The Effect of Layered Teaching Method of Reading Tasks on Middle School Students' English Learning Motivation

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Abstract. In daily teaching, it is found that students in junior high schools lack the interest of learning English, especially in English reading. They are fear of difficulty, and their reading ability is difficult to improve. However, English reading accounts for a large proportion of English learning and plays an important role in improving English language ability. And the layered teaching method can meet the learning needs of different students and provide a personalized educational experience. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore whether the reading task layered teaching method has any effect on junior high school students' English learning motivation and to know about students' ideas on the reading task layered teaching method through the research methods of experiments and structured interviews. This study found that learners could gradually improve their comprehension of English texts and developed independent thinking and reasoning skills through the reading task-layered approach. This approach helps learners to build self-confidence and stimulates their interest in delving further into English texts and literature. But at the same time, the reading task layering method also requires teachers to pay attention to students' psychological state and adjust students' layering tasks according to their situation in time.

Keywords: Middle school students, layered teaching, English reading interest, Learning motivation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In middle school English, reading occupies an important position. And junior high school students have variety problems in reading. Teaching method is one of the reasons. Wang Runrun pointed out that teaching method was an important area of modern teaching reform. It was a general term for the interaction of teaching and learning between teachers and students in order to achieve teaching objectives and complete teaching tasks in the process of teaching. The influence of teaching methods on the information processing ability of students with different cognitive styles was different [1]. Sang Donghua illustrated that when conducting English reading teaching activities in junior high school nowadays, English teachers often guided students to interpret and translate sentences and texts to help them understand the content. During the translation process, teachers translated the sentences or paragraphs into Chinese while extracting important English words, grammar points, and another linguistic knowledge. They then briefly expanded on these extracted grammar or vocabulary points and provide a few examples sentences to help students understand these language elements. While this teaching approach allows students to combine theory with practice, it is evident that students' practical experience is insufficient to support this method. This teaching method tended to be vague and superficial, lacking targeted instruction. Additionally, due to limited practical experience, students' grasp of grammar knowledge tended to lean towards the theoretical aspect, making it difficult for them to fully master English reading learning methods [2]. It is also difficult to solve the problem of differentiation among students through this traditional reading teaching method. And this leads to students' lack of interest and motivation in English reading, and it also makes students being unwilling to read English test. In this teaching background, the layered teaching method can divide different reading tasks according to students' different reading abilities, thus helping students at

different levels find reading tasks that can be completed and are suitable for them. This can increase their interest and motivation in English reading and gradually improve their English reading ability.

1.2. Research Review

Zhang pointed out that learning motivation referred to an internal power that directly pushes students to learn, and it was a kind of need that inspires and guides students to learn. To improve the learning effect, students must recognize and work to enhance internal motivation to strengthen learning motivation [3]. Wang illustrated that the importance of motivation had been widely recognized in pedagogical research and practice. However, the issue of individual differences was often neglected, both in research and in practice [4]. In English language teaching, learners' motivation to learn English has been recognized as the key to teaching and learning. If English learners lack learning motivation, then English teaching will not achieve the expected results. Liang also pointed out that the Layered teaching method of reading tasks could meet the individual development of students, and this teaching method also focused on the fact that teachers should pay attention to stimulate students' learning initiative and motivation, so that students had confidence in learning [5]. Zhao Yehua also stated that the advantages of the layered teaching method, those were, the layered teaching method not only met the requirements of teaching students according to their aptitude, but also conformed to students' learning characteristics, which was conducive to enhance students' comprehensive English ability and improving the efficiency of junior high school English teaching. This author also proposed that junior high school was a psychologically sensitive stage for students, and English teachers must pay full attention to students' psychology when using the layered teaching mode, discover students' psychological problems, and carry out psychological guidance in a timely manner, to ensure the correct use of layered teaching in English teaching [6]. Meanwhile, Peng put forward that in the process of using the layered teaching method, the psychological problems that students might have would affect the effect of the layered teaching method if they are not paid attention to and dealt with in time. In English reading hierarchical teaching, it should be necessary to adjust students' reading learning goals and tasks according to their situations in time to cater the needs of students [7].

1.3. Research topic

The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether middle school students' motivation is affected under the layered teaching method of reading task. Using interviews, this study aims to find out junior high school students' interest in reading in English and their problems in reading in English under the traditional reading teaching method. This paper will also investigate junior high school students' understanding of reading layered instruction, their acceptance of it and find out whether their interest in reading in English is affected under reading layered instruction.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study aims to investigate the effect of layered teaching method of reading task on junior high school students' English learning motivation, and to find out students' ideas about this teaching method through the ways of experiment and structured interview.

2.2. Research Subjects

The researchers took two classes of grade 8 (age range: 12-14 years old) in junior high school in Qingyuan for experimental investigation. Class A has 42 individuals while Class B has 45 individuals in total. Before the experiment, the students in the two classes were categorized into English reading proficiency levels A, B and C according to the grades of the midterm English test papers. And after the experiment, two students, one male and one female, were randomly selected from each level of

each class. A total of twelve students were interviewed for this study, including six male and six female.

2.3. Research Instrument

In this study, English test papers was used for determining the English level of the students and rationalizing the stratification. And the structured interviews were designed in conjunction with the Learning Motivation Scale, which included the evaluation of the effectiveness of the existing teaching and learning, and attitudes towards stratified teaching and learning, and so on to explore their experiences, opinions and suggestions on the layered teaching method of reading tasks.

2.4. Research Process

2.4.1 Designing and preparing the test instrument

The research in this study focuses on the effect of the layered teaching method of reading tasks on students' motivation in English. The students were first categorized into English reading proficiency levels A, B and C. To ensure the rationality and accuracy of the implementation of the stratification, an appropriate test question is necessary. Therefore, the first step of the study was to design and prepare the test instrument. The questions were selected from the English midterm examination, in which the levels of the reading questions were clearly differentiated, focusing on students' comprehension of reading details and guessing of vocabulary, as well as their understanding of the contextual logic, the thematic meaning of the text, and general knowledge of life.

2.4.2 English test and classification

The test was taken by 42 students in Class A and 43 students in Class B. According to their reading ability, the students were divided into three levels: A, B and C. Students in level A had strong language learning ability and could mostly understand and complete the reading tasks; students in level B had some language learning ability and could partially complete the reading tasks; students in level C had weaker language learning ability, and their completion and correctness of the reading tasks were lower. According to the test results, in Class A, 11 students were graded A, 24 students were graded B, and 7 students were graded B. While in Class B, 12 students were graded A, 21 students were graded B, and 10 students were graded C. In this study, the researcher adopt the layered teaching method of reading tasks to teach student class A and use the traditional reading teaching method to teach students in Class B.

2.4.3 Designing Reading Tasks and Instruction

Regarding the stratification strategy, Huang Li pointed out that students, teaching objectives, and teaching process could be scientifically stratified [8]. The researcher used three dimensions to stratify the reading task and design the teaching content. First, it was stratified according to the difficulty of reading comprehension. According to the complexity of the article and the difficulty of the questions, the reading comprehension tasks were categorized into different levels such as primary, intermediate, and advanced. Elementary reading comprehension mainly examines the comprehension of direct information in the text; intermediate reading comprehension requires reasoning and comprehensive analysis of the text; advanced reading comprehension requires in-depth thinking and critical thinking of the text. Second, according to the requirements of reading speed, the reading tasks were divided into different levels such as fast reading, ordinary reading, and deep reading. Fast reading mainly examines the ability to capture key information in the article; ordinary reading requires a comprehensive understanding of the article content; deep reading requires in-depth thinking and exploration of the article. Thirdly, the reading tasks were categorized according to different purposes and needs, such as information acquisition, theme exploration and opinion analysis. The information acquisition type focuses on extracting facts and details from the text; the theme exploration type requires comprehension of the main idea and the central idea of the text; and the viewpoint identification type requires analysis of the author's viewpoint and position. Wang Lihui pointed out that educators should apply different tasks to train different students in different levels. For students

in the elementary level C, they trained the ability of learning and remembering vocabulary, grammar, and analyzing text structure; for students in the intermediate level B, they focused on learning the reading strategies such as prediction, inference, text comprehension, and communication; and for students in the advanced level A, they learned about language use and application skills. In addition, the layered teaching method of reading tasks also included reading improvement training such as selecting more difficult texts for vocabulary, structure, and point of view comprehension [9].

2.4.4 Research Process

The research experiment lasted for two months. The 42 students in Class A were divided into 7 groups with 6 students each group, including A, B, C grade students. In the classroom, the researcher designed different levels of reading tasks for the same reading text according to the different levels of students' abilities and required group members to complete the reading tasks together. As for homework, Guo pointed out that the original intention of the layered design of middle school English homework should be to fully consider the differences of students based on basic knowledge level, individual learning ability, etc., so that each student could get the English after-class homework that suits his or her ability level [10]. Therefore, in addition to the classroom reading task stratification, the researcher assigned different levels of reading tasks and training assignments after class according to the different levels of students. After the experiment, two students, one male and one female, were randomly selected from each level of Class A. And in Class B, a total of twelve students were interviewed in a structured interview to gain insight into their views and suggestions.

2.4.5 Structured Interview

The researcher of this paper developed the questions and content of the structured interview in conjunction with the Learning Motivation Scale. This structured interview contains three parts. The first section focused on asking students about their interest and motivation in reading English, e.g., "Are you interested in reading English? Why?" "What do you think is the importance of reading in English in your daily life and study?" "What factors do you think influence your reading interest and motivation?" The second part of the questionnaire focuses on students' reading methods and habits and problems, such as "How do you manage and organize your English reading time?" "How does the teacher talk about reading in class?" "What reading skills did the teacher teach? Do you think it helps you? Why?" "What difficulties have you encountered in reading English texts?" "Do you use the methods that your teacher has taught you when you have difficulty reading English texts?" The third part focuses on the contents and views of the reading hierarchy teaching method, e.g., "Are you willing to accept the teacher dividing you into reading levels according to your reading level and level and giving you corresponding reading tasks?" "Do you think it would be helpful for you if your teacher used the layered teaching method and divided the reading tasks into different levels? Why?" The fourth part understands students' student motivation, e.g., "For you, does completing the reading tasks assigned by the teacher make you more willing to do the reading?" "Does not being assigned the same reading task as other students make you feel low? Why?" The fifth part focuses on students' suggestions for teaching English reading, e.g., "What suggestions or expectations do you have for your school or teacher in teaching English reading?"

3. Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the results of the interviews based on twelve randomly selected students and found that all twelve students had a sense of pressure that would be caused by the fact that they are lagging others, and they all said that this sense of pressure will lead to greater motivation. According to the interview, in traditional English reading instruction, teachers introduced students to learn about some reading skills and strategies, such as vocabulary comprehension, reasoning and judgment, and main idea of the passages, usually through verbal explanations, and teachers provided demonstrations and exemplary texts to guide students in understanding and applying these skills. Ten out of twelve interviewers thought that the traditional English teaching method could help them learn

the methods of prediction, scanning, and skimming. However, they also thought that the teaching method lacked pertinence, and the content was relatively simple, and some of the content and texts did not match their reading level. In Class A, four out of the six students interviewed thought that the layered teaching method of reading tasks could meet their reading needs and stimulate their interest and motivation in learning. Because this method emphasized individualized instruction based on students' abilities and learning needs and it helped to provide a more challenging and adaptive learning experience for students to increase their engagement and motivation. The remaining two students held different ideas about the layered teaching method of reading tasks could stimulate their interest in learning English. Because they thought that their learning motivation was related to factors such as the content, the learning environment, and the teaching style of teachers. In addition, in Class A, three students raised the issue of the layered teaching method of reading tasks. There will be the problem that the degree of differentiation of the reading tasks is not obvious for students, because their reading level is not stable and will not be at the same level all the time. Therefore, the implementation of the layered teaching method of reading tasks requires teachers to observe students' responses keenly and adjust their teaching strategies flexibly according to students' feedback and needs to improve students' learning interests and motivation.

Another conclusion analyzed from the results of the interviews was that among the layered teaching method of reading tasks, students were not satisfied with the degree of personalization of reading materials. The male students preferred popular science articles, which they thought they could gain more knowledge and learn more than just what was in the books. Female students, on the other hand, preferred to read storytelling articles because they were more interesting and readable. This difference illustrates the need to diversify the content selection of reading articles when using the layered teaching method. Diverse and rich article content is more likely to motivate students to read.

4. Discussion

From the students' point of view, the layered teaching method can stimulate their reading interest and satisfy their reading needs, but there may be the following areas for improvement in this teaching method:

(1) Degree of individualization: although the layered teaching method emphasizes students' different levels and needs, some students may feel that it still does not fully meet their individual learning needs. A more deeply individualized approach to instruction may be needed to better accommodate students' learning styles and interests.

(2) Learning resources: When implementing the layered teaching method, teachers need to prepare learning resources and materials at different levels. Some students may feel that the learning resources at their tier are insufficient or not rich enough, resulting in reduced interest in learning.

(3) Learning environment: In the layered teaching method, students may be divided into different tier groups and the learning environments in which they are placed may be different. Some students may feel labeled and develop a sense of inferiority or anxiety, affecting their learning motivation.

(4) Competitive pressures: The layered teaching method of reading tasks may lead to increased competitive pressures among students. Some students may feel unable to keep up in a higher-tier learning group and feel unfulfilled in a lower-tier learning group. This competitive pressure may affect motivation and interest in learning.

The future of the layered teaching method of reading tasks needs to be improved to meet the needs of the students and to increase their interest in reading for better learning outcomes.

Based on student feedback from the interviews, the researcher suggests some specific ways to improve and enhance the tiered reading task approach:

(1) Personalized assessment: Enhance personalized assessment of students' abilities, interests, and learning styles. Use a variety of assessment methods, including standardized tests, teacher assessments, and student self-assessments, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' learning needs and strengths and to provide them with more precise tiered instruction. Tiering based

solely on quantitative performance in a particular reading is immature and can result in students being incorrectly assigned to inappropriate levels, leading to a decline in enthusiasm for learning.

(2) Enrichment of learning resources: Provide rich and diverse learning resources and materials to meet the learning needs of students at different levels. Like the reading materials of different themes analyzed in the interview analysis. In addition to reading materials with different themes, reading materials with different levels of difficulty and multimedia teaching resources can also be included, so that students can find their interest in learning in reading tasks that are suitable for their own level.

(3) Create a good learning environment: To avoid the psychological gap after students are assigned to different level groups, it is important to keep the learning environment of different levels consistent, to maximize students' psychological health and positive learning enthusiasm.

(4) Continuously optimize teaching strategies: educational researchers can study different teaching strategies through experiments and educational trials, such as adopting gamification elements and cooperative learning to increase students' interest and participation in reading tasks.

(5) Cultivating motivation: researchers can focus on students' motivation and explore ways to stimulate students' interest in learning. For example, students' motivation is enhanced by engaging them in topics of interest and providing challenging learning tasks. This should be handled specifically according to the students' specific situation; the wrong approach can be counterproductive.

(6) Teacher professional development: Schools should provide teacher professional development training to help teachers better understand the tiered reading task approach and learn to adjust their lesson plans according to students' needs and progress. Teachers' teaching level and competence are crucial to the implementation of the tiered teaching method.

5. Conclusion

This investigation study, which lasted for two months, was an exploration and attempt to teach English reading tasks in a tiered manner. It was found that learners can gradually increase their interest in reading English through the layered teaching method of reading tasks, and this method helps learners to build up self-confidence and improve their language ability, but teachers need to take into account the students' psychology while implementing this teaching method and adjust the layering as well as the tasks in a timely manner, and at the same time, they need to enrich the teaching resources and improve their teaching ability.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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