

# Application of Schema Theory in English Reading Comprehension Teaching in Senior High School

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**Abstract:** English reading is a basic language skill, and the level of English reading comprehension is directly related to the level of learners' language ability. In recent years, the new curriculum standards and the new college entrance examination reform have put forward higher requirements for high school students' English reading comprehension ability. However, English teachers pay much more attention to vocabulary, sentence patterns and grammar knowledge, and to some extent neglect the cultivation of the cultural knowledge, genre structure and reading strategies at present. English reading teaching based on schema theory emphasizes linguistic knowledge as the basis, activating the existing schema, enriching the background knowledge and grasping the discourse structure, so as to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the text. Therefore, this paper combines schema theory with English reading teaching, and analyzes how to effectively use schema theory to help students effectively read and improve their reading ability from three stages: before reading, while reading and after reading.

**Keywords:** Schema Theory; English Reading Teaching; Reading Ability.

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## 1. Introduction

The Input Hypothesis Theory proposed by Krashen emphasizes that language acquisition depends on a large amount of language input. English reading is one of the important ways to help students increase their knowledge, cultivate their cultural awareness, and improve their thinking ability. Nowadays, English has become an indispensable tool for communication and interaction all over the world. Thus, it is necessary for us to improve learners' English reading ability.

The General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2022) put forward general requirements of reading, including three aspects: practical reading and communication, literary reading and creative expression and speculative reading and expression. It put forward higher requirements for students' reading ability than previous English curriculum standards.

In traditional teaching, vocabulary, grammar and text reading are divided into independent units to be taught, which makes students learn English ineffectively without context. Students can quickly mobilize the relevant cultural background knowledge, understand the logical structure of the text, and form a comprehensive schema in their minds based on schema theory, which will improve the efficiency of English teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to study the combination of schema theory and senior high school English reading teaching.

## 2. Theoretical Basis

Schema first appeared in the book, Critique of Pure Reason, written by Kant, who defined schema as "the product of transcendental imagination". Specifically, in the process of human cognition of the world, the brain obtains some specific substances and events, and forms different concepts after brain processing, classification and generalization, storing them in the mind for a long time. Only when the newly acquired information is connected with the existing knowledge in people's brain can it be meaningful. Therefore,

schema is the link connecting the existing concept with the new cognitive object.

Bartlett (1932) first proposed the schema theory in his book Remembering: a study in experimental and social psychology. He described schema as "a positive development mode" and believes that schema can be applied to the area of language comprehension, and readers can fill in some unexpressed details in the text through the knowledge structure activated in memory, so as to achieve the true purpose of reading comprehension.

Scholars have different definition on this theory, but they have something in common on the whole: schema is a systematic and logical structure, and is knowledge with a certain degree of generalization.

Different schools classify schema theory differently, but it is commonly acknowledged that schema related to reading comprehension can be mainly divided into three types: linguistic schema, content schema, and formal schema[4]. Linguistic schema refers to the linguistic knowledge that learners have commanded and the ability to use the language. Content schema refers to the background knowledge about the content of the reading text, including culture, history, science and technology, etc. Formal schema refers to discourse knowledge, including the logical structure, organizational form, and genre style of the text.

## 3. The Application of Schema Theory in the Teaching of Reading Comprehension

English teachers can use schema theory to optimize the teaching mode from three stages, before reading, while reading and after reading[2]. So, they can guide students to explore and learn independently before reading, to help students quickly sort out the content and structure of the text while reading, and to consolidate and review the content after reading, which can help students improve reading effect and reading ability.

### 3.1. Activating Content Schema before Reading

Before reading, teachers can carry out activities related to the topic of the reading material that stimulate students' background knowledge and content schema, laying the foundation for reading later.

Take unit 1 "Nature in the balance" (Yilin version of high school English compulsory volume 3) as an example. The theme of the reading part is "The Amazon rainforest: a natural treasure". The teacher can conduct the activity "brainstorming" to activate students' content schema. For example, teachers can use multimedia to display pictures, videos and other materials about the Amazon rainforest, so that students can understand the background knowledge and theme of the text. And then teacher asks students a question "What animals and plants are there in the Amazon rainforest? Do you know which ones are rare?" Students are encouraged to talk freely and give various answers, which can fully stimulate students' imagination and association.

### 3.2. Enriching Formal Schema while Reading

During the reading process, teachers can guide students to comb the content of the text by conducting some activities. So, students can form formal schema and understand the genre, structure, main points of the text.

Take the passage "The Monarch's Journey" of unit 5 "Into the wild" (Foreign Language Learning Materials Edition of high school English compulsory 1) as an example. The teachers need to guide students to know the genre and structure of it in the process of teaching. Students have had the content schema before reading so that some tasks such as fast reading and matching should be given students to help enrich the formal schema. Finally, they can know the three main parts of this text: definition and background of the monarch's journey, the mystery of monarch's migration and influences of human activities, and solutions to the monarch's survival.

### 3.3. Consolidating Linguistic Schema after Reading

After reading, the teachers can guide students to

consolidate the linguistic schema and help students internalize and store the knowledge.

Take unit 3 "War and Peace" (Foreign Language Learning Materials Edition of high school English compulsory 3) as an example. After reading teaching, teachers can conduct various activities to help students deeply understand the text and form a complete knowledge net in their brain, consolidating their linguistic schema. For example, the question "Do you think peace is important for social development?" can be given students to encourage them to deeply think and discuss in groups. The process of discussing is the process of consolidating the linguistic knowledge and text content.

## 4. Conclusion

To conclude, it is obvious that schema theory produces positive effect in English reading comprehension based on various researches so that English teachers need to combine schema theory with the whole English teaching process, and strength the effectiveness of reading teaching based on the three stages: activating content schema before reading, enriching formal schema while reading and consolidating linguistic schema after reading.

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