

Exploring the Effects of the Activity-based Approach on English Reading Instruction in Junior High Schools

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Abstract: Applying Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and Constructivist Learning Theory, the present study sought to examine the effects of the Activity-based Approach on junior high school English reading instruction. A total of 100 students from two parallel seventh-grade classes and six English teachers were selected. The questionnaires, reading tests, and semi-structured interviews served as the primary instruments for data collection. The comparison of the pre- and post-questionnaires for the experimental class revealed significant improvements in Reading Emotional Interest ($M_{\text{post}} = 3.65$, $M_{\text{pre}} = 2.12$), Reading Autonomy ($M_{\text{post}} = 3.72$, $M_{\text{pre}} = 2.21$), Reading Focus and Engagement ($M_{\text{post}} = 3.81$, $M_{\text{pre}} = 2.28$). Additionally, the experimental class significantly outperformed the control class in the post-test reading achievement ($M_{\text{experimental}} = 21.20$, $M_{\text{control}} = 18.42$, $p < 0.005$). The findings suggest that the Activity-based Approach can support junior high school reading instruction and help foster students' core competencies.

Keywords: Activity-based Approach; English reading instruction; Junior high school

1. Introduction

The Activity-based Approach is a significant teaching philosophy proposed within the context of China's English curriculum reform in the new era, which fully embodies the curriculum value pursuit oriented towards core competencies. Its main purpose is to enable students to solve problems and improve language skills, cultural awareness, thinking and value judgment abilities under the guidance of thematic significance, based on existing knowledge and different types of texts, through activities such as learning comprehension, application practice, and transfer innovation (Ministry of Education, China, 2017)^[1].

According to the *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition, Ministry of Education, China)*^[2], hereinafter referred to as the *New Curriculum Standards*, one of the core curriculum concepts is the implementation of "integrating learning and thinking while emphasizing innovation as the primary approach of the English Learning Activity View." English learning activities should focus on the thematic meaning exploration, guide students' integrated learning of language knowledge and cultural knowledge, and develop core competencies through language practice.

Chandio, Pandhiani and Iqbal (2016) combined Bloom's educational goal classification system and built a hierarchical activity design model, providing specific methods for gradient activity design^[3]. Mahanin (2017) proposed that learning activities are learning tasks designed for students, closely related to the process of students' knowledge construction. Such activities can help students integrate new and old knowledge, form a new knowledge system, and students can also generate new understanding and thinking in the process of explanation, analysis, synthesis and evaluation^[4]. Ali and Muhammad (2018) took practical teaching as an example and pointed out that activity-based learning is an important link connecting theoretical knowledge and practical application, which can effectively enhance learners' independent inquiry ability^[5]; Atinuke (2018) confirmed in a special study on language skills training that extensive reading activities centered on students can effectively enhance students' reading interest and reading comprehension ability^[6]; Anwer (2019)'s research went further, focusing on the correlation between activity-based teaching and learning motivation, and through a comparative experiment, it was found that the activity-oriented teaching mode could more significantly stimulate students' learning interest and thereby promote the improvement of academic achievements^[7]. Nwosu and Etiubon (2022) combined activity teaching with primary school basic science classrooms and through a questionnaire survey, it was found that students were very satisfied with the teaching method based on activities, and in the process of activity teaching, students' metacognitive ability significantly improved^[8].

The above studies supported the positive role of learning activities in improving reading interest, comprehension, and thematic exploration, providing valuable references for both the instructional design and practical execution of reading teaching within the framework of the Activity-based Approach.

Reading teaching serves as an important means for putting the Activity-based Approach into practice in English instruction. Through the design of multi-level activities, it cultivates students' abilities in applying reading strategies, integrating information, thinking critically, and understanding cross-cultural contexts.

However, current reading instruction remains constrained by traditional teaching models. Specifically, activity design often deviates from exploring the thematic meaning of texts and continues to focus on mechanical explanation and drills of language knowledge. In class, teachers dominate learning activities, ignore the participation process of students' activities, and the feedback of process evaluation lags behind, which deviates from the education orientation of core competencies.

Therefore, probing the impact of the Activity-based Approach on junior high school English reading instruction has become a central concern for both teachers and researchers. This is not only the need for new curriculum reform, but also the practical need to improve the quality of English teaching and promote the reading proficiency of students.

2. Theoretical foundations

2.1. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

As originally designed, Bloom's Taxonomy organized educational goals along three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Among these, the cognitive aspect has received the most extensive attention and application. In 2001, Anderson et al. revised the theory that features two interacting dimensions: knowledge dimension and cognitive dimension. Under the knowledge dimension lie four categories—factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge. Cognitive dimension describes people's cognitive activities, including memory, understanding, application, analysis, evaluation, creation, etc^[9]. The revised theory pays more attention to the psychological development status of students, which can help teachers clarify the types of teaching activities and teaching goals, conform to the cognitive development laws of students, and has direct guiding value for English teaching activities.

2.2. Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist Learning Theory originated from the cognitive development research of Swiss psychologist Piaget. It was further expanded and perfected by scholars such as Bruner and Vygotsky, forming a systematic theoretical framework. This theory holds that the acquisition of knowledge is not a passive process of receiving information, but rather a cognitive activity in which learners, drawing upon their existing cognitive structures, actively construct meaning from new input. Meanwhile, the construction of knowledge is embedded in social and cultural contexts, which ultimately enables learners to complete the reconfiguration of their own knowledge system through interpersonal collaboration and cognitive reorganization.

Constructivist Learning Theory has three typical features: highlighting the dominant position of learners, emphasizing the initiative and significance of knowledge construction, and attaching importance to the stimulating effect of real situations on learning motivation. The core viewpoint of Constructivist Learning Theory lies in the fact that in the teaching progress, more time should be allocated to students to participate in activities. The Activity-based Approach is highly consistent with the Constructivist Learning Theory. The former requires teachers to create real task situations in the context of the theme and guide students to complete knowledge construction in the process of solving problems. Robinson (2018) believes that this kind of real situation teaching can help students understand what is happening in their minds, and enable learners to establish the connection between new and old knowledge through the personal participation of the whole learning experience ^[10].

3. Methodology

3.1. Research subjects

This quasi-experimental research selected two Grade Seven parallel classes from a junior high school as research participants. The teaching intervention lasted for three months, spanning from September to December 2025. The two classes consisted of 100 students equally divided into an experimental class (n=50) and a control class (n=50).

In the experimental class, reading instruction was conducted following the principles of the Activity-based Approach, whereas the control class continued to adopt the traditional reading teaching model. To ensure the fairness and validity of the pedagogical experiment, both classes were taught by the same teacher and used the same textbook. Pre- and post-experiment reading tests were carried out to both classes to examine changes in students' reading performance. The pretest results confirmed that the two classes had comparable reading proficiency levels, thereby meeting the prerequisite conditions for the experiment. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six English teachers of varying teaching experience to gain an in-depth understanding of the current practices in junior high school English reading instruction. Both before and after the experiment, questionnaires were distributed to students in the experimental class to assess shifts in their reading interest. Furthermore, six students from the experimental class were chosen for interviews after the experiment to learn about their different views on the new teaching method guided by the Activity-based Approach.

3.2. Research instruments

3.2.1. Questionnaires

This study administered two rounds of the same questionnaire to the students in the experimental class before and after the teaching experiment. The questionnaires were uniformly distributed in the classroom and collected immediately, which effectively ensured the authenticity of the responses. 50 questionnaires were distributed before and after the experiment, and 50 valid questionnaires were collected in each round. The valid response rate for the questionnaires was 100% in both rounds.

The questionnaire aimed to analyze whether students' interest in English reading changed after integrating the Activity-based Approach into junior high school English reading teaching. The questionnaire consists of 12 objective questions, representing three dimensions: Reading Emotional Interest (subjective emotions and liking), Reading Autonomy (active choice and behavioral tendency), and Reading Focus and Engagement (interest expression during the reading process). Questions 1-4 are related to the dimension of Reading Emotional Interest. Questions 5-8 are related to the dimension of Reading Autonomy. Questions 9-12 are related to the dimension of Reading Focus and Engagement.

3.2.2. Interviews

This study conducted interviews before and after the experiment. The researcher conducted pre-intervention interviews with six English teachers at the school, probing their perspectives on the Activity-based Approach, their routine reading lesson activities, and the primary barriers they face in deploying it at the junior high level.

To make up for the shortcomings of questionnaire and experimental methods, and to further understand the practical effects of English reading teaching based on the Activity-based Approach, a semi-structured interview was conducted after the experiment. The interviewees after the experiment were six students of three different levels in the experimental class. The interview focused on the changes in students' reading interests, the impact of activity-based teaching on reading performance, the difficulties encountered during the learning process, and suggestions for improvement.

3.2.3. Tests

In order to explore the influence of the Activity-based Approach on junior high school students' reading achievements, reading tests were conducted in the experimental class and the control class. This study implemented two rounds of reading tests, namely the pre-test before the teaching experiment and the post-test after the teaching experiment, with the same difficulty level for both tests.

Before carrying out the reading teaching practice, a pre-test for the students was conducted to understand their English reading proficiency. After three months of reading teaching, the post-test was conducted for the experimental class and the control class to compare the differences in their reading

performance. The data before and after the tests were collected and a comparative analysis was undertaken to investigate the effect of the Activity-based Approach on junior high school students' English reading achievements.

3.3. Research procedures

3.3.1. Pre-experimental phase

Prior to the teaching experiment, a questionnaire was distributed to students in the experimental class, so as to grasp their initial status of English reading interest. After completing the questionnaire, the first reading test papers were distributed to both the experimental class and the control class, with the aim of understanding the reading comprehension abilities of students in the two classes. After collecting the test papers, SPSS27.0 was used to conduct a detailed analysis of the test results. The results showed that there was no significant difference in reading levels between the experimental class and the control class, which ensured the feasibility of the experiment. In addition, to gain a deeper understanding of the current status of middle school English reading teaching, the semi-structured interviews with six English teachers were conducted at school before the experiment.

3.3.2. Experimental phase

During the teaching process, both classes were taught by the same instructor, and the textbooks used were all from the Yilin Edition. The teaching content was from the Yilin Edition's seventh grade textbook 1 and both classes had the same weekly class hours for reading lessons and maintained a consistent teaching pace. In the second week of the teaching experiment, the instructor applied the Activity-based Approach to English reading teaching in the experimental class. The control class, on the other hand, retained its traditional teaching mode, thus forming a corresponding comparative experiment.

Based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the reading teaching activity design of this experiment gradually advances around the six levels of cognitive domain, cultivating students' reading ability and English core competencies progressively. Meanwhile, Constructivist Learning Theory serves as another core theoretical support for the design of this experimental teaching activity, emphasizing that learning is a process in which students actively construct knowledge, rather than passively receiving knowledge. The core role of teachers is to guide, organize, and assist. Based on this viewpoint, the design of reading teaching activities in this experimental stage always focuses on students' agency, emphasizing the authentic real-life reading contexts.

The teaching activities based on the Activity-based Approach are divided into three stages, namely learning and understanding activities, application and practice activities, and transfer and innovation activities, corresponding to three levels: discourse-based, in-depth, and beyond-discourse levels. The following explains how to design activities for these three stages to effectively implement the Activity-based Approach.

(1) Carrying out learning and understanding activities

Learning and understanding activities are the most fundamental activities, mainly including discourse-based learning activities such as perception and attention, acquisition and organization, summarization and integration. In the first stage of the classroom teaching, the teacher creates daily situations to introduce the discourse content for discussion, allowing students to understand the background knowledge or language knowledge related to this lesson. Afterwards, through activities such as summarization, organization, and integration, students will have a preliminary understanding of the article, which helps them establish new knowledge structures.

(2) Conducting activities for application and practice

After students achieve a basic understanding of the theme and content of the article, teachers introduce more advanced discourse-based learning activities such as describing and interpreting, analyzing and judging, and internalizing and applying. These activities enable students to explore the discourse from a deeper perspective, with the goal of reinforcing language and cultural knowledge through continued practice, consolidating newly formed knowledge structures, and transforming knowledge into competence.

(3) Conducting activities for transfer and innovation

Transcending discourse is to further explore the connotation of discourse and transfer knowledge to another life context, so that students can truly internalize the knowledge and abilities they have acquired,

and promote the development of core competencies. Firstly, teachers can guide students to conduct in-depth analysis of the author's emotional attitude and value orientation behind the discourse during the activity. Subsequently, students can evaluate the author's viewpoint and also provide their own insights. When designing this teaching activity, attention should be paid to creating new contexts. Students need to creatively solve problems in new situations, which can not only test their mastery of new knowledge, but also cultivate their ability to transfer and innovate, truly integrating the knowledge they have learned with daily life, thereby achieving practical application.

3.3.3. Post-experimental phase

After the teaching experiment, questionnaires were once again distributed to the experimental class. The aim of this research was to understand whether students' reading interest had been enhanced through reading teaching guided by the Activity-based Approach. At the same time, in order to verify whether students' reading scores had improved and whether the improvement was significant, the second reading test was conducted in both classes. The data from the two classes were analysed in detail using SPSS 27.0 and the corresponding experimental results were obtained. To gain further insight into the practical effects of English reading teaching based on the Activity-based Approach, the researcher selected six students from the experimental class for interviews.

3.4. Data collection

This study began in September and ended in December 2025. During the research period, both the experimental class and the control class were taught by the same teacher. The specific data collection process is as follows: Firstly, the interviews were conducted with teachers about the current situation of middle school English reading teaching before the experiment. After the experiment, students were selected from three levels in the experimental class for interviews, with two students in each level. Secondly, the author conducted a questionnaire before and after the teaching experiment. The first questionnaire was conducted before the experiment, and each student in the experimental class (n=50) received a reading interest questionnaire. The students independently completed the questionnaire without any communication, and a total of 50 questionnaires were collected, with a response rate of 100%. After the experiment, a second questionnaire was conducted with the same questions as the first one. Furthermore, the author conducted English reading tests on the experimental and control classes before and after the teaching experiment. After the experiment, the researchers will input all collected data into SPSS27.0 for data analysis to draw relevant conclusions.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results and analysis of questionnaires

The questionnaire adopts a five-point Likert scoring system, with 1 point indicating complete disagreement and 5 points indicating complete agreement. According to the evaluation criteria of Oxford & Burry Stock (1995), a mean greater than or equal to 3.5 is considered high, between 2.5 and 3.4 is considered moderate, and less than or equal to 2.4 is considered low. The descriptive statistical methods of mean and standard deviation were used to compare the differences in data before and after the experiment to analyze whether students' interest in English reading changed after the implementation of reading instruction under the guidance of the Activity-based Approach.

4.1.1. Results and discussion of pre-questionnaire

Table 1 presents the specific data of the pre-questionnaire in three dimensions, mainly used to understand the basic situation of English reading interest of experimental class students before carrying out teaching practice.

Table 1: Statistical Results of Pre-questionnaire

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reading Emotional Interest	2.12	0.38
Reading Autonomy	2.21	0.42
Reading Focus and Engagement	2.28	0.35

The results show that the mean of students' Reading Emotional Interest dimension is 2.12 (standard deviation = 0.38), the mean of Reading Autonomy dimension is 2.21 (standard deviation = 0.42), and the mean of Reading Focus and Engagement dimension is 2.28 (standard deviation = 0.35). On the whole, the means of the three dimensions are all at the lower-middle level, indicating that students' interest in English reading is not high before the experiment, their autonomous reading ability needs to be improved, and their focus and engagement in reading activities are also limited. At the same time, the standard deviation of each dimension is small, indicating that students have little individual differences in these three aspects, and the overall state is relatively consistent.

This result reflects that under the conventional reading teaching mode, students' reading learning state has not yet reached the ideal level, which provides a realistic basis and room for improvement for the follow-up reading teaching intervention based on the Activity-based Approach.

4.1.2. Results and discussion of post-questionnaire

After implementing teaching practice, the researchers conducted a post-questionnaire on the experimental class students again to understand their changes in English reading interest. The specific data is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Statistical Results of Post-questionnaire

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Reading Emotional Interest	3.65	0.29
Reading Autonomy	3.72	0.31
Reading Focus and Engagement	3.81	0.27

From the data, the mean of the Reading Emotional Interest dimension for students is 3.65 (standard deviation = 0.29), which has significantly increased compared to 2.12 before the experiment. This indicates that the English teaching in the experimental class has stimulated students' interest in reading. The mean of the Reading Autonomy dimension is 3.72 (standard deviation = 0.31), which has significantly improved compared to 2.21 in the pre-test. This shows that students gradually mastered reading strategies in three progressive reading activities and their ability to independently plan and monitor the reading process was effectively developed. The mean of the Reading Focus and Engagement dimension is 3.81 (standard deviation = 0.27), which is the highest among the three dimensions. Compared to 2.28 in the pre-test, the marked improvement was found to be statistically significant, indicating that students' attention investment and classroom participation status have been significantly improved in real and meaningful reading activities, and they can become more actively involved in the reading teaching process.

The pre- and post-questionnaire comparison shows that the design of theme-based and progressive reading activities guided by the Activity-based Approach effectively improved students' emotional experience in reading, stimulated their intrinsic reading motivation, helped them master reading strategies and enhanced their autonomous learning ability.

4.2. Results and analysis of interviews

4.2.1. Results and analysis of teachers' interview

The interviews with six English teachers from the experimental school before the experiment were conducted. The interview results are as follows:

Most teachers did not fully understand the design of three types of activities: learning and comprehension, application and practice, and transfer and innovation. They are unclear about how to naturally transition and advance layer by layer in reading classes, which can lead to superficial and poorly structured activities. In addition, Teacher B stated that students differ in their reading proficiency and that it is difficult to carry out activities at different levels in a reading class. Students' acceptance of activities varies, making it difficult for English classes to proceed smoothly. Teachers C and D both mentioned that time and teaching pressure have hindered the implementation of activities, so they have to consider the overall teaching progress and focus on the key points to keep up with the teaching schedule before the exam.

4.2.2. Results and analysis of students' interview

In order to have a deeper understanding of the influence of the Activity-based Approach on individual students, six students in the experimental class were selected for interviews. The interview analysis results are as follows:

Most students said that after the implementation of the Activity-based Approach, their interest in English reading has been improved to varying degrees. The top students believe that the new teaching model uses a variety of activities such as independent exploration, group discussion and situational application, and is not confined to the teacher's explanation. This enhances their sense of classroom participation and enables them to participate more actively in reading.

Students of all proficiency levels reported that this teaching mode facilitated their completion of English reading tasks. The top students mentioned that after three types of activities, they can better grasp the structure, main ideas and logic of the text. When doing reasoning and judging problems, their thinking is clearer, and the answers are more accurate and standard. Students at the intermediate level say that after systematic classroom activity training, they have mastered the basic reading methods, and can master the main ideas of the text before answering the questions. The ability to locate key information becomes stronger and the ability to solve problems is enhanced. Struggling students believe that these activities help them understand the basic content of the article, reduce their fear of reading questions, improve the accuracy of answers to simple questions, and enhance their reading confidence.

4.3. Results and analysis of tests

Table 3 presents the results of the independent sample t-test for the post-test English reading scores of the experimental class (EC) and the control class (CC) after the teaching experiment. The aim is to compare the differences in the impact of reading teaching practices based on the Activity-based Approach and the conventional teaching model on students' reading abilities.

Table 3: Independent Samples T-test of Post-tests of EC and CC

Class	N	Mean	SD	t	p
EC	50	21.20	5.18	2.95	0.004
CC	50	18.42	4.20		

Based on the descriptive statistics, the experimental class (N=50) achieved a mean post-test score of 21.20 (SD=5.18), whereas the control class (N=50) had a mean post-test score of 18.42 (SD=4.20). The resulting mean difference of 2.78 between the two groups was notably larger than that observed in the pre-test. This suggests that students in the experimental class experienced a significantly greater improvement in reading scores compared to their counterparts in the control class.

The inferential statistics results show that t of the independent sample t-test was 2.95, and the corresponding p was 0.004, which was much smaller than the commonly used 0.05 significance level in statistical research. The results demonstrate that after the instructional intervention, a statistically significant gap emerged in English reading performance between the two groups, and the experimental class scored notably higher than the control class.

5. Conclusion

After a three-month empirical study, the following findings emerged from this study.

First of all, most teachers do not have a deep understanding of the Activity-based Approach but they are highly supportive of it and agree with its teaching objectives and methods. In practice, teaching remains teacher-centered and knowledge-focused and most teachers focus on teaching vocabulary, grammar explanations, and text translation. Teaching activities are often limited to tasks related to literal understanding, lacking a layered and progressive activity design that encourages thinking. As a result, students have been in a passive learning state for a long time, with generally insufficient intrinsic reading motivation and weak willingness to read independently, which hinders the overall improvement of their reading literacy.

Secondly, reading teaching under the guidance of the Activity-based Approach can effectively

enhance students' interest in English reading. By designing diverse classroom activities, it enables students to shift from passive listening and watching to active participation in the class activities. Adapted tasks designed for students of different levels help struggling students reduce their fear of reading learning, improve the learning initiative of average students, and provide more exploration space for top students. Overall, it significantly enhances students' self-awareness and self-efficacy in reading learning.

Thirdly, reading teaching under the guidance of the Activity-based Approach has a positive effect on improving students' reading ability and academic performance. Different from traditional reading teaching that focuses on vocabulary, grammar and exercises practice, this teaching model emphasizes the cultivation of students' reading strategies. Through three progressive activities, students can not only extract and organize discourse information more efficiently, but also grasp the article structure, identify the main idea, and understand the underlying logic of the text.

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