

# Research on the Connotation and Features of In-Depth English Reading Teaching Based on Core Literacy

Yu Deying

*School of Foreign Languages, Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing City, Guangdong Province, China  
825399649@qq.com*

**Abstract:** *In-depth English reading class has unique connotations and features. Combining with the educational philosophy of the new round of curriculum, this paper probes into the features of famous English reading classroom teaching, explores the connotations and features of in-depth English reading teaching, and provides theoretical reference for promoting the reform of new curriculum English classroom teaching. In term of connotations of in-depth English reading teaching, it was originated from in-depth learning proposed in 1976 and gradually developed into an important term in the field of education. The features of in-depth English reading teaching could be summarized as the following five aspects: discourse teaching under the guidance of theme, teaching with structured knowledge, contextualized teaching, problem-oriented Teaching and teaching with the ultimate goal of cultivating talents. The effective implement of in-depth teaching of English reading needs calls for the in-depth guidance and leadership of teachers.*

**Keywords:** *core literacy, English reading, in-depth teaching*

## 1. Introduction

The Ministry of Education issued *the Opinions on Deepening the Overall Reform of the Curriculum and Implementing the Fundamental Task of Building Morality and Cultivating People* in 2014, formally proposing the core literacy system and providing direction for the new round of basic education reform. Core literacy is a comprehensive summary of educational goals, reflecting features of criticality, universality, and developmentality. It points out in a higher-order form what China's education should focus on in terms of developing students' comprehensive qualities in thinking ability and ideological quality necessary to adapt to future society. Looking back on the past twenty years of new curriculum reform, China's English basic education has achieved remarkable results: the setting of teaching objectives began to focus on the development of abilities other than grades, reflecting a shift from a "knowledge-based" to a "literacy-based" approach; the design of the teaching process became more rationalized and enriched, implementing the teaching philosophy of "taking the textbook as the basis", with diverse and lively teaching methods that effectively leverage information technology in classroom teaching... However, relevant research literature shows that there are some problems in current English reading teaching: the explanation of knowledge in language ability is fragmented, with less emphasis on ability development; cultural character infusion is superficial; thinking skills mainly focus on memory, with little cultivation of other abilities; learning ability focuses on knowledge learning, with other learning abilities being ignored.

The main reasons for these problems are: influenced by traditional teaching evaluations, the teachers focus exam results, thus overlooking the comprehensive development of students; the teachers have an insufficient understanding of the relationship between subject core literacy and teaching effectiveness, and do not attach enough importance to it mentally; the teachers do not have a thorough understanding of core literacy and have not yet been able to closely integrate it with goal design and teaching activities. To solve the above problems, this paper takes English reading teaching as an example to explore the basic connotations and main characteristics of deep teaching under the background of subject core literacy.

## 2. Discipline Core Literacy and In-Depth English Reading Teaching

The 21st century is an era of rapid globalization and informationization. Facing the new, complex, and challenging pattern of the times, many countries around the world have carried out educational reforms to cultivate talents adapted to the development of the new era. What kinds of core literacy should talents of the 21st century possess? The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) took the lead in launching the PISA project and DeSeCo project, proposing ten core skills that students of the 21st century should possess, aiming to construct a comprehensive conceptual reference framework for core literacy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Union (EU), and other international organizations have also conducted research on core literacy. Against this background, countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Germany, Finland, Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan have actively developed core literacy frameworks. "Core Literacy" (Key Competencies) has gradually gained attention from countries around the world and has become a consensus on educational reform. On March 30, 2014, the Ministry of Education issued the document *the Opinions on Deepening the Overall Reform of the Curriculum and Implementing the Fundamental Task of Building Morality and Cultivating People*, which proposed the "Student Development Core Literacy System" for the first time in China. And on September 18, 2016, a report on "China Student Development Core Literacy" was officially released with the efforts of Professor Lin Chongde of Beijing Normal University. "Core Literacy" thus became a buzzword in the education field in China.

Chinese famous professor Ye Lan once said, "Every course has an indispensable and unique mission to cultivate students' core literacy." After the formation of the upper framework of the "China Student Development Core Literacy" system, the Ministry of Education initiated the revision of high school curriculum standards. After two years of effort, each discipline has completed the construction of its own core literacy framework. Disciplinary literacy is the concentrated reflection of disciplinary education, and is the correct values, necessary character, and key abilities that students gradually develop through disciplinary learning. The core literacy of English mainly includes language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. [1] These four competencies are intertwined, closely surrounded, and inseparable. Among them, language ability constitutes the basic elements of core literacy, cultural awareness reflects the value orientation of core literacy, thinking quality reflects the mental characteristics of core literacy, and learning ability constitutes the development conditions of core literacy. The core literacy points out that the direction for English disciplines is to fulfill the fundamental task of building morality and cultivating people, while the reform of English classroom teaching is the key to implementing English discipline core literacy.

Under the background of discipline core literacy, how should teachers change English classroom teaching from instrumental teaching and superficial teaching to in-depth core literacy teaching? There may be various answers, but one thing is certain: only "in-depth teaching" that leads students to "in-depth learning" is based on core literacy. [2] The implementation of in-depth teaching is the fundamental basis and direction of classroom teaching reform. [3] It can be seen that in order to fulfill the educational function of English discipline teaching and implement the fundamental task of building morality and cultivating people, in-depth teaching must be carried out. In the process of English discipline teaching, the promotion of language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, or learning ability is closely related to reading activities in English classroom teaching. Compared with other English teaching activities, reading teaching accounts for the largest proportion of time, which is undoubtedly the most important way to cultivate students' English discipline core literacy. Therefore, it is particularly important to study in-depth English reading teaching under the background of core literacy.

## 3. The Connotation of In-Depth English Reading Teaching

The concept of "in-depth learning" was first proposed by Marton F. and Säljö R. from the University of Goteborg in Sweden in 1976. They conducted experimental research on college students' learning process when dealing with reading tasks, and found that there were two completely different learning processes: in-depth processing and shallow processing. Entwistle N. further studied the differences between "in-depth learning" and "shallow learning", and proposed the concept of "meaningful learning". Pask Gordon and others observed learners' behaviors while learning, and found that some learners formed their own goals for understanding or memory, thus proposing the concept of "understanding learning". Biggs J. B. & Collis, K. F. et al. proposed to focus on relational and extended

abstract learning outcomes in their book *Evaluation of Learning Quality: SOLO Taxonomy of Observable Learning Outcomes*. In 2006, Hinton G., professor of the Department of Computer Science at the University of Toronto proposed the concept and computer deep learning model, which set off a wave of deep learning in the field of artificial intelligence. [4] Driven by computer science, brain science and artificial intelligence, in-depth learning has gradually developed into an important term in the field of education, especially in the field of educational technology. Professor Egan K. of Simon Fraser University in Canada has surpassed the research horizon of single educational technology, turned to teaching, focused on classroom learning and teaching issues, and made new interpretations of teaching activities and learning processes, thus achieving a shift from in-depth learning to in-depth teaching. [4] American scholar Eric Jensen & LeAnn Nickelsen proposed in their book *Seven Powerful Strategies for in-Depth Learning* a route for in-depth learning from seven dimensions: "design standards and curriculum, pre-assessment, creating a learning culture, previewing knowledge, acquiring new knowledge, deeply processing knowledge, and evaluating learning". [5]

The earliest research on in-depth learning in China can be traced back to Confucius' educational theory of "heuristic induction", which was several decades earlier than Socrates' "midwifery" proposed by Western educational pioneers. [6] In 2002, Song Qingsheng published an article titled *In-Depth English Vocabulary Teaching*, marking the beginning of in-depth teaching in China's English discipline. Since 2010, the Basic Education Curriculum Research Center of Central China Normal University and Xinyang Normal University have jointly carried out nationwide classroom "in-depth teaching" reform experiments, with nearly 30 primary and secondary schools joining the experimental school alliance. Through thematic training, research projects, on-site teaching and research, seminars and other forms, fruitful results have been achieved in the theoretical research and practical exploration of deep teaching. Zong Han introduced in-depth teaching in his study *Research on the Teaching Methods of Senior High School English Teachers* in 2011. Guo Hua believed that in-depth learning in pedagogy refers to "a meaningful learning process in which students, under the guidance of teachers, actively participate around challenging learning topics, experience success, and achieve development". [7] Kong Lingxiao applied in-depth teaching to junior high school English classroom teaching practice in his study *Research on Junior High School English Teaching Model for Promoting in-Depth Learning* in 2017. Yang Wenjing published *Strategies for in-Depth Teaching of English in Senior High School from a Cultural Perspective* in 2018, exploring the in-depth teaching of English discipline from a cultural perspective. Thus the in-depth teaching of English discipline has gradually expanded from vocabulary teaching to teaching models and cultural teaching. In 2021, Luo Guiping proposed in his study *Research on in-Depth Reading Teaching of Senior High School English Under the Guidance of in-Depth Teaching Theory* that "in-depth reading teaching of senior high school English under the guidance of teachers means that high school students can comprehensively and deeply understand and analyze English reading texts based on their own knowledge and experience, so as to ultimately enable students to achieve in-depth development in cognition, ability, thinking and other aspects and eventually form a correct cultural orientation." [8]

In the context of core literacy, in-depth teaching should be "based on the internal structure of knowledge, through thorough and profound processing of knowledge, guiding students to move from symbolic learning to understanding and mastery of subject ideas and meaning systems, and leading to the teaching of discipline core literacy." [3] In-depth teaching of English reading takes language and cultural knowledge in reading texts as content, theme activities as guidance, discourse as activity carrier, language skills as a means, and learning strategies as methods, thus cultivating students' cultural awareness, promoting the development of their thinking quality, helping them form good learning abilities, and ultimately achieving the fundamental task of fostering morality and cultivating people.

#### **4. Main Features of In-Depth English Reading Teaching**

In-depth English reading teaching goes beyond shallow teaching such as memorizing language knowledge and training language skills. Language ability is the foundation of English subject, which is not only the goal of the subject, but also the way to achieve subject education. [9] English reading teaching should integrate the cultivation of knowledge, ability and literacy, stimulate students to actively participate in learning in the teaching process, use advanced cognitive thinking, and improve key abilities through learning. In general, in-depth English reading teaching has the following features.

#### **4.1. Discourse Teaching Under the Guidance of Theme**

It is pointed out in *the Standards for English Curriculum in Senior High Schools* (2017 edition) that the course content includes six major elements: theme context, discourse type, language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies, which are interrelated as a whole. Under the guidance of the theme context, teachers carry out relevant teaching activities based on different types of discourse, such as narratives, explanatory texts, argumentative essays, practical writing, interviews, dialogues and other continuous texts, as well as charts, graphs, web pages, advertisements, cartoons and other non-continuous texts. Therefore, discourse interpretation is the cornerstone of in-depth English reading teaching in high schools.

The interpretation of high school English reading texts includes three dimensions: the interpretation of shallow meaning, the interpretation of in-depth meaning, and the interpretation of means of constructing meaning. The shallow meaning of discourse mainly includes: extracting main information and viewpoints; grasping key concepts and details in the discourse; inferring the meaning of words according to contextual clues or nonverbal information; identifying the content points and corresponding supporting evidence in the discourse; understanding conceptual words or terms based on definition clues. The in-depth meaning of discourse mainly includes: distinguishing, analyzing and summarizing the main viewpoints and facts in the discourse; inferring the implied meaning in the discourse according to the context; critically examining cultural phenomena involved in the discourse. The means of constructing meaning in discourse mainly include: grasping the structure and linguistic features of the discourse; understanding the significance of titles, subtitles and illustrations in written discourse; predicting the genre and structure of the discourse based on its title; understanding the explicit or implicit logical relationships in the discourse, such as chronological order, spatial order and process order; identifying common reference and cohesion relationships in written discourse.

Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to grasp discourse interpretation under the theme context to carry out in-depth English reading teaching and effectively implement the core literacy of the English subject.

#### **4.2. Teaching with Structured Knowledge**

Traditional English reading teaching mainly focuses on fragmented knowledge explanation, ignoring students' overall grasp of the knowledge system and cultivation of subject literacy ability, which results in superficial exploration of theme meaning and shallow cultivation of thinking. Structured knowledge teaching is an important way to effectively solve the above problems.

In-depth teaching of English reading is structured knowledge teaching. Structured knowledge refers to "the conceptual structure formed after sorting, organizing and integrating text information, which establishes logical connections between knowledge." [10] Therefore, teachers should thoroughly study the discourse, understand and grasp the reading text as a whole, classify and organize scattered and isolated language knowledge into an interrelated knowledge system in the process of English reading teaching. According to the theme context, discourse type, discourse structure and language characteristics of different styles, the teachers should guide students to deeply explore and understand the theme meaning expressed by the language, construct structured knowledge, internalize the learned language and cultural knowledge, and form structured learning. In this way, students are supposed to enrich their knowledge, broaden their horizons, develop their humanistic qualities, realize the transfer and innovation of knowledge, thereby improving their learning abilities, developing good thinking quality, learning to use the knowledge they have learned to analyze and solve problems, rationally express their views, make correct and wise evaluations and choices, form correct values, and fulfill the fundamental task of moral education.

#### **4.3. Contextualized Teaching**

Another main feature of in-depth English reading teaching is contextualized teaching. It refers to the fact that teaching activities should be guided by the three major theme contexts of human and self, human and nature, and human and society, relying on discourse and based on students' existing knowledge and skills, to solve specific problems in specific activity contexts. [11]

Contextualized teaching activities put higher demands on teachers' professional competence. Firstly, teachers should accurately grasp the theme meaning of the text. The theme of the text serves as a beacon for teachers to design teaching activities. The depth of understanding of the theme context

directly affects the level of students' thinking development and the effectiveness of language learning. Therefore, teachers should regard the exploration of theme meaning as the core task of teaching activities, and use it to integrate learning content, lead the integrated development of students' language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. [12] Secondly, teachers should activate students' existing life and learning experiences. According to the theme context, design real-life context activities that are in line with students' language level and interests, teachers are expected to guide students to discuss and express their own opinions, build a scaffold between real life and what they have learned, stimulate students to observe, discover, and think about real-life problems in life, lay a good foundation for learning new knowledge, constructing new experiences, and developing new thinking. Thirdly, teachers are supposed to hierarchize teaching activities. According to Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the educational objectives in the cognitive domain are divided into knowing (knowledge), understanding (comprehension), applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating. In order to effectively implement the above goals, at different teaching stages, teachers should design hierarchically related teaching activities so that students can acquire corresponding learning comprehension abilities, problem analysis abilities, problem-solving abilities, and be able to transfer their classroom practice abilities to real life, solve real-life problems, gradually form and develop the key abilities and values needed for future learning and life.

#### **4.4. Problem-Oriented Teaching**

In-depth teaching of English reading should be problem-oriented instruction (Problem-based instruction). The new curriculum standard points out that cultivating students' ability to analyze and solve problems is a key and essential ability in the core literacy of the subject. In order to effectively cultivate students' ability to analyze and solve problems, teachers need to change the traditional teaching method based on knowledge transmission in the classroom and establish a problem-oriented consciousness. In every teaching link of each reading class, teachers should consider the following questions: What have students learned? What do students want to learn? What will students learn? What problems do students have? What problems do students need to solve? In order to help students solve problems, how to design teaching problems? How to organize teaching activities? Based on specific situational problems, teachers are expected to use diversified teaching methods such as enlightenment, exploration, cooperation, research, etc., to guide students to learn how to think, analyze, summarize, reason, etc., and find the answers to solving problems. In other words, the teaching method should be problem-oriented to help students recognize and solve the problems in learning, life, and society. The problem-oriented teaching method makes the problem the focus of attention. Students can not only acquire new language knowledge and skills, update their knowledge structure, improve their understanding and expression abilities, but also change their original way of thinking, learn to analyze and solve problems rationally, become more intelligent, full of flexibility and creativity.

#### **4.5. Teaching with the Ultimate Goal of Cultivating Talents**

The ultimate goal of in-depth teaching of English reading is to realize subject education. The Ministry of Education promulgated *the Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening Curriculum Reform and Implementing the Fundamental Task of Building Morality and Cultivating People* in 2014. It is emphasized at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities in 2016 that moral education should be taken as the central link and integrating ideological and political education throughout the entire process of education and teaching to achieve full-process and all-round education. In May 2020, the Ministry of Education issued a notice on *the Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Courses in Colleges and Universities*, proposing that comprehensively promoting the construction of ideological and political courses is a strategic measure to implement the fundamental task of establishing morality and cultivating people, comprehensively improving the quality of talent training is an important task of ideological and political course construction, and integrating ideological and political courses into the whole process of classroom teaching construction to achieve "full participation, full process, all-round" education. One of the basic concepts of *the Standards for English Curriculum in Senior High Schools* (2017 edition) is to develop the core accomplishments of the English discipline and fulfill the fundamental task of establishing morality and cultivating people.

In-depth teaching of English reading is a return to the original point of education, which is, starting from the students and centering on cultivating learners. It respects individuals, focuses on the meaning of life, and realizes self-realization. In the teaching process, teachers should awaken students' interest in

unknown things, guide them to learn and use language to explore the unknown, construct new knowledge, and cultivate problem-solving skills. Infecting students with noble moral sentiments, rich wisdom, excellent teaching ability, and selfless dedication can achieve the educational effect of "moistening things silently".

## 5. Conclusion

In-depth teaching of English reading needs to be based on the in-depth guidance and leadership of teachers. Through the structural, conditional, and trans-formative processing of textual knowledge, teachers focus on shaping the educational literacy of the classroom, creating a realistic teaching situation, and encouraging students to actively participate in classroom activities. Through understanding, analysis, integration, processing, application, practice, migration, innovation and other activities, and problem-oriented, teachers guide students to solve problems, construct correct values, develop critical thinking, innovative ability, communication skills and cooperation spirit, achieve the integration of "knowledge, ability and accomplishment" and the development of high-level intelligence, and ultimately realize the fundamental task of establishing morality and cultivating people.

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