

# Designing Classroom Activities for Senior English Reading: A Case Study from a High School in China

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## Abstract

Reading class is one of the basic courses of English teaching, and activity design is an important tool for improving students' reading competence. *The New English Curriculum* highlights the subjectivity and initiative of students in English reading classes, so the design of activities in senior English reading class should be student-centered and achieve full advantage of these activities to improve students' reading ability. This study aims to investigate the status quo of activity design in senior English reading class, to explore the problems existing in the teachers' activity design, and to provide suggestions for effective reading activity design. This study, conducted at Jiangsu Province Zhenjiang No.1 High School, China, targeted ten teachers and fifty students from grade ten through questionnaires and interviews, and thirty classes were observed. Based on analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data, to effectively design reading activities and to promote the efficiency of English reading teaching, this research suggests a layered design of activities aimed at enhancing classroom participation and improving students' overall reading competence in English. This research offers insights into designing activities for senior English reading classes, emphasizing that each stage of reading requires activities tailored to its specific objectives. However, the limited number of participants in the study may impact the generalizability of the findings. In the future study, the targeted participants could be enlarged to increase the variety of data sources.

**Keywords:** English reading, classroom activity, educational design

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Reading and Classroom Activity

Day and Bamford (1998) define reading as “the construction of meaning from a printed or written message.” For educators, reading is a process including such areas as decoding, comprehension, word recognition (Castles, Rastle & Nation, 2018). Chall (1983) proposes six stages of reading, including pre-reading, initial reading, confirmation, fluency, ungluing from print, reading for learning the new, multiple viewpoints, and construction and reconstruction. Subsequently, Maryanne (2008) puts forward her view of the five stages of reading development, including emerging pre-reader, novice reader, decoding reader, fluent, comprehending reader, and expert reader. Willis (1996) divides activities in a task-based learning lesson into three stages, including pre-task, task-cycle, and language focus. In this study, the division proposed by Hedge is adopted: the three stages of a reading class are pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading (Hedge, 2002).

There is a prevailing belief that classroom activities are the foundation of a reading class (Wang, 2000). Brown (1994) defines classroom activity as a task that learners can use the target language to express their own opinions after understanding and internalizing what they have learned. Harmer (2000) holds that classroom activity is a comparatively general term, which often involves all the actions happening in the class, ranging from listening to the audio to writing. Nunan (2000) claims that classroom activity is an instrument to complete teaching objectives. Based on the above definitions, it can be concluded that classroom activity is considered as a method to complete certain tasks among students or between a teacher and students by using target language.

### 1.2 Theoretical Basis of Activity Design

The principles of activity design are, in large part, influenced by the following two theories: The Input Hypothesis and Humanistic Education. The Input Hypothesis is first proposed and discussed by Stephen D. Krashen. Krashen (1985) stipulates that comprehensible input is of great importance to second language learning

and language input should be “i+1”, in which “i” represents the current language proficiency of a learner and “i+1” is the proficiency achievable. Based on this theory, activity design should concentrate on providing comprehensible input so that students could learn language knowledge and boost language understanding. Humanistic Education, also known as person-centered education, is an idea based on the theories of humanistic psychologists, most notably Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Hall & Carol, 1988). Humanistic psychologists claim that children have inborn desire towards knowledge, specifically those related to their own experiences. Consequently, teachers should serve as the promoter of students' learning (Carl, 1969). Based on this theory, activity design should cultivate students' interest in reading materials and help them to achieve new understanding. The Input Hypothesis and Humanistic Education are of great significance in the principles of activity design. The Input Hypothesis stresses the importance of comprehensible input and Humanistic Education advocates the interaction between a teacher and students, which offers a theoretical basis for activity design.

### *1.3 Research on Reading Approach*

The bottom-up approach highlights decoding written text into basic components, such as letters and sounds, to understand the text. Students achieve the comprehension of the text through a linear process that progresses from basic letter recognition to higher-level semantic comprehension (Alderson, 2000). In contrast, the top-down approach centers on the use of prior knowledge and context to interpret the current text. It stresses the use of background knowledge, prediction, and expectation to contribute to the interpretation of text (Aebersold & Field, 1997).

Interactive approach combines both bottom-up and top-down approaches, emphasizing active engagement and collaboration between teachers and students. According to this approach, reading instruction involves a dynamic interaction between decoding text and utilizing prior knowledge (Conley, 1992). Readers simultaneously draw on their understanding of language and context together to comprehend text. Interactive approach contributes to foster an engaging and collaborative learning environment, which boosts student participation and improves their learning outcomes. Psycholinguistic approach integrates insights from psychology and linguistics to explain how individuals comprehend text, emphasizing the role of cognitive processing in reading comprehension (Goodman and Goodman, 1982). Reading is a process with interaction and prediction, where individuals use their language skills and background knowledge to anticipate and interpret text (Goodman, 2014).

### *1.4 Related Research on Activity Design*

Concerning the study on activity design, Brown (1994) argued that classroom activities should be designed based on teaching objectives. At the same time, the diversity of activities should be taken into consideration to meet different needs of different students. Lindstromberg (2010) proposed that completing tasks while using target language is beneficial to second language acquisition. PeterGeyser (2013) indicated the specific methods and basic procedures of activity design in English classes. Among the studies on the principles of activity design, Cheng (2004) proposed that the fundamental principles of activity design are people-oriented, feasibility, diversity, and objectivity. Zhang (2010) put forward that activities should provide students with a platform to present themselves and gain confidence. Wang (2015) indicated that activities should center on the development of core competence of English discipline in senior high schools. Meanwhile, the idea that classroom activities are educational should also be taken into consideration in reading classes. Chen (2016) proposed the principles of activity design and how to interact these theories with practice, using specific case studies. To sum up, the research of activity design has highlighted the importance of classroom activities and expounded the basic principles of activity design. Nevertheless, the study on specific activities centering on different types of lessons still needs further investigation.

Regarding the study on activity design in reading class, Rumelhar (1977) claimed that interaction is of great importance in reading classes and proposed the interactive model of reading. Harmer (2000) put forward that teachers should construct information gap for the purpose of getting students involved in the reading activities. VanPatten (2016) stipulated that interactive reading activities are helpful for students to achieve new understanding of the reading materials. The research on activity design in reading class in China has gained popularity over the last few decades. Tian (2010) classified activities in a reading class into three stages, including lead-in, reading and production. Lead-in is to activate students' background knowledge and boost their interest towards the reading materials. Reading is seen as the means of acquiring language and developing reading skills, and the aim is that students could gradually improve their reading competence through activities in the reading class. Production mainly concentrates on the ability of language use through a wide range of activities like role play, debating etc. Based on this classification, different reading activities have since been

designed to serve these three stages according to their perspective teaching objectives. Furthermore, Wang (2000) claimed that reading activities design should focus on the development of students' reading skills and strategies. Another study conducted by Yin (2004) pointed out that reading activities should transform its function from imparting linguistic knowledge to developing critical thinking and innovation, thus highlighting that reading activities in senior high schools should be students-centered.

The existing body of literature review shows that activity design is of great importance in reading class and presents the widely recognized principles of activity design in English reading class. However, these studies are mostly short of empirical analysis and fail to combine the principles of activity design with case studies. In the context of the New English Curriculum, activities should be designed to develop language skills, cultivate reading strategies, raise cultural awareness, and promote critical thinking. Therefore, this research depends upon the conduct of a case study at a senior high school in Jiangsu Province and is significant to the activity design in senior high school reading teaching.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Research Design*

This study aims to analyze the current state of activity design in senior English reading classes, highlights problems, and provides recommendations for enhancement. Therefore, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively investigate classroom dynamics. In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire was designed to explore the current problems of reading activities, students' attitudes towards activity design, and their reading needs. The questionnaire is composed of ten questions (See the Appendix). In the qualitative phase, an approximately two-month classroom observation was conducted in Zhenjiang No.1 High School, China. In the course of this internship, the reading classes taught by ten various teachers and classroom performance of students were noted down for the following analysis. Meanwhile, the current problems of activity design will also be recorded. The interviews were conducted targeting ten teachers for the purpose of providing further insights into the present situation of activity design in senior English reading class. The data obtained are used to analyze the status quo of reading classes in senior high schools, the problems with activity design, and the measures about effectively design and conduct classroom activities.

### *2.2 Research Questions*

This research is designed to answer the following three questions:

- (1) What is the status quo of activity design in senior English reading class?
- (2) What are the problems with activity design in senior English reading class?
- (3) What can be done to effectively design and conduct classroom activities in order to achieve high quality teaching in reading classes of senior high schools?

### *2.3 Context and Participants*

The study was conducted at a senior high school in Jiangsu Province, China. Participated in this research were 50 students and 10 teachers from Jiangsu Province Zhenjiang No.1 High School, China. Students were selected at random from grade ten. Of the ten teachers, the ratio of men to women is two to three. They are all have at least four years of teaching and are trained to conduct effective reading activities.

### *2.4 Data Collection*

#### *2.4.1 Questionnaire*

The researcher administered the questionnaire and explained the specific meaning of each item. Students were informed that all the data collected in this questionnaire will only be used in this research and no personal information will be disclosed. Subsequently, the questionnaire was collected after students completed it and used for further analysis.

#### *2.4.2 Classroom Observation*

The researcher attended at least 30 lessons in total taught by ten English teachers in Zhenjiang No.1 High School from October to December 2021. The frequently selected reading activities and students' performance were noted down and selected for detailed analysis.

#### *2.4.3 Interview*

Ten teachers were interviewed in this research. They were informed that the interview was designed to explore the present situation of activity design in senior high schools and the measures about effectively design and

conduct classroom activities in reading classes. In the interview, questions were asked in English, and they were informed to feel free to answer these questions either in English or in Chinese. The whole processes of interviewing were audio-recorded and then the conversations were transcribed.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

It mainly provides the findings of the status quo of activity design in senior English reading class and the problems in this respect and is subdivided into three sections. The first section reports the findings on the first research question: what is the status quo of activity design in senior English reading class? The second section reports the findings on the second research question: what are the problems with activity design in senior English reading class? The third section reports the findings on the third research question: What can be done to effectively design and conduct classroom activities in order to achieve high quality teaching in reading classes of senior high schools?

#### 3.1 The Status Quo of Activity Design in Senior English High School

This section reports the status quo of activity design in senior English high schools based on data collected in the interviews. In these interviews, ten randomly selected teachers were asked the following five questions:

Question 1: What do you think of the functions of activities in a reading class?

In terms of the first question, more than half of the teachers being interviewed claimed that classroom activities are of great importance to second language teaching as they not only boost students' understanding of linguistic knowledge but also help them express opinions using target language in the class. But a few of them said that classroom activities might take the vast majority of class time and thus affecting teaching effects.

Question 2: What difficulties have you encountered when designing and conducting activities in reading classes?

With regard to the second question, eight interviewees said the group discussion is sometimes ineffective on the grounds that students in a group could be distracted by other topics or that some may take the lead while others often lose the opportunity to present themselves and gain confidence through the opinion sharing. Four teachers said sometimes the difficulty of reading activities is unlikely to fulfill the reading needs of all students. Meanwhile, nine teachers said the different reading competence of students in the same classroom could, in large part, affect the activity design because students' reading needs vary with their reading levels.

Question 3: What do you think of students' participation in classroom activities?

With respect to the third question, six interviewees said students' participation is largely influenced by the type of reading materials. Eight teachers said that familiar reading themes or appealing reading materials are more likely to motivate students' participation.

Question 4: What kind of activities do you mostly choose and why?

In view of the fourth question, six teachers favored prediction because this activity could help students concentrate on the main idea of the whole text, making the learning more purposeful and attracting. Four teachers pointed out that more often than not, they would prefer reading comprehension questions in while-reading activities as they are beneficial to students' understanding of the whole text and could improve their reading skills, ranging from scanning to skimming. Nine out of the ten interviewees said the discussion in post-reading is the most frequently used activity as it enables students work in a group and thus not only boosting their language production but also cultivating their teamwork spirit. Meanwhile, four teachers said they normally would not choose the role-play activity in many cases but it is a recommended choice if the reading material is a conversation or a dialogue.

Question 5: What role do you think does the teacher play in reading classes?

As concerns the fifth question, more than half of the interviewees agreed that they largely serve as a facilitator in reading. They pointed out the virtuous circle of a good reader, in which he enjoys the process of reading itself and is willing to read more and thus improving his reading competence, which further boosts his interest towards reading. Nine teachers said that they should serve as the instructor of reading methods because reading skills are of great importance. Eight teachers considered themselves as the designer of reading questions.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the above interviews. First, despite the importance of activities being recognized by teachers, the design and application of activities continue to be affected by a wide range of factors, ranging from students' reading competence to classroom participation, which make it difficult for teachers to design activities that would fulfill the reading needs of all students. Second, in terms of activities selections, there are still a small number of teachers who would prefer traditional tasks on account of

their cognition and understanding of activities. At last, there is a chasm between the present reading activities and the reading needs of students.

### 3.2 Problems with Activity Design in Senior English High School

This section reports the present problems attached to activity design in senior English reading class based on the data of the questionnaire.

Question 1 What percentage does the time of activities account for a reading class?

- A. 0-25%
- B. 26%-50%
- C. 51%-75%
- D. 76%-100%

Table 1. The results of Question 1

| O | N  | P   |
|---|----|-----|
| A | 6  | 12% |
| B | 24 | 48% |
| C | 15 | 30% |
| D | 5  | 10% |

Note. O stands for option. N is number. P presents percentage.

Question 2 How do you describe your interest towards current reading activities?

- A. 0-25%
- B. 26%-50%
- C. 51%-75%
- D. 76%-100%

Table 2. The results of Question 2

| O | N  | P   |
|---|----|-----|
| A | 8  | 16% |
| B | 17 | 34% |
| C | 21 | 42% |
| D | 4  | 8%  |

Table 1 shows that almost half of the students think classroom activities comprise 26%-50% of a reading class. Thirty percent of them think 51%-75% of a reading class is the time for activities. At the same time, 12% of students choose 0-25% and 10% of them choose 76%-100%. Table 2 demonstrates that the vast majority of students hold a positive attitude towards reading activities, accounting for 76%, with 34% of them choose 26%-50% and 42% of them select 51%-75%. Nevertheless, it should be noted that 16% of students are not sufficiently attracted by the present activities and the number of students who are extremely allured by classroom activities only accounts for eight percent.

Question 3 How do you view your participation in reading activities?

- A. 0-25%
- B. 26%-50%
- C. 51%-75%
- D. 76%-100%

Table 3. The results of Question 3

| O | N  | P   |
|---|----|-----|
| A | 13 | 26% |
| B | 22 | 44% |
| C | 8  | 16% |
| D | 7  | 14% |

Question 4 What factors hinder you the most from participating in reading activities?

- A. the difficulty of activities
- B. interest towards activities
- C. personality
- D. background information

Table 4. The results of Question 4

| O | N  | P   |
|---|----|-----|
| A | 13 | 26% |
| B | 10 | 20% |
| C | 17 | 34% |
| D | 10 | 20% |

As presented in Table 3, more than half of the participants think their participation in reading classes is below the medium level. Among the remaining participants, 26% of them passively participate in the activities and only 14% of them consider themselves as active participants. According to Table 4, the factor personality is chosen by 17 students and the difficulty of activities 13 students. In addition, 10 participants think interest towards activities is the factor that hinders them the most from participating in reading activities and the remaining 10 participants select background information.

Question 5 What factors impede you the most from reading comprehension?

- A. new words
- B. background
- C. grammar
- D. type of the text

Table 5. The results of Question 5

| O | N  | P   |
|---|----|-----|
| A | 9  | 18% |
| B | 12 | 24% |
| C | 11 | 22% |
| D | 18 | 36% |

Question 6 How many opportunities do you have to express your opinions in classroom activities?

- A. always
- B. often
- C. seldom
- D. none

Table 6. The results of Question 6

| O | N  | P   |
|---|----|-----|
| A | 6  | 12% |
| B | 12 | 24% |
| C | 25 | 50% |
| D | 7  | 14% |

Table 5 illustrates that 18 students think the type of reading materials hinders them the most in reading activities and 12 students choose background. At the same time, the number of students choosing new words as the factor that hinders them the most from reading comprehension are nine and the factor grammar is selected by 11 students. Table 6 reveals that half of the students think they seldom get the chance to express their opinions in classroom activities. Students often speak in activities are the double of those who always express their opinions in the class, which is 12% of the total students. In the end, seven students consider themselves do not express their opinions at all.

Question 7 What do you think are the impacts of reading activities?

- A. understanding the text
- B. developing cultural awareness
- C. fostering critical thinking
- D. training team spirit

Table 7. The results of Question 7

| O | N  | P   |
|---|----|-----|
| A | 26 | 52% |
| B | 8  | 16% |
| C | 5  | 10% |
| D | 11 | 22% |

Question 8 Which kind of activities do you prefer at the pre-reading stage?

- A. prediction
- B. setting the scene
- C. skimming
- D. learning key words and basic structures

Table 8. The results of Question 8

| O | N  | P   |
|---|----|-----|
| A | 11 | 22% |
| B | 15 | 30% |
| C | 12 | 24% |
| D | 12 | 24% |

As demonstrated in Table 7, 52% of the total fifty students think the function of activities is to understand the reading material, while eleven of them choose the effect of training team spirit. Meanwhile, eight of them select the effect of developing cultural awareness and only five of them choose the effect of fostering critical thinking. Table 8 highlights that 15 students prefer setting the scene in pre-reading section. Twenty two percent of them favor prediction. Meanwhile, the number of students choosing the activity of skimming is equal to those who choose the activity of learning key words and basic structures, each accounting for 24%.

Question 9 Which kind of activities do you prefer at the while-reading stage?

- A. reading comprehension questions
- B. understanding references

- C. making inferences
- D. explaining the key sentences intensively

Table 9. The results of Question 9

| O | N  | P   |
|---|----|-----|
| A | 14 | 28% |
| B | 9  | 18% |
| C | 16 | 32% |
| D | 11 | 22% |

Question 10 Which kind of activities do you prefer at the post-reading stage?

- A. role-play
- B. gap-filling
- C. discussion
- D. writing

Table 10. The results of Question 10

| O | N  | P   |
|---|----|-----|
| A | 19 | 38% |
| B | 6  | 12% |
| C | 21 | 42% |
| D | 4  | 8%  |

As shown in Table 9, 32% of students and 28% of them prefer the activity of making inferences and reading comprehension questions respectively. At the same time, there are 11 students who favor the activity of explaining the key sentences intensively and nine participants who choose the activity of understanding references. According to Table 10, most students favor discussion and role-play, with the number of 21 and 19 respectively. Meanwhile, only six students choose gap-filling and the remaining four students prefer writing.

Several findings could be drawn from the data collected above. In terms of the design of reading activities, there are still a couple of deficiencies. First, activities account for a low percentage of the time in teaching. Second, the input and output activities are uneven. Third, stratified teaching is seldom conducted to fulfill reading needs of students of different proficiency. In the end, activity design focuses more on text understanding and ignores the cultivation of cultural consciousness and critical thinking (Wang, 2015), which is consistent with the prior findings. In regard to students' attitudes towards reading activities, part of the problem is that some students still hold a negative attitude towards classroom activities and are mostly unwilling to participate in them. They do not actively take part in reading activities in the class, like group discussion, but choose to be passive learners who rarely express their own opinions towards the topic proposed by the teacher in group discussion. One reason for this is that it is difficult for them to be attracted by the questions proposed by reading teachers. They are consequently always shied away from public speaking, like expressing their opinions as the representative of their group. Therefore, the design of reading activities should take into consideration the actual teaching procedures of these activities so that reading teachers could be braced for all the possible conditions in the class. These conclusions were also supported by classroom observation about reading activities and students' performance.



Table 11. Widely selected pre-reading activities in reading classes

| Activity              | Teacher's activity   | Students' performance                                       |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| 1. prediction         | Guide students to predict the main idea of the text according to the title | Students showed a medium interest towards this activity     |
| 2. video-watching     | Show students a video related to the text                                  | It fired students with interest for the learning afterwards |
| 3. direct explanation | Give a direct explanation of the reading material                          | Students' attention was vaguely drawn to the activity       |
| 4. brainstorming      | Brainstorm on the topic of the reading material                            | This activity appealed to students                          |

Table 12. Widely selected while-reading activities in reading classes

| Activity                | Teacher's activity                                       | Students' performance                              |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| 1. extensive reading    | Read for the main idea of the reading material           | It was a big draw to students.                     |
| 2. intensive reading    | Read for the detailed information of the text            | Students were largely concentrated on the activity |
| 3. explaining sentences | Explain the key or difficult sentences in detail         | It failed to enthrall some students                |
| 4. linguistic knowledge | Explain the linguistic knowledge of the reading material | Some students were not attracted by this activity. |

Table 13. Widely selected post-reading activities in reading classes

| Activity         | Teacher's activity                                   | Students' performance                            |
|------------------|--|--|
| 1. discussion    | Discuss a topic associated with the reading material | This activity lured students.                    |
| 2. role-play     | Have a role-play of the conversation or dialogue     | It attracted a large percentage of the students. |
| 3. writing       | Assign related writing tasks                         | It hardly attracted the attention of students.   |
| 4. blank-filling | Design fill-in-the-blank exercises                   | Some students were distracted by other stuff     |

Table 11 to Table 13 show the widely selected activities in the three reading stages. There are some deficiencies in the activity design. First, some activities were not attractive enough for getting all students involved in the classroom activities, such as direct explanation in the pre-reading stage and writing in the post-reading stage. Second, some activities focused more on text understanding, such as linguistic knowledge. Based on the analysis of the interviews and class observation, deficiencies exist in the following three aspects: First, activities account for a low percentage of time in teaching and stratified teaching is seldom conducted to fulfill reading needs of students of different proficiency. Second, activity design fails to promote every student's enthusiasm in participation and their desire to express their opinions. Third, activity design focuses more on text understanding and ignores the cultivation of cultural consciousness and critical thinking. These findings are consistent with previous research, which highlights that traditional teaching concepts have not yet undergone a fundamental shift (Yin, 2004; Zhang, 2010), and there is a misalignment in the value of the subject (Wang, 2015).

### 3.3 The Measures about Effectively Design Classroom Activities

Following is the analysis of the interviews with 10 teachers to learn about their opinions about how to effectively design and conduct classroom activities in order to achieve high quality teaching in reading classes of senior high schools.

#### 3.3.1 Factors Influencing Activity Design in Reading Instruction

Through the synthesis of ten answers of question "What factors will you consider in terms of activity design", the factors which frequently mentioned by the ten teachers are as follows. Students' reading competence and the difficulty of tasks, in large part, affect teachers' design of reading activities. The type of reading materials will be taken into consideration when designing classroom activities. Students' interest and personality have an impressive impact on the activity design.

#### 3.3.2 Measures for Enhancing Activity Design in Reading Instruction

Through the synthesis of ten answers of question "What can be done to effectively design and conduct classroom activities to achieve high quality teaching in reading classes of senior high schools?", the measures which frequently mentioned by the ten teachers are as follows. Relevant lectures and training could prove the stepping stone to teachers' professional improvement and teachers should further their skill set and learn advanced professional theories. Teachers should take into consideration a large range of factors when designing activities. Activity design should not only focus on text understanding but also pay attention to the development of

students' all-round abilities. One of the most crucial abilities is text comprehension as it is key to enhancing the effectiveness of classroom teaching and the quality of student learning (Wang, 2015).

Based on the results of the interviews with the ten teachers, a couple of measures could contribute to conducting classroom activities effectively, which align with the previous findings (Wang, 2015; Zhang, 2010). Specific manifestations are as follows. First, reading teachers should take into consideration a wide range of factors in the process of activity design, from teaching objectives to students' reading needs. Second, teachers should also pay close attention to the development of students' cultural awareness and critical thinking. Third, it is also crucial for teachers to help students establish correct learning attitudes and let them be aware of the participation in classroom activities in order to improve their reading competence and comprehensive development.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study examines the current state of activity design in senior English reading classes, identifies issues in the designs, and offers recommendations for improvement. Major conclusions summarized from the former data are as follows: First, the proportion of activity time in reading classes is too low in some classes and the reading teacher takes lead in the whole class, to the neglect of students' participation and agent in the reading activities. Besides, those activities are not suitable for most students for the design of these activities and tasks falls short of layering and diversity. As a result, the reading activities are less likely to fulfill all students' reading needs. Second, teachers should concentrate more on the teaching of linguistic knowledge, to the neglect of the development of students' cultural awareness, critical thinking, and team cooperation. Third, a number of students fail to fully devote themselves into the process of activities, which is detrimental to the classroom participation. Part of the problem is that some students hold a negative attitude towards classroom activities and are unwilling to participate in these activities.

From the perspective of pedagogical implications, this research provides insights into activity design in senior English reading class. The activities designed in each stage of reading should take into consideration different objectives of each stage. Pre-reading activities are tasks that students need to complete before reading the full reading material in detail. The purpose of this stage is to arouse students' interest towards reading materials and to make the following activities easier for them. As a result, activities at this stage should be informative as well as attractive. Meanwhile, activities before reading should be of appropriate difficulty in order to ensure students could keep up with the pace of teaching. While-reading activities are tasks that students should finish in the process of reading the full text adequately in order to grasp the main idea and details of the text. While-reading activities are one of the most crucial parts in the whole teaching process as it is directly related to students' understanding of the whole text and thus affecting their production afterwards. Common while-reading activities consist of reading comprehension questions, understanding references, making inferences, and explaining the key sentences intensively. It should be mentioned that these activities do not all need to be carried out. What need to be done by teachers is to select appropriate activities according to the students and reading materials. Post-reading activities are perceived as tasks to be fulfilled by students after the detailed reading with the aim of having a check of the fulfillment of the reading tasks and applying what they have learned by using target language. It would be better if students could integrate reading with other skills, like writing or listening in this section. Therefore, activities at this stage should provide students with the platform to connect what they have learned in the class to existing knowledge.

Several limitations impose restrictions on the extent to which the results of this research can be generalized. For one thing, the research was conducted only in Jiangsu Province Zhenjiang No.1 High School and targeted a limited number of participants, which wreaked havoc on the accuracy and reliability of the data collected. For another thing, classroom observation was subjective, may even with subconscious assumptions, and fell short of objectivity. Research on activity design in senior English reading classes still needs to be further developed. First, the targeted participants could be enlarged so that the data sources will be multiple. Second, classroom observation could be conducted by several researchers at the same time for the purpose of objectivity. In the end, influencing factors and variables, like the various economic development of areas, should be considered.

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#### **Authors' contributions**

Bo Zhao was responsible for study design, writing and revising. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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## Appendix A

### Investigation into Activity Design in Senior English Reading Class

Dear students,

Thank you all for taking the time to complete this questionnaire centering on classroom activities. The purpose of this questionnaire is to explore the status quo of activities and the problems attached to the design of them. All the data collected in this questionnaire will only be used in this research and no personal information will be disclosed. Thank you for your participation!

1.What percentage does the time of activities account for a reading class?

- A. 0-25%
- B. 26%-50%
- C. 51%-75%
- D. 76%-100%

2.How do you describe your interest towards current reading activities on a scale of one to ten?

- A. 0-25%
- B. 26%-50%
- C. 51%-75%
- D. 76%-100%

3.How do you view your participation in reading activities on a scale of one to ten?

- A. 0-25%
- B. 26%-50%
- C. 51%-75%
- D. 76%-100%

4.What factors hinder you the most from participating in reading activities?

- A. the difficulty of activities
- B. interest towards activities

- C. personality  
D. background information
5. What factor impede you the most from reading comprehension?
- A. new words  
B. background  
C. grammar  
D. type of the text
6. How many opportunities do you have to express your opinions in classroom activities?
- A. always  
B. often  
C. seldom  
D. none
7. What do you think are the impacts of reading activities?
- A. understanding the text  
B. developing cultural awareness  
C. fostering critical thinking  
D. training team spirit
8. Which kind of activities do you prefer in pre-reading stage?
- A. prediction  
B. setting the scene  
C. skimming  
D. learning key words and basic structures
9. Which kind of activities do you prefer in while-reading stage?
- A. reading comprehension questions  
B. understanding references  
C. making inferences  
D. explaining the key sentences intensively
10. Which kind of activities do you prefer in post-reading stage?
- A. role-play  
B. gap-filling  
C. discussion  
D. Writing

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questions for Teachers**

- (1) What do you think of the functions of activities in a reading class?
- (2) What difficulties have you encountered when conducting activities in reading classes?
- (3) What do you think of students' participation of classroom activities?
- (4) What kind of activities do you mostly choose and why?
- (5) What role do you think does the teacher play in reading classes?
- (6) What factors will you consider in terms of activity design?
- (7) What can be done to effectively design and conduct classroom activities to achieve high quality teaching in reading classes of senior high schools?

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