in junior high school English teaching. However, in the past, people's understanding of reading activity design and junior high school English reading teaching was limited to the theoretical level. Therefore, this study attempts to a systematic, scientific, and rationalized junior high school English reading class teaching design by forming a complete design of junior high school English reading teaching activities based on the perspective of curriculum teaching objectives and analyzing academic situations, so as to provide application cases for researchers on this topic. The period of teaching practice research is one semester. The research aims to know the present situation of English reading teaching in Qinglai Junior High school, design some reading activities from three reading teaching steps to improve students' interest in English reading, and build efficient and interesting English reading class through questionnaire survey and case study.*

**Keywords:** *activity design, English reading teaching, junior high school*

## 1. Introduction

English reading teaching can improve students' comprehensive English ability, enrich their English knowledge, and improve their interest in English reading. The researcher did a questionnaire survey of some teachers and students in Qinglai Junior High School, drew conclusions, analyzed data, and found the following problems. However, the professional and teaching abilities of English teachers at Qinglai Junior High School are insufficient. It has led to the fact that that most students are not interested in English reading.

The organization of this thesis is divided into several parts: acknowledgement, abstract, introduction, theoretical basis, research design, data analysis, suggestion, and conclusion. Firstly, this study analyzes the current situation of English reading teaching in Qinglai school and describes the theoretical basis of the teaching research in both reading teaching and reading activities. Secondly, it introduces the research design, including the research objects, research questions, and research methods. Thirdly, it analyzes the research data from both reading teaching and teaching design, and gives some research suggestions. Finally, it draws conclusions and summarizes the limitations and experiences of the application.

## 2. Theoretical Basis

The method of English reading teaching in junior high schools is mainly task-based language teaching. Task-based language teaching emphasizes real-life tasks, which are the main activities in English teaching. Task-based language teaching is beneficial to intensify interest and motivation and reflect the reality of the task.

The three main reading teaching modes in junior high school are bottom-up, top-down, and interactive. Firstly, the bottom-up mode is to teach new words, new sentence patterns, and the text<sup>[1]</sup>. Reading comprehension is based on mastering all the new words, phrases, and sentence patterns and practicing reading loudly<sup>[2]</sup>. Secondly, the top-down model holds that background knowledge plays a greater role in reading comprehension than new vocabulary and sentence structures<sup>[3]</sup>. It emphasizes that teachers should teach students to master background knowledge to guess the meaning of the text<sup>[4]</sup>. Finally, the interactive model thinks that reading is the reader interacting with the text. Reading comprehension is based on the interaction between the visual information from the reading material

and the reader's original knowledge of the language, word, and text type<sup>[5]</sup>.

Ling Wang did research on efficient English reading teaching activities designed from the major reading teaching steps by using the case study method and the questionnaire survey method. She thought reading teaching research could be done through pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities to promote students' comprehensive development<sup>[6]</sup>. Therefore, researcher will do this research using reading teaching activities to improve students' interest in English reading.

In the pre-reading, the main activities for teaching English reading are: brainstorming, make predictions, discussion, providing background knowledge, and pre-teaching selected vocabulary. The principles of these pre-reading activities are to activate students' existing knowledge, give necessary background knowledge, clarify cultural shock information, make students aware of text type, and set a clear reading purpose. In the while-reading, the main activities for teaching English reading are: skimming, scanning, sequencing, make inferences, information transfer, and jigsaw reading. The principles of these while-reading activities are to help students become engaged in what they are reading, encourage students to respond to the content, and allow students time to read. In the post-reading, the main activities for teaching English reading are: retelling, gap-filling, true or false, matching, short answer questions, quiz your classmate, creative writing, role play, interview the author, mind mapping, and one-sentence summary. The principle of these post-reading activities is to make post-reading activities relevant to the text and students.

### **3. Research Design**

#### ***3.1 Research Objects***

The research objects are 15 randomly selected students in Grade 7 and six English teachers from Grade 7 in Qinglai School, Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China.

#### ***3.2 Research Questions***

1) Can reading teaching activities improve students' interest in English reading and build efficient and interesting English reading class in junior high school?

2) How to improve students' interest in English reading and build efficient and interesting English reading class by designing reading activities in junior high school?

#### ***3.3 Research Methods***

##### ***3.3.1 Literature Method***

The researcher searched for the theoretical basis of this study through multiple channels, including the current situation of English reading teaching in junior high school, how to improve students' interest in English reading, activity design's research cases and contents, and the long-term methods and measures to promote English reading teaching in junior high school. These literature have laid the theoretical foundation for this research.

##### ***3.3.2 Case Study Method***

Two teaching designs, on the basis of an English textbook, are selected from teaching practice in Qinglai junior high school, with the aim of illustrating how to apply appropriate activities in English reading.

##### ***3.3.3 Questionnaire Survey Method***

The researcher distributed, collected, and analyzed 3 questionnaires from students and teachers in Qinglai junior high school. Two questionnaires are aimed at finding the problems of English reading teaching for students and teachers. One questionnaire is to learn about the effectiveness of English reading teaching activities. The effectiveness of reading teaching activity design is illustrated by analyzing these 3 questionnaires.

## 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

### 4.1 Data Analysis on the Pre-questionnaire

#### 4.1.1 Findings of Students' Survey

Table 1. Interest of Reading

	Number of Students	Percentage
<i>Very interesting</i>	10	66.67%
<i>Interesting</i>	2	13.33%
<i>Not interesting</i>	3	20%

Based on Table 1, 66.67% of the students thought reading classes were very interesting, 13.33% thought that reading classes were interesting, and 20% were not interested in reading classes.

The researcher found that 60% of the students' biggest difficulties in reading English focused on grammar. 26.67% of the students' biggest difficulties focused on vocabulary. Only 13.3% of the students' biggest difficulties focused on cultural background knowledge.

#### 4.1.2 Findings of Teachers' Survey

Table 2. Activities Applied in English Reading Teaching

Teaching Stages	Activities	Teacher's Number	Percentage
<i>Pre-reading</i>	<i>Brainstorming</i>	6	100%
	<i>Making Predictions</i>	6	100%
	<i>Discussion</i>	6	100%
	<i>Providing Background Knowledge</i>	4	66.67%
	<i>Pre-teaching Selected Vocabulary</i>	5	83.33%
<i>While-reading</i>	<i>Skimming</i>	5	83.33%
	<i>Scanning</i>	6	100%
	<i>Sequencing</i>	2	33.33%
	<i>Jigsaw Reading</i>	2	33.33%
	<i>Information Transfer</i>	5	83.33%
<i>Post-reading</i>	<i>Retelling</i>	5	83.33%
	<i>Gap-filling</i>	4	66.67%
	<i>True or False</i>	4	66.67%
	<i>Matching</i>	3	50%
	<i>Short Answer Question</i>	5	83.33%
	<i>Creative writing</i>	2	33.33%
	<i>Role play</i>	2	33.33%
	<i>Mind mapping</i>	4	66.67%
<i>One-sentence summary</i>	1	16.67%	

It's obvious that the teachers surveyed like using the following reading activities in English reading teaching to improve students' interest in English reading and to build an efficient and interesting English reading class.

Based on the above data in the pre-reading activities of Table 2, it can be found that 100% of teachers like using brainstorming, making predictions, and discussion. The percentages of the six teachers who like providing background knowledge and pre-teaching selected vocabulary are 66.67% and 83.33%, respectively.

According to the above data in the while-reading activities of Table 2, it can be found that the percentage of the six teachers who like using both skimming and information transfer is 83.33%. The percentage of the six teachers who like using both jigsaw reading and sequencing is 33.33%. All teachers like scanning.

From the above data in the post-reading activities of Table 2, it can be found that the percentage of the six teachers who like using retelling and short answer question are both 83.33%. The percentage of teachers who like using Gap-filling, True or False and Mind Mapping are all 66.67%. Half of the teachers like using matching, and very few teachers like using one-sentence summary. 33.33% of the teachers like to use creative writing and role play.

3 major factors have an effect on activity design in English reading teaching. Among six teachers,

two thought that they had difficulty innovating their reading teaching activities. Three teachers thought that students were unable to have a deeper understanding of reading materials through reading teaching activities. 1 teacher thought that it was easy to design the form of activities, but lacking of the content of activities.

#### 4.2 Data Analysis on the Post-questionnaire

The researcher carried out a questionnaire survey on the effectiveness of the teaching design with 21 teachers and students after applying the designed activities used in teaching. The results are as follows:

Table 3. Effectiveness of Activity Design

<i>Activities to Improve Students' Comprehensive English Ability</i>			
<i>Teaching Stages</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Number of Students and Teachers</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Pre-reading</i>	<i>Discussion</i>	12	57.14%
	<i>Providing Background Knowledge</i>	16	76.19%
	<i>Pre-teaching Selected Vocabulary</i>	11	52.38%
<i>While-reading</i>	<i>Skimming</i>	9	42.86%
	<i>Scanning</i>	14	66.67%
	<i>Jigsaw Reading</i>	13	61.9%
	<i>Information Transfer</i>	11	52.38%
<i>Post-reading</i>	<i>Creative writing</i>	16	76.19%
	<i>Role play</i>	14	66.67%
	<i>One-sentence summary</i>	7	33.33%
<i>Activities to Take Different Approaches for Different Students</i>			
<i>Pre-reading</i>	<i>Discussion</i>	13	61.9%
	<i>Providing Background Knowledge</i>	16	76.19%
	<i>Pre-teaching Selected Vocabulary</i>	16	76.19%
<i>While-reading</i>	<i>Skimming</i>	10	47.62%
	<i>Scanning</i>	11	52.38%
	<i>Jigsaw Reading</i>	14	66.67%
	<i>Information Transfer</i>	10	47.62%
<i>Post-reading</i>	<i>Creative writing</i>	16	76.19%
	<i>Role play</i>	8	38.1%
	<i>One-sentence summary</i>	8	38.1%
<i>Activities to Expand Students' Vocabulary, Grammar and Background Knowledge</i>			
<i>Pre-reading</i>	<i>Discussion</i>	13	61.9%
	<i>Providing Background Knowledge</i>	14	66.67%
	<i>Pre-teaching Selected Vocabulary</i>	12	57.14%
<i>While-reading</i>	<i>Skimming</i>	10	47.62%
	<i>Scanning</i>	11	52.38%
	<i>Jigsaw Reading</i>	8	38.1%
	<i>Information Transfer</i>	9	42.86%
<i>Post-reading</i>	<i>Creative writing</i>	14	66.67%
	<i>Role play</i>	8	38.1%
	<i>One-sentence summary</i>	5	23.81%

Based on these activities to improve students' comprehensive English ability in Table 3, in the pre-reading activities of Table 3, 57.14%, 76.19%, and 52.38% of the students and teachers, respectively, thought activities of discussion, providing background knowledge, and pre-teaching selected vocabulary improved students' comprehensive English ability effectively. In the while-reading activities of Table 3, 42.86%, 66.67%, 61.9%, and 52.38% of the students and teachers, respectively, thought activities of skimming, scanning, jigsaw reading, and information transfer improved students' comprehensive English ability effectively. In the post-reading activities of Table 3, 76.19%, 66.67%, and 33.33% of the teachers and students, respectively, thought activities of creative writing, role play, and one-sentence summary improved students' comprehensive English ability effectively.

From these activities to take different approaches for different students in Table 3, in the pre-reading activities of Table 3, 61.9%, 76.19%, and 76.19% of the students and teachers, respectively, thought

activities of discussion, providing background knowledge, and pre-teaching selected vocabulary helped teachers take different approaches for different students effectively. In the while-reading activities of Table 3, 42.86%, 66.67%, 61.9%, and 52.38% of the students and teachers, respectively, thought activities of skimming, scanning, jigsaw reading, and information transfer helped teachers take different approaches for different students effectively. In the post-reading activities of Table 3, 76.19%, 66.67%, and 33.33% of the teachers and students, respectively, thought activities of creative writing, role play, and one-sentence summary helped teachers take different approaches for different students effectively.

According to these activities to expand students' vocabulary, grammar and background knowledge in Table 3, in the pre-reading activities of Table 3, 61.9%, 76.19%, and 76.19% of the students and teachers, respectively, thought activities of discussing, providing background knowledge, and pre-teaching selected vocabulary helped students to expand their vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge effectively. In the while-reading activities of Table 3, 42.86%, 66.67%, 61.9%, and 52.38% of the teachers and students, respectively, thought activities of skimming, scanning, jigsaw reading, and information transfer helped students to expand their vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge effectively. In the post-reading activities of Table 3, 76.19%, 66.67%, and 33.33% of the teachers and students, respectively, thought activities like creative writing, role play, and one-sentence summary helped students expand their vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge effectively.

### 4.3 Analysis on Teaching Design

In order to make sense of how to improve students' interest in English reading and build an efficient and interesting English reading class by designing reading activities in junior high school, cases of teaching design are analyzed as follows:

In the pre-reading, the researcher used the following activities to solve students' difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge: The discussion activity is to ask students to discuss some questions. The questions must be related to the topic of reading teaching. For example, in the PEP Grade 7 *"Unit 10 You're supposed to shake hands"*, the teacher can divide all the students into 4 or 5 groups and ask students to discuss some common greeting customs in different countries and cultures by using related vocabulary and background knowledge, such as bowing in Japan, shaking hands in China, kissing in France. Then, the teacher will invite one student to share the result of the discussion with each group, comment on their performance, and find some problems in vocabulary and background knowledge, such as pronunciation and usage of vocabulary and some mistakes about greeting manners and customs. This activity can expand their vocabulary knowledge of greeting customs by using their vocabulary and background knowledge of greeting manners and customs in their mind to discuss. In the PEP Grade 7 *"Unit 2 I'll help to clean up the city parks"*, the teacher can divide all the students into 4 or 5 groups and ask students questions to discuss: What do you know about charity and volunteer work? Students use some related background and vocabulary knowledge to answer it in each group, such as helping the elderly, visiting sick children in the hospital, or cleaning up the city park. In addition, the teacher will invite one student in each group to share their results and add some vocabulary and background on charity and volunteering, such as care and satisfaction. During this activity, students will expand their background and vocabulary knowledge. Providing background knowledge is an activity to introduce some related knowledge of teaching content and help students read well. For instance, in the PEP Grade 7 *"Unit 10 You're supposed to shake hands"* and the PEP Grade 7 *"Unit 2 I'll help to clean up the city parks"*, students can watch the videos and see the pictures to provide background knowledge, which is related to different greeting customs in different countries and doing some volunteer activities. The teacher can introduce how to use these greeting manners through pictures and videos, such as which countries often use shake hands, which situations and places use shake hands, and how to use kiss correctly. The teacher can also teach students some common volunteer activities through pictures and videos, such as planting trees, cleaning up the park, visiting old people in nursing homes, teaching the kids in the west of China for many university students. This activity can mainly help students accumulate their background knowledge by teaching and introducing it through pictures and videos. Pre-teaching selected vocabulary activity is to teach some related new words and phrases of teaching content. For example, in PEP Grade 7 *"Unit 10 You're supposed to shake hands"* and PEP Grade 7 *"Unit 2 I'll help to clean up the city parks"*, teacher can teach students the related new words and phrases by using some related pictures to introduce their usage, pronunciation, and meaning, such as bow, kiss, impolite, charity, volunteer, shake hands, be supposed to do, and help to do. These new words and phrases can be combined with grammar knowledge of future tense to make sentences, such as using the above new words (volunteer, charity)

and future tense to make new sentences. During this process, teacher can find students' problems in vocabulary and grammar knowledge to expand and correct their knowledge, such as when students make sentences that use the past tense in the future and make mistakes in the pronunciation of new words. This activity can not only help students learn some new words, but also expand their knowledge of grammar by using the new words to make sentences.

In the while-reading, the researcher used the following activities to solve students' difficulties with vocabulary and grammar knowledge: Information transfer activity is to ask students to transfer the form of reading information expression. In the PEP Grade 7 "*Unit 10 You're supposed to shake hands*", teacher can ask students to transfer everyone's greeting custom from different countries in the conversation into a table or mind map, such as Marie in France using a kiss and Katie shaking hands in the USA. On this table, it needs to correspond with people's greeting customs. In the PEP Grade 7 "*Unit 2 I'll help to clean up the city parks*", teacher can make students read the passage and summarize the information into a table. For example, in this passage, Mario volunteers at an animal hospital to care for animals every Saturday morning. That is hard work for him. Therefore, students can transfer these contents from this passage into a table to use their vocabulary and grammar knowledge of volunteer work and future tense. The table can consist of people, place, time, volunteer work, and their feelings about doing this work. This activity focused on using vocabulary and grammar knowledge to transfer the way to express the information. Skimming activity is to ask students to read the text quickly to finish some practice. In the PEP Grade 7 "*Unit 10 You're supposed to shake hands*", the teacher can give students this passage of greeting customs. Students read this passage quickly and get its main idea. Students need to summarize the place, time, people, and contents of this passage. For example, Katie and John are talking about the welcome party for foreign students last night at their school. Different students used different customs to greet each other. Students need to use the vocabulary of greeting customs and grammar knowledge of past tense to read the passage, organize their language, and get the main idea of this passage. In the PEP Grade 7 "*Unit 2 I'll help to clean up the city parks*", the teacher gives students this passage of volunteer work for students without the title. Students read this passage quickly and conclude its title by using the vocabulary of volunteer and the grammar knowledge of simple present tense and future tense. From their titles, teacher can find some mistakes and supply some knowledge in grammar and vocabulary. Scanning activity is to ask students to locate certain information by reading the text quickly and asking the questions. In the PEP Grade 7 "*Unit 10 You're supposed to shake hands*", teacher can make students read this passage of greeting customs and finish some practices of identifying true or false, such as Sato from America shaking hands to greet each other. This is false, because Sato from Japan bows to greet each other in this passage. This activity asks students to use their vocabulary of greeting each other and grammar knowledge of past tense to first understand this passage's meaning, and then finish identifying true or false practice. Skimming and scanning activities require students to have basic knowledge of vocabulary and grammar to understand the main idea and certain information of the passage and finish some practice conducted by their teacher, so they can help students expand their vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Jigsaw reading activity is to ask students in a group to order the storyline cards in their own hands to form a complete story. In the PEP Grade 7 "*Unit 10 You're supposed to shake hands*", teachers can design this activity in the reading class by dividing the whole passage of greeting each other into some sentences in every card, distributing cards to students, and asking students in each group to order these cards to form a whole passage by using their vocabulary of greeting customs and grammar of past tense to understand these contents from the cards and share their opinion with other classmates. This activity can help them accumulate knowledge in vocabulary and grammar to know the meaning of these sentences and express their contents in their cards.

In the post-reading, the researcher used the following activities to solve students' difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge. Role play activity is to ask students to apply the knowledge they learned from this reading class to real life situations. In the PEP Grade 7 "*Unit 10 You're supposed to shake hands*", the teacher gives some different situations to each group and asks students to use their knowledge of greeting each other in different countries and past tense to finish the role play. For instance, group 1 needs to finish role play in the welcome party for foreign students in the last night, so this group needs to apply the vocabulary and background knowledge of greeting customs and grammar of past tense to show this role play, such as John from Italy kissing to greet other foreign students. In the end, other classmates and their teacher will evaluate their performance. This activity can increase their ability to speak English and accumulate their background knowledge of greeting each other in different countries. At the same time, it can also help teachers find students' problems with grammar and vocabulary in the past tense and correct students' errors accurately. In the PEP Grade 7 "*Unit 2 I'll help to clean up the city parks*", the teacher asked students to use new words,

background, and grammar knowledge of future tense and volunteer work that they have learned in this class to finish role play in each group. Every group can choose one volunteer work to show, such as group 2 choosing to help the old in the nursing home on next Sunday. They can choose one student as the old people, one student as the leader of the nursing home, one student as the worker in the nursing home, and other students as volunteers. They start the rehearsal and show. In the end, other classmates and the teacher will find some mistakes in background, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge of volunteer work or future tense and correct them to expand their knowledge. Creative writing activity is to ask students to read the passage and write some contents creatively by themselves. In the PEP Grade 7 “Unit 10 You’re supposed to shake hands”, teacher gives some words or phrases from this passage or unit, such as shake hand, kiss, and greet. Students use these words and phrases to make a new sentence or story. After that, the teacher will invite students to read their sentences or stories and ask other students to find the mistakes in them. Therefore, students can accumulate some vocabulary and grammar knowledge of greeting customs by finding other classmates’ mistakes. For example, a student said his sentence: Johnson from the USA often shakes hands to greet her friends.” Other classmates can find his mistake in tense and personal pronoun and ask this classmate to correct it. In the PEP Grade 7 “Unit 2 I’ll help to clean up the city parks”, students need to imitate this passage to write a paragraph about their own experience or plan to do the volunteer work. What’s more, the teacher will ask students to exchange their paragraphs with each other and correct the mistakes in spelling and grammar to review their vocabulary and grammar knowledge. They can also make suggestions about polishing their writing. Therefore, this activity can expand their vocabulary and grammar knowledge by peer-editing and writing a paragraph. One-sentence summary activity ask students to summarize the teaching contents in one sentence. Students can use one sentence to talk about their gains and comment on a teacher’s teaching activity in English. Teachers can improve their teaching and find students’ mistakes in spoken English. For instance, in the PEP Grade 7 “Unit 10 You’re supposed to shake hands”, students can use their vocabulary knowledge to say how they have learned to greet each other in different cultures or countries, such as how kissing is popular in France. They can also express their confusion at difficult points and give their teacher some advice or suggestions by using the words they have learned. For example, when a teacher introduces the usage of this phrase “be supposed to do”, it is too quick to understand it clearly, so students wish the teacher would teach this point again. This activity can make use of students’ knowledge of vocabulary to express their feelings about this class and comment on the teacher’s performance.

In conclusion, through the case study, the researcher designed the above activities to solve the difficulty in vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge.

## 5. Conclusion

The researcher summarized the following experiences of English reading teaching activity design after doing this teaching practice research:

First, update the theories of teaching activity design. With the development of the times, society has been required to cultivate comprehensive development. Therefore, teaching activities should be meaningful and educational to promote the development of students’ language abilities. They should also cultivate students’ interest in English learning. In addition, the theoretical knowledge of teaching activity design came from foreign countries. Teachers in China need to be combined with China’s education situation to update the theories of activity design in order to use them to solve the problems in English reading teaching. Second, further explore the key parts of teaching activity design. Reasonable teaching activities can achieve teaching objectives efficiently. However, at present, the researches on teaching activity design is not deep, so teachers’ teaching activity designs are not specific. Secondly, with the development of information technology, teachers should think about how to design teaching activities by using modern information technology. Researchers should broaden the fields and ranges of their research on teaching design.

The researcher found the following limitations in the teaching application research, hoping the related studies on reading activity design will remedy these limitations in the future.

Firstly, the data collected was from only 21 surveyed samples formed by 15 students and 6 teachers in Grade 7 in Qinglai Junior High School. Future studies might need to add sample data suitably. The more data of various types collected, the more general the result got. Secondly, the researcher did this applied research only for one semester. However, this research only examined the present situation and effectiveness of reading activity design in improving students’ interest in English reading in a slightly

short research period. Future research could be extended their research period appropriately to explore the relationship between English reading activity and improving students' interest and effectiveness in English reading with a more overall analysis. Thirdly, this research was only done on a small range. In this research, the research objects are 15 randomly selected students in Grade 7 and six English teachers from Grade 7 in Qinglai School, Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan Province. Future studies might explore English reading activities designed by some junior high schools from other areas of Yunnan Province, with the aim of getting a more general result.

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