

# The Impact of Theme-Based Graded Multi-Text Reading Instruction on High School Students' Reading Character

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## Abstract

This paper, taking 100 senior secondary school students in Sichuan as the research object, explores the effect of thematic meaning-based English multi-text reading teaching on reading character of senior high school students. The author uses research tools such as questionnaire survey method, test method, and interview method to conduct experimental research, attempting to answer the following research questions: 1) What is the current situation of high school students' English reading character? 2) After thematic meaning-based multi-text reading instruction, what changes have taken place in high school students' English reading habits? 3) After thematic meaning-based multi-text reading instruction, what changes have occurred in high school students' English reading experience? This study supplements existing research on multi-text reading instruction.

## Keywords

**Thematic Meaning; Graded Reading; Multi-Text Reading; Reading Literacy; Reading Character.**

## 1. Introduction

This section introduces the research background, purpose, and significance of this study, aiming to clarify its scientific and practical nature.

### 1.1. Research Background

The "Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition)" (Ministry of Education, 2018; hereinafter referred to as the "Curriculum Standards") states that English teaching aimed at students' subject core literacy should be led by thematic meaning, based on discourse, and integrate learning content such as language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies. It should create comprehensive, relevant, and practical English learning activities, guiding students to adopt independent and cooperative learning methods to participate in thematic meaning exploration activities. In these activities, students learn language knowledge, develop language skills, and absorb cultural nourishment. The new curriculum standards also emphasize the importance of cultivating students' core literacy, requiring them to gradually form correct values, essential qualities, and key abilities, including language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. Therefore, English teaching based on thematic meaning has become one of the hot topics in recent years.

Reading comprehension, as one of the important comprehension skills in language use, requires students to understand the information, viewpoints, emotions, and attitudes conveyed in the discourse. Reading is a process of interaction between thought and language, and students can develop their thinking through reading. At the same time, reading instruction can also promote the development of students' thinking quality. However, current reading instruction suffers from problems such as routinization, superficiality, fragmentation, "labeling," overemphasis on knowledge at the expense of ability, and over-reliance on memory instead of thinking, which seriously hinders the development of students' English thinking

quality.[1] The advancement of the new college entrance examination has set higher requirements for English language learners' reading comprehensive quality: the ability to understand the main idea and structure of an article, specific information within the article, the meaning of words or phrases through context, and the author's writing intentions, viewpoints, and emotional attitudes. Therefore, learners need to increase their in-class and out-of-class reading volume, expand the scope of reading topics, and come into contact with and learn multimodal forms of discourse to familiarize themselves with the specific structure, stylistic features, and expression methods of different types of discourse. This helps them deepen their understanding of the discourse, use different types of discourse for effective expression and communication, and thus cultivate good English language comprehensive quality.

Given the diversity and abundance of discourse types, "what to read?" and "how to read?" are questions that need careful consideration. English graded multi-text reading, as an innovation in English teaching methods, undoubtedly makes a positive contribution to the selection of reading discourse and teaching for learners. The concept of graded reading was proposed in European countries in the 19th century. Although the introduction of this concept in China was relatively late, after going through four stages of development, in recent years, domestic scholars have begun to gradually attempt to establish English graded reading standards. For example, Wang Qiang and Chen Zehang, editors of the "Chinese Primary and Secondary Students' English Graded Reading Standards (Experimental Draft)," proposed a "three-stage, nine-segment" English graded reading standard from the first grade to high school grades.[2] Since June 1, 2018, the "Chinese English Language Ability Scale," reviewed and approved by the National Language Committee's Language and Character Norms and Standards Review Committee, has been implemented, and corresponding test standards have been developed for the scale.

However, due to the varying levels of language quality of learners, different educational concepts of teachers in teaching English courses, and the pressure of college entrance examination for promotion, high school English language learners focus more on in-class knowledge and grammar learning. Their reading literacy is not well cultivated and exercised, and reading has become their weakness. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the impact of theme-based English graded multi-text reading instruction on learners' reading character and to summarize effective teaching implementation suggestions.

## **1.2. Research Purpose**

### **1.2.1. Improve English Learners' Reading Character and Grades**

English, as an important subject in China's quality education, plays an indispensable role in college entrance examinations and other academic assessments. Under the background of exam-oriented education, teaching mainly focuses on in-class knowledge, grammar, and exam techniques, with a slight neglect of cultivating learners' English reading literacy. As society's requirements for learners' language literacy and English grades increase, the existing teaching model can no longer meet learners' needs. For most English learners, English reading remains a persistent problem. Therefore, exploring English graded multi-text reading teaching methods to improve English learners' reading literacy and grades is very meaningful.

### **1.2.2. Explore New Pathways for English Graded Multi-Text Reading Instruction Aimed at Reading Character**

"Reading literacy" has always been a hot topic in educational research. In recent years, the emerging "graded multi-text reading" teaching has rarely been explored for its impact on learners' reading literacy. Exploring the impact of English graded multi-text reading on learners' reading literacy can help promote the reform of multi-text reading teaching models and methods. It can also help improve English learners' reading literacy and integrate it into other disciplines to promote learners' comprehensive quality development.

## 2. Literature Review

This section reviews the core concepts of "thematic meaning of discourse," "graded reading," and "graded multi-text reading." It also summarizes domestic and international research on "English graded multi-text reading" in recent years.

### 2.1. Thematic Meaning of Discourse

The Curriculum Standards advocate English teaching based on thematic meaning exploration, stating that students' exploration of thematic meaning is an important part of language learning. It directly affects their depth of discourse understanding, level of thinking development, and effectiveness of language learning. English courses should regard the exploration of thematic meaning as the core task of teaching and learning, guiding students to participate in thematic meaning exploration activities to integrate learning content and lead the development of core literacy.

In recent years, research on thematic meaning of discourse has been popular in China. Chen Xinzhou conducted an in-depth exploration of thematic meaning from four aspects: unit, title, genre, and vocabulary. [3]He pointed out that exploring the thematic meaning of discourse cannot be separated from the overall understanding of the unit. The title provides highly condensed information, which helps predict and understand the main content of the discourse. Moreover, he emphasized the special role of narrative texts in expressing thematic meaning, especially through the interweaving of six elements (time, place, characters, etc.) and explicit and implicit narrative lines to present the theme. Cheng Xiaotang believes that thematic meaning refers to the process of activating students' background knowledge and related experiences, training their active thinking, and promoting the formation and development of their emotions, attitudes, and values.[5]

### 2.2. Graded Reading

Graded reading is the provision of scientific reading methods and plans for children of different age groups based on their intellectual and psychological development levels. [5]It offers reading materials that are scientific and targeted.[7] Graded reading, also known as leveled reading, is the process of selecting and developing a series of progressive reading materials based on the developmental characteristics and cognitive thinking levels of children of different age groups to promote the development of children's reading abilities. They can experience the advantages and disadvantages of different reading strategies while learning reading skills and improving reading efficiency (Primary and Secondary School English Graded Reading Research and Guidance Center, 2015). It is challenging to find books that are particularly suitable for children's age and reading comprehension levels because there is a vast selection of books available. Children should have the opportunity to read and understand simple graded books. To scientifically and systematically classify the difficulty of English reading materials, it is necessary to comprehensively consider factors such as the total vocabulary, vocabulary frequency, sentence length, and thematic characteristics of the reading materials. When determining whether graded reading materials are suitable for readers, their age and cognitive abilities should also be taken into account. English graded reading refers to the sequential selection of English books for readers based on the characteristics of the psychological and physiological development and cognitive thinking levels of children and adolescents of different age groups. This process aims to promote and enhance the reading abilities, reading habits, character, and values of young people, enabling them to master reading skills while experiencing reading. Extensive reading input refers to students reading a large number of vivid and authentic reading materials.[7] In this study, incremental reading refers to the reading of graded English reading materials by students in action classes to increase their

actual out-of-class reading volume. Graded reading in this study refers to out-of-class English reading completed by students based on their actual reading abilities and interests.

### **2.3. Graded Multi-Text Reading**

Graded multi-text reading is a significant innovation in reading instruction methods. It is a specific implementation method for exploring innovative education in the new century. In the implementation process, it not only cultivates students' learning abilities but also enhances their innovation capabilities.[8] This innovative teaching concept originated from a scientific analysis of children's development. Children at different growth stages have completely different reading natures and abilities. The emergence of English multi-text reading is based on a comprehensive consideration of readers' English levels, mental maturity, and interests. By carefully compiling a collection of articles of the same type or topic, readers can select suitable reading materials according to their personal situations. This method aims to guide readers to gradually improve their English reading abilities through progressive reading. In fact, English graded multi-text reading integrates two core concepts: First, English graded reading, which customizes a scientific reading plan based on the psychological and physiological characteristics of children at different growth stages, ensuring the effectiveness and targeting of reading materials; second, English multi-text reading instruction, also known as English multi-text reading, refers to a reading instruction model in which teachers and students select reading materials around specific themes or several related themes. Within a limited time, through a combination of individual reading and group cooperation, they conduct in-depth reading, discussion, and ultimately reach a consensus.

Theme-based English multi-text reading instruction refers to the process of setting a theme-based topic based on the theme context corresponding to a single main reading text, in accordance with the principles of textbook compilation. Teachers then select multiple extended texts around this topic and design a series of language learning activities in the order of the constructed topic. This guides students to explore the theme's meaning while paying attention to the structure, style, and language features of the texts. As a result, students acquire language knowledge, absorb cultural nourishment, enhance their thinking quality, develop learning abilities, and promote deep learning.[9]The main focus of this study is theme-based English multi-text reading instruction.

### **2.4. Domestic and International Research Reviews on Graded Multi-Text Reading**

#### **2.4.1. Domestic Research Review**

The concept of English graded multi-text reading was introduced relatively late in China. Its development process can be divided into four stages: The first stage began in the 1990s when domestic professional foreign language publishers introduced a batch of graded readers. These were then graded by language difficulty by foreign language professionals based on their expertise. Although the scope was relatively niche, this initiated the practice of English grading in China. The second stage began in the 21st century with the introduction of the "English Curriculum Standards," which stipulated that high school students should achieve an out-of-class reading volume of over 360,000 words in addition to textbooks by graduation. This was the first time that requirements for English reading volume were included in the teaching syllabus, and China's English graded multi-text reading began to be encouraged at the national level. The third stage saw a surge in the popularity of English learning in China over the past decade, which greatly propelled the development of English graded reading. During this period, a large number of advanced foreign graded reading concepts, standards, and materials were introduced. The popularity of advanced ideas in developed regions, various market players, and online social media significantly advanced the practice of English graded reading. The fourth

stage began in recent years when domestic scholars started to attempt to establish English graded reading standards. For example, Wang Qiang and Chen Zehang edited the "Chinese Primary and Secondary Students' English Graded Reading Standards (Experimental Draft)," which proposed a "three-stage, nine-segment" English graded reading standard from the first grade to high school grades. Since June 1, 2018, the "Chinese English Language Ability Scale," reviewed and approved by the National Language Committee's Language and Character Norms and Standards Review Committee, has been implemented, and corresponding test standards have been developed for the scale.

Given that English graded multi-text reading is an emerging English teaching strategy, its emergence coincides with the needs and development direction of China's education system. However, this teaching model is still in its infancy and can even be said to be in the initial stage of exploration. Therefore, it inevitably encounters many challenges and problems in exploration and practice. At the same time, although some experts and scholars have begun to study this field, the research results are still scarce, and its application scope and practicality are relatively limited.

This paper aims to explore and verify the positive impact of English graded multi-text teaching on improving language learners' English reading character through practical high school English teaching cases. Through feedback from actual teaching and data analysis, we firmly believe that this teaching model can effectively promote a leap in students' English reading literacy and lay a solid foundation for their future English learning. Therefore, despite many challenges, English graded multi-text reading undoubtedly opens up a new path worth exploring for innovation in China's English education.

#### **2.4.2. International Research Review**

Since William McGuffey first established a set of graded reading standards and compiled corresponding graded reading materials in 1836, the concept of graded reading has gained widespread recognition and dissemination. With the deepening of research on graded reading concepts, a variety of graded reading standard systems have emerged. After a century of evolution, these systems have gradually matured and diversified. Among them, the Lexile Measures (LM), Guided Reading Levels (GR), Developmental Reading Assessment Levels (DRA), and Grade Level Equivalents (GLE) have become the most popular and widely used grading standards.

These grading systems, either developed by authoritative experts or created by professional institutions, follow similar construction principles. They establish scientific grading standards based on factors such as vocabulary volume, sentence complexity, text characteristics, and illustration quality. Each system forms a complete theoretical framework, aiming to provide clear grading information for readers. Through meticulous grading, each book is assigned a precise level label, and even the same book may be labeled with multiple levels according to different grading systems, along with detailed grading explanations. This greatly facilitates readers in selecting the most suitable reading materials according to their reading abilities and interests, thereby more efficiently improving their reading levels.

Looking at these developmental stages, the development of English graded multi-text reading in China follows a similar trajectory to that in Western countries, both guided by educational concepts (such as curriculum standards) for practical exploration. Currently, although China has produced a number of high-quality graded multi-text reading materials, it is still in the initial stage of exploration and gradual promotion. How to transcend geographical boundaries and establish grading standards suitable for the reading abilities of most students remains a topic for continuous exploration.[11] Therefore, researchers should start from the needs of students, learn from foreign mature experiences, and carry out solid research to quickly build

a graded multi-text reading teaching system that is in line with Chinese cultural characteristics, clear and feasible, and effective.

### 3. Research Design

This section introduces the research subjects, research questions, research process, and research tools used in this study to give readers a general understanding of the research design.

#### 3.1. Research Questions

This study primarily investigates the following three questions:

- 1) What is the current situation of high school students' English reading character?
- 2) After theme-based multi-text reading instruction, what changes have occurred in high school students' English reading habits?
- 3) After theme-based multi-text reading instruction, what changes have occurred in high school students' English reading experience?

#### 3.2. Research Subjects

This study selected 100 students from two classes (Class A and Class B) of Grade 1 in a high school. To ensure the validity of the data obtained from the experiment, both classes were from liberal arts classes, were at the same level, and were taught by the same teacher. Before the experiment, the two classes were divided into the experimental class (Class A) and the control class (Class B). The gender ratio and number of students in the experimental and control classes were the same. The experimental period lasted for one semester, with each class having nine English class hours per week. While ensuring that the school's English curriculum schedule was met, the experimental class conducted English graded multi-text reading instruction during the two consecutive evening tutorial class hours on Thursdays. The control class followed the normal curriculum arrangement for teaching activities.

#### 3.3. Research Methods and Tools

##### 3.3.1. Questionnaire Survey Method

To better understand the current situation of high school students' English reading character, a questionnaire survey was conducted for both classes before the experiment. The questionnaire consisted of 36 questions, mainly covering aspects such as English reading attitudes, motivations, habits, strategies, and self-assessment. The questionnaire used in this study was designed by Wu Aijiao in 2016.[10] After conducting reliability and validity analyses with the test papers, the results showed that the reliability coefficients were all above 0.8, indicating strong internal consistency and high reliability of the test papers and questionnaires.

##### 3.3.2. Testing

The pre-test and post-test used the same set of test papers (Appendix 2), which were carefully prepared by the teaching research team based on the English curriculum standards and had high reliability, validity, and differentiation.[12]The test method was a closed-book exam. The test time, question types, and scores were exactly the same for both tests, but the order of the options in the questions was different for the pre-test and post-test. Both tests included 15 multiple-choice questions that could assess students' reading abilities, such as understanding details, summarizing main ideas, making inferences, and guessing the meanings of words and phrases.

##### 3.3.3. Interview Method

After the test, to better understand the implementation effects of the English graded multi-text reading instruction research from the perspectives of teachers and students, 20 students were

randomly selected from the experimental class for semi-structured interviews (Appendix 3) with the cooperation of the head teacher.

### 3.4. Research Process

To understand the current situation of high school students' English reading character, both the experimental and control classes completed the "High School Students' English Reading Character Status Survey" and the "English Reading Ability Test Paper" before the experiment. The experimental period lasted for one semester, with each class having nine English class hours per week. While ensuring that the school's English curriculum schedule was met, the experimental class conducted English graded multi-text reading instruction during the two consecutive evening tutorial class hours on Thursdays. The control class followed the normal curriculum arrangement for teaching activities.

Regardless of the text combination, English multi-text reading discourse under the guidance of thematic meaning should reflect relevance, progression, and complementarity as much as possible. Teachers should first interpret the in-class discourse to locate the theme and then find suitable discourses under different combinations based on the theme. After that, they should determine the topics for discussion between teachers and students and finally adapt or reduce the text content according to the created topics.

In the current textbooks, most units' materials are "natural multi-texts," and the unit themes can provide the scope or context for multi-text reading. Unit multi-text reading aims at theme expression, which means playing the teaching value of multi-text reading in unit-based teaching. This helps students deeply understand the unit theme and enhance their ability to express the unit theme content. Multi-text reading and writing integration is based on a variety of processes and skills and is influenced by factors such as the reader, the text, and the reading and writing tasks[13].

After completing one semester of experimental teaching, the students in the experimental and control classes took the "English Reading Ability Test Paper" again with the options shuffled. After the test, 20 students were randomly selected from the experimental class for interviews. After collecting all the data, Excel and SPSS 26.0 statistical software were used for analysis and discussion.

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## Appendix

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Interview Date: [Date]
2. Interview Location: School Teacher's Office
3. Interview Purpose: To understand students' feelings after learning graded reading and their views on graded reading instruction.
4. Interview Questions:
  - Has the introduction of graded reading into the classroom helped your English learning?
  - What impact do you think graded reading instruction has had on your reading level?
  - What problems have you encountered in graded reading learning?
  - Do you have any good suggestions for the current graded reading instruction by teachers?