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Analysis of Activities in Senior English Textbook from the Perspective of Deep Learning: Taking Required Course Book One by FLTR Press (2019 Edition) as an Example

Qingqing Liu, Hongyuan Wang *

School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Science and Engineering, Zigong 643000, China
*** Corresponding author:** Hongyuan Wang

Abstract: Deep learning is an effective way to cultivate students' core competencies. As an organic part and crucial resource of deep learning in English class, the textbook presents activities at diverse cognitive levels. In this study, the cognitive levels of activities are analyzed in a senior English textbook by adopting a qualitative method, which intends to reveal the characteristics of deep learning activities. Then in the study an even distribution is revealed between surface and deep learning activities, the latter featuring integration, contextualization, and participatory nature. Finally, three suggestions are put forward to promote students' deep learning.

Keywords: Senior English; Textbook Analysis; Deep Learning; Activity Design.

1. Introduction

In the era of economic globalization and informatization, mechanical, passive, and rote learning methods are increasingly inadequate for meeting the demands of talent development. The rapid advancement of information technology necessitates a transformation in learning approaches.

However, surface learning—characterized by fragmentation and mechanical exercises—continues to prevail in senior English classrooms (Luo, 2021). Consequently, fragmented learning, rote memorization, and superficial understanding of knowledge remain significant challenges that need to be addressed.

In recent decades, deep learning—a concept that stands in contrast to surface learning—has emerged as a viable solution for addressing the challenges of fragmented and surface learning. It is used to describe the quality of learning, whether in humans or machines. The concept of deep learning was introduced by Marton and Säljö (1976), who defined it as a process in which students thoroughly analyze new information based on their comprehension of the learning materials, allowing them to engage with the author's intended thoughts and objectives. Therefore, to enhance students' understanding of the learning materials and develop their higher-order thinking and problem-solving capabilities in authentic contexts, teachers should conduct a thorough analysis of the teaching materials and implement in-depth teaching in the classroom.

As the core resource in the English curriculum, textbooks play a crucial role as both content and tools for students and teachers in the learning and teaching process. According to the *English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition)*, teachers should conduct a thorough analysis of the textbooks, accurately understand both the design concepts and the content, and familiarize themselves with the characteristics of the textbook organization (Ministry of Education, 2022). The English textbook (2019 Edition) published by FLTR Press consists of various activities. In the *General Senior High School English Curriculum Standard (2017 Edition, revised in 2022)*, activities are defined as the fundamental mode of English learning. The activity-based approach to English learning provides a solid foundation for implementing in-depth teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2022). Therefore, to thoroughly comprehend the textbooks in order to implement in-depth teaching, teachers should analyze the activities in the textbooks from the perspective of deep learning. However, what are the characteristics of deep learning activities within the textbook? How can teachers effectively utilize textbooks to promote deep learning? In this paper, the activities in a senior English textbook will be analyzed in light of deep learning, and suggestions will be provided for teachers to maximize the use of textbooks to facilitate in-depth teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Studies on Deep Learning

The studies on deep learning at home and abroad can be divided into theoretical and applied research.

The concept of deep learning can be traced back to the 1970s. Based on the way learners acquire and process information, Marton and Saljo (1976) initiated in the field of education two opposing concepts: surface learning and deep learning, the former of which emphasizes recitation, memorization, and application of basic principles, knowledge, and facts whereas the latter pays more attention to complicated application and creation based on a deep comprehension of knowledge. Besides, teachers and students need to figure out the problems and interact with the textbooks in teaching and learning. In China, the term "deep learning" was introduced by He and Li (2005), who defined deep learning as learning that builds on understanding, in which the learner is able to critically learn new ideas and facts and integrate them into existing cognitive structures, to make connections between ideas, and to transfer existing knowledge to new situations for decision making and

problem-solving. According to Guo (2016), deep learning refers to meaningful teacher-led learning processes in which students actively participate, experience success, and develop around challenging learning topics. Within the realm of English education, Luo (2021) views deep learning in senior high school English classes as an integrated system encompassing the classroom subject, teaching information, and teaching environment, which functions to foster the emergence, progression, and realization of deep learning experiences. From the above definitions, it can be concluded that a comprehension of the learning material is a fundamental prerequisite for the occurrence of deep learning.

Apart from theoretical research, deep learning has been applied across various disciplines. In English education, deep learning is mainly applied in the cultivation of students' reading and writing abilities, overall unit instructional design, and smart class design.

Firstly, Since the word "deep learning" was mentioned in *General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards* (2017 Edition, 2022 Revision) several times, many practitioners have tried to employ it in reading and writing classes, showing that deep learning is a feasible approach to cultivating students' core competencies. For example, Sun (2019) explored the ways to conduct English learning activities in junior English classes based on teaching samples and practical teaching, finding that deep learning is conducive to internalizing what learners have acquired and enhancing their higher-order thinking skills.

Secondly, it is common to see researchers combining deep learning with overall unit instructional design. For instance, Liz Grauerhdz (2001) asserted that by comparing the features of deep learning and surface learning, holistic teaching proved available to promote deep learning. In China, Wang et al. (2021) combined overall unit instructional design with deep learning to explore a specific path study of reading teaching with an example in the textbook of BNU Press.

Thirdly, with the development of information technology and its application in the field of teaching, the design and development of digital teaching resources based on deep learning has become a new research perspective. Empirical studies on deep learning abroad focus on E-learning, artificial intelligence, and learning science (Hinton et al. 2012; Ranjan et al. 2015). In China, smart classes based on deep learning are mainly applied in college English. For instance, Yu (2021) proposed to design a flipped classroom in college English to motivate students and engage them in learning. Chen (2023) elaborated on the application and effect of the SPOC teaching model in college English teaching from the perspective of deep learning, hoping to promote the reform of college English teaching in China.

In summary, research on deep learning is abundant and varies significantly between domestic and international contexts. International studies cover a broad range of subjects, including basic and practical courses from primary school to graduate studies, predominantly employing empirical research methods. In contrast, domestic studies focus more on the development and transfer of advanced knowledge among students. These studies are significant in the field of deep learning, providing valuable insights into definitions, characteristics, and specific teaching models for various educational stages. They offer important guidance for applying deep learning, enhancing education quality, and improving students' core competencies. Despite these contributions, there are limited studies combining deep learning and activities in textbooks, which are crucial resources and integral parts of deep learning (Luo, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to textbook analysis from the perspective of deep learning.

2.2. Studies on Senior English Textbooks

Tomlinson (1999) defined teaching materials as any materials conducive to language learning, which are encompassed by the broader definition of teaching materials. In a narrower sense, teaching materials predominantly refer to textbooks. This paper focuses exclusively on teaching materials in the narrow sense. Within the realm of senior high school English textbooks, studies can be grouped into three main themes: research on material development, research on material content, and research on material utilization.

Firstly, in terms of material development, the studies at home pay much attention to the principles of material development. *General Senior High School English Curriculum Standard (2017 Edition)* (hereinafter the new CSSE (2017) for short) has become the fundamental guidance of China's English teaching, the crucial tool in English textbook writing and the main reference of English textbook analysis in various studies. For example, Wu et al. (2019) proposed three strategies to refine textbook compilation based on the problems of senior English textbooks under the background of the new CSSE (2017).

Secondly, the research on material content is relatively abundant. Chen and Huang (2019) analyzed the characteristics and problems in a senior high textbook and proposed five strategies from English core competencies. Besides, many domestic researchers analyzed the Chinese culture in senior English textbooks. For example, Guo et al. (2024) compared word frequency, representation, and cultural connotations of 26 representative Chinese cultural keywords in Chinese high school English textbooks and the international English corpus through corpus research and text analysis. These studies highlighted intercultural communication competence and the cultivation of students' thinking quality by exploring cultures.

Finally, in terms of research on material use, scholars tend to study the ways to use teaching materials from different perspectives. Wen (2017) proposed a framework for using and evaluating teaching materials by POA. Taking a text from an English textbook as an example, Huang (2020) discussed how to integrate ideological-political education into English teaching. Additionally, some studies discussed how to integrate deep learning into overall unit instructional design by analyzing a unit in a textbook.

Generally speaking, the research on senior English textbooks is diverse, contributing to the further optimization of the teaching materials and the reflection of teachers on materials and teaching. Notably, since the issuance of the new Curriculum Standards (2017), a multitude of studies have focused on nurturing students' core competencies through an analysis of the teaching materials. Senior high school English textbooks incorporate a range of activities, which serve as fundamental modes of English learning. The current objective of English education is to cultivate students' core competencies which can be achieved by adopting deep learning.

Nevertheless, a few studies have explored the role of activities in textbooks during the deep learning process and how can teachers better utilize these activities to promote students' deeper learning. Therefore, this study is to analyze

the activities in a textbook of FLTR Press from the perspective of deep learning, so as to provide some suggestions for teachers to optimize their use of textbooks and improve the teaching effect.

3. Theoretical Basis

3.1. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives proposed by Bloom et al (1956). is widely used in the field of education worldwide. It divides the educational goals into cognitive domains, affective domains, and motor skill domains. Among them, the goals in cognitive domains involve six levels---memorizing, comprehending, applying, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating, thus helping to evaluate textbooks and students' learning results. Then Anderon and Kathwohl (2001) revised Blomm's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and changed it into two dimensions---knowledge dimension and cognitive dimension, the latter of which is divided into six levels: memorizing, comprehending, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. The specific definitions of each level are presented in Table 1. The six levels progressively increase from simple to complex.

Table 1. The Cognitive Levels of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

Cognitive Level	Definition	Keywords
Memorizing	Recognize and recall facts, terminology, and basic concepts.	recognize, identify, recall
Comprehending	Explain or restate information, demonstrating a basic understanding of the material.	explain, restate, exemplify, compare, classify, summarize, infer
Applying	Apply learned knowledge to new contexts and solve practical problems.	apply, solve problems, use
Analyzing	Break down the material into its constituent parts, understanding the relationships and organizational structure.	distinguish, outline, deconstruct
Evaluating	Make judgments about the material and provide assessments, involving value judgments.	check, critique, judge
Creating	Integrate knowledge and create new products or solutions.	create, plan, produce, design

From the deep learning perspective, students perceive knowledge differently across various activities. More specifically, the activities solely involving memorizing and comprehending are correlated to surface learning whereas those containing applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating are associated with deep learning (see Table 1). Memory and comprehension of learning materials are prerequisites of deep learning. Hence Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive objectives requires that the teaching content and process should progress hierarchically from learning and comprehension, applying and practicing, transferring and creating, which are also the core of the activity-based approach to English learning.

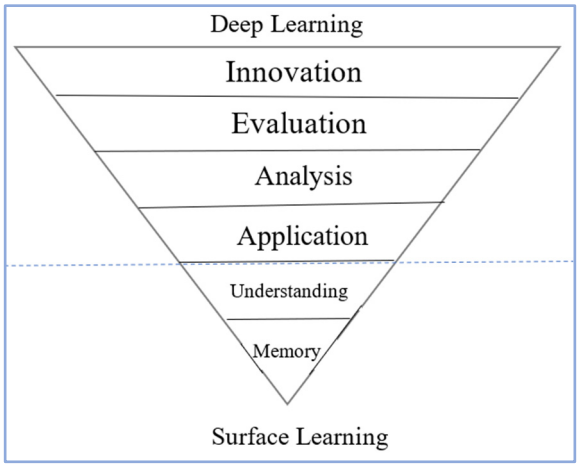


Fig 1. The Relationship between the Six Levels in the Cognitive Domain of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and Deep Learning

4. Research Design

4.1. Research Object

The object of this study is the activities on the *senior English Textbook Required Course One* published by FLTRP (2019 Edition). The textbook is a newly revised edition that aligns with the *General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition)* and it was published and then put into use in 2019. The textbook comprises six units, each of which can be subdivided into five modules: Starting Out, Understanding Ideas, Using Language, Developing Ideas, and Presenting Ideas within the student's book. Each module consists of several activities, incorporating both textual and non-textual, multimodal discourses.

At a macro level, each unit presents a coherent unit content and a profound theme. More importantly, the five modules within each unit are ideas-centered and reflect the progression of thinking development at various stages. The modular arrangement facilitates the implementation of in-depth teaching. At a micro level, the activities and discourses within each module are sequentially related and progressively more complex and comprehensive, which is conducive to advancing students' learning from surface to deep levels.

4.2. Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to analyze how the activities within the aforementioned textbook facilitate students' deep learning and how teachers can optimize the utilization of the textbook to promote students' deep learning. Consequently, the study primarily addresses the following questions:

1) What cognitive levels are included in the *senior English Textbook Required Course One* of FLTRP (2019 Edition)?

2) What are the characteristics of the deep learning activities in the textbook?

3) How do teachers promote students' deep learning when utilizing the textbook?

4.3. Research Methods

The main research method of this study is qualitative descriptive analysis. To answer the above research questions, content analysis is adopted to identify the levels of activities based on the cognitive domain of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. With the classification and statistical

data of activities, the characteristics of the activities suitable for deep learning will be concluded.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Analysis of Activities in the Cognitive Domain

Based on the revised Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, all the activities in the *senior English Textbook Required Course One* of FLTRP (2019 Edition) are analyzed and categorized into six levels in the cognitive domain. Since the instructional language of the activities may not reveal their cognitive levels directly, the levels of activities are categorized by analyzing the instructional language, content, and objectives of the target activities. The analysis is carried out from macro and micro perspectives: the textbook as a whole and individual unit modules.

5.1.1. Macro Perspective

According to the results of data statistics, there are 196 activities in the textbook and the proportion of activities in the cognitive domain is shown in Figure

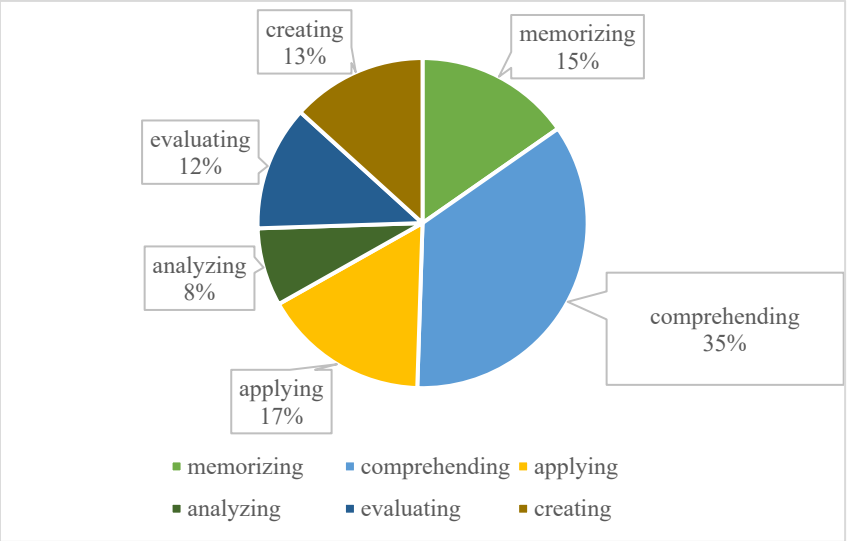


Fig 2. The Proportion of Activities in the Cognitive Domain

As is shown, all the levels of activities are involved in the targeted textbook. Among them, the activity at the level of understanding accounts for the largest proportion (35%), followed by the level of applying (17%) and memorizing (15%). The smallest percentage is for activities at the level of analyzing (8%) and creating (13%).

The distribution of activities highlights the importance of understanding activities. For one thing, the statistics indicate that the textbook places significant emphasis on fostering students' ability to comprehend and apply new knowledge in diverse contexts. For another thing, deep learning is predicated upon understanding (He & Li, 2005). Thus, the layout of activities in the textbook establishes a robust foundation for deep learning.

Additionally, the distribution of activities indicates an equal emphasis on both surface and deep learning tasks. According to the revised Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, memorizing and understanding are associated with surface learning, while applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating are linked to deep learning. As depicted in the figure, there is a relatively even distribution of activities between surface and deep learning, striking a balance.

5.1.2. Micro Perspective

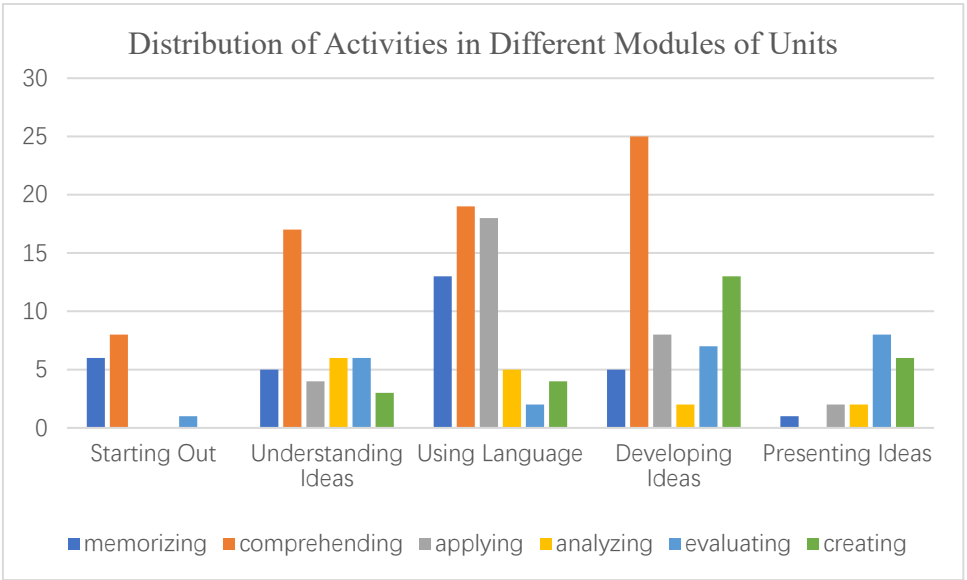


Fig 3. Distribution of Activities in Different Modules of Units

The structure of the senior English Textbooks published by FLTRP (2019 Edition) is centered around ideas. Every unit is organized in the following sequence: Starting Out, Understanding Ideas, Using Language, Developing Ideas, and Presenting Ideas. The layout facilitates the cultivation of students' core competencies in the English subject and contributes to training their thinking from lower to higher orders. Within a unit, the activities in different modules serve distinct functions and play varying roles in advancing deep learning. The distribution of activities across various modules within units is illustrated in the subsequent figure.

As is shown in Figure 3, the activities in different modules are uneven, revealing distinct trends. For example, the "Starting Out" module mostly involves activities at the level of memorizing and comprehending, which means the function of this part is to lead in the unit topic and it needn't take too much time. Conversely, the activities in "Understanding Ideas" "Using Language" and "Developing Ideas" are relatively comprehensive for students' cognitive thinking training, covering all six cognitive levels. Nevertheless, the distribution of activity design in the three modules implies a degree of diversity. Firstly, the proportion of activities at the understanding levels in "Understanding Ideas" is notably higher than in "Using Language" and "Developing Ideas", suggesting the activity design in the "Understanding Ideas" part places greater emphasis on surface learning. Secondly, compared with the applying activities and creating activities in the "Understanding Ideas" module, their counterparts in the "Using Language" and "Developing Ideas" account for a larger proportion. This shows a gradual transition from surface to deep learning as students engage with the unit topic. Lastly, in the "Presenting Ideas" module, activities are mainly clustered at the evaluating and creating levels hence the phase is characterized by a dominance of deep learning.

In conclusion, on the one hand, the activities in "Understanding Ideas" "Using Language" and "Developing Ideas" are comprehensive and diverse. The activity focus in the cognitive domain progressively transitions from understanding to applying and creating, signifying a shift in learning depth from surface to deep. On the other hand, the activities in the modules "Starting Out" and "Presenting Ideas" exhibit opposite trends.

5.2. Characteristics of Deep Learning Activities in the Textbook

5.2.1. Integration of Activity

The integration of activities entails that each deep learning task incorporates multiple cognitive levels. For instance, the following Activity 7 instructs students to compose an ending for a story titled 'After Twenty Years' based on a provided scenario and five guiding questions.

Activity 7: *Come up with your own ending to Jimmy and Bob's story, twenty years after Bob was arrested. Answer the questions to help you.*

1. What type of ending will it be?

2. Do you want to introduce other characters in the ending? If so, who are they?

3. Where will the ending take place?

4. What has happened to Bob and Jimmy over the past twenty years?

5. How will the story end?

To answer these questions and come up with their endings, students must first understand the plot and recall the characters and other pertinent details. This process involves surface learning. Then students need to apply the newly learned language, writing ideas, and other knowledge to analyze the connection between the ending and the whole story. Besides, the act of constructing an ending also involves assessing the characters and creating an ending of the story. Consequently, deep learning activities, in comparison to surface learning activities, are typically more holistic, integrating more cognitive levels.

5.2.2. Contextualization of Activities

Cui (2021) asserts that deep learning aimed at fostering core competencies should be grounded in authentic contexts. In other words, the activity and task should connect with the real world and assist students in developing the capacity to solve real-world problems. Numerous activity designs in the targeted textbook present contextual relevance. For instance, there is an activity design in the "presenting ideas" module in unit one. Here is its instructional language:

"Imagine you are a member of your class committee. Think about the changes you would suggest to the head teacher to improve your school. Give your reasons."

The activity provides an authentic context closely related to students' lives. Meanwhile, the problem mentioned in the activity mirrors those that students might encounter in their school life. As such, activities rooted in real-world contexts stimulate active deep thinking among students. However, owing to constraints on space, a detailed analysis of numerous other similar activity designs in the textbook is not included herein.

5.2.3. Participatory Nature of Activities

Deep learning is characterized by being active, inquisitive, and comprehensible (Guo, 2018). Hence it necessitates high levels of cognitive and emotional engagement in various organizational formats. Engaging in pair or group work facilitates enhanced engagement and motivation. It is common to find activities in the textbook designed for multiple participants, with instructional language often incorporating terms like "discussing," "debating," and "role-play." These activities are highly interactive, enabling students to articulate their thoughts and avoid mechanical and repetitive learning.

In addition to these attributes, the textbook's deep learning activities possess further characteristics, such as practicality and interdisciplinary elements. A grasp of these characteristics aids teachers in accurately identifying the nature of activities and designing deep learning activities while analyzing textbooks.

5.3. Suggestions for Promoting Deep Learning by Using the Textbook

5.3.1. To Balance Surface and Deep Learning Activities

Educators are encouraged to strike a balance between surface learning and deep learning activities. Firstly, as depicted in Figure 2, the English textbook encompasses a range of activities across various cognitive levels to achieve numerous specific teaching objectives. Thus, educators must adeptly grasp the definitions and characteristics of activities at all cognitive levels. Secondly, among these, understanding activities predominate. While comprehension is foundational to deep learning, these activities should extend beyond superficial meanings and direct students towards exploring deeper implications. Thirdly, educators should tailor the

proportion of surface learning and deep learning activities according to students' cognitive and affective capabilities.

5.3.2. To Design Interdisciplinary Activities

As deep learning activities are comprehensive, involving much higher-order thinking and knowledge in various disciplines, teachers should design activities that prompt students to explore and integrate knowledge from other fields with English. For example, after studying Unit Five of the targeted textbook, a series of activities could be designed to encourage students to compose scientific reports. Besides, enough attention should be devoted to the projects of each unit, which are mostly interdisciplinary. These projects can be used to promote and evaluate students' deep learning in a unit.

5.3.3. To Implement Personalized and Differentiated Teaching

On the one hand, teachers should provide personalized learning paths and activities tailored to each student's interests and abilities, ensuring that every student engages in deep learning at an appropriate level for them. On the other hand, they should design activities of varying difficulty and types, which enables teachers to accommodate the diverse needs of students, ensuring that every student progresses through challenges.

In summary, teachers are suggested to discern the cognitive levels of activities and balance them in actual teaching, progressively steering towards deep learning. Apart from the activities designed in textbooks, teachers are expected to design interdisciplinary activities to promote the comprehensive development of students and implement personalized and differentiated teaching to help each student achieve deeper learning.

6. Conclusion

Analyzing textbook activities from a deep learning perspective facilitates teachers to identify the features of different activities and better utilize textbooks to promote deep learning among students. Based on a descriptive analysis of the activity design in the *Senior English Textbook Required Course One* by FLTRP (2019 Edition), three conclusions are drawn. Firstly, the targeted textbook includes all cognitive levels, and there is a relatively balanced distribution of activities between surface and deep learning. Secondly, deep learning activities are comprehensive, contextual, and interactive. Finally, to promote deep learning, teachers are advised to balance different levels of activities in the textbook, design interdisciplinary activities, and implement personalized and differentiated teaching.

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