

Suggestions for Extracurricular Graded Reading Teaching of Junior High School English in Western Regions

Ying Wu

Shaanxi University of Technology, Shaanxi Hanzhong 723000

Abstract: The *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standard* (2011) sets requirements from the first year to the fifteenth year. However, in China, junior high school students mainly rely on textbooks and exercises in the classroom, neglecting extracurricular English reading. Currently, there is a pressing need in China to find an effective way of teaching extracurricular English reading in secondary schools. In November 2016, the first *Chinese Graded Reading Standard for Primary and Secondary School Students (experimental draft)* was released, establishing a corresponding level system for English teachers nationwide and attracting increasing scholarly involvement. However, current research in the country primarily focuses on assessing English proficiency, with limited systematic and in-depth studies on its impact on learners' English learning outcomes. Existing studies mostly target urban primary and secondary schools. Therefore, this study focuses on the *Chinese Graded Reading Standard for Primary and Secondary School Students (experimental draft)* with rural junior high school students as subjects, examining the impact of "reading experience" on different types of children.

Keywords: Western regions, junior high school English, extracurricular graded reading, teaching suggestions

Introduction

Graded extracurricular English allows children more time for supplementary English activities beyond textbooks, enabling them to utilize books of varying difficulty levels. Consequently, there's a significant improvement in English reading ability. Extensive use of different level materials aids in vocabulary expansion. Diverse reading materials enhance students' understanding of English culture. Strategies like "identifying key information," "visualization," and "activating prior knowledge" effectively enhance English reading abilities at different levels of training.^[1] A solid vocabulary foundation, rich cultural background, and correct reading methods contribute to an overall improvement in English proficiency.^[2]

Regarding issues in graded reading, the author combines personal experiences from conducting graded reading experiments to propose the following recommendations.

1. Appropriately selecting materials from different levels

Choosing suitable reading materials is fundamental for efficient English reading teaching. With numerous graded books available, parents often fail to carefully select or consider their impact on children. This practice may lead to challenging content that hampers comprehension or overly simplistic texts that

diminish children's sense of accomplishment. Teachers should guide students in selecting appropriate materials, create categorized reading lists, and provide recommendations and encouragement.

Additionally, teachers should incorporate various reading materials because each category holds unique features: some focus on intriguing plots, some have broad themes with formal language and ample information, and others emphasize literary depth, language, and humanistic care. A scientific and rational approach to reading involves exploring novels, encyclopedias, and classical literature. Teachers need a clear understanding of the structure and content of reading materials, ideally discovering supplementary textbooks for extracurricular readings.

2. Tailor teaching methods based on student characteristics

2.1 Designing diverse level reading courses

Living in an information-rich era, students predominantly engage in digital reading through mediums like public accounts and videos. Due to the impact of exams, extracurricular reading among junior high students is fragmented, especially in English. Most confine English reading to textbooks or assignments, lacking time for complete English books.^[3] Hence, teachers need a planned approach to guide students, eliminating negative impacts of fragmented reading and encouraging immersive reading. Before graded reading, surveys and interviews should be conducted in classes to understand students' personalities and reading preferences. Collecting materials based on their needs and creating effective reading plans tailored to content and vocabulary levels.

2.2 Emphasizing guidance on English proficiency

Teachers must have a clear understanding of students' learning strategies while implementing graded reading. Accordingly, they should employ targeted teaching methods. For beginners, teachers can introduce new words first, allowing them to guess meanings or use dictionaries to tackle difficulties. Post-reading activities could involve sharing good words or sentences. For intermediate learners, rapid reading and summarizing text content can enhance their comprehension skills. Advanced learners should learn to think independently, analyze characters, and write their reading notes, thereby enhancing their English thinking ability. In English classes, emphasis should be on appropriate application of details and methods. Encourage extensive reading on easy materials, guiding students to silently read for a prolonged time, fostering their understanding of plot development and personal interpretations. For challenging articles, offer guidance to encourage independent reading and appreciation.

Moreover, under the "double reduction" policy, teachers can utilize after-school services to carefully plan students' extracurricular reading. Develop reading plans, offer appropriate guidance, and incorporate reading into basic post-school tutoring. Utilize the two-hour daily after-school service not just for academic guidance but also to set reading schedules and quantities for students, fostering a habit of reading. Considering the current implementation of "five-item management" and "double reduction," teachers should adopt a graded approach in homework design.^[4] While meeting the understanding level of taught knowledge, reduce or eliminate daily copying tasks, allocating over 20 minutes for graded reading. This not only lightens their workload but also provides ample reading time, as most prefer learning to do homework, fostering a liking for reading and gradually cultivating reading interest.

2.3 Developing assessment methods for graded reading to enhance students' English learning outcomes

Assessment is indispensable in English reading teaching, sustaining the enthusiasm and initiative of English education. In graded English classes, teachers can employ various assessment methods effectively.

Firstly, through diverse book-sharing activities, provide a platform for students to showcase their reading achievements—such as sharing reading notes, discussing book experiences, staging plays, or organizing storytelling sessions—to assess and understand students’ reading conditions. Secondly, the goal of “active reading” is to stimulate extensive reading.^[5] Therefore, teachers should not measure English learning effectiveness based on correctness or quality. Instead, assess students’ learning progress and outcomes according to individual levels, offering tailored evaluations.^[6] Additionally, through peer evaluation among students of different levels, beneficial feedback and communication are encouraged to improve English reading ability. Peer influence can motivate students, create a collaborative learning atmosphere, and promote teamwork spirit. Finally, by providing different levels of reading materials to recognize exemplary students, their reading confidence and enthusiasm can be improved.^[7]

3. Conclusion

This research identifies that due to variations in English proficiency, the selected graded teaching materials might not entirely suit every student, potentially influencing comprehension and impacting research conclusions. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to further explore this type of classification based on this study. There's a call for increased attention from scholars to conduct empirical research on graded reading teaching in primary and secondary schools in western China, aiming to enhance students’ English reading experiences and proficiency. Continual improvement in graded reading research is essential for its application both inside and outside classrooms, providing a better English learning environment for students.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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