

An Experimental Study on the Influence of Classroom Graded Reading on English Ability of High-grade Primary School Students

Gan Xiaolan*, Liu Ying

College of foreign languages, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering

519 Huixing Road, Ziliujing District, Zigong City, Sichuan Province, China. College of foreign languages, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering

***Corresponding Author:** Gan Xiaolan, College of foreign languages, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to explore whether graded reading in the classroom can effectively help high-grade primary school students improve their English proficiency, especially their English reading proficiency, under the guidance of the 2022 edition of the New Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education. Through the SPSS analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire, it is found that the 9-week class graded reading has no significant effect on the improvement of primary school students' English abilities, but has a great effect on the improvement of reading confidence, reading cognition and creative divergent thinking of high-grade primary school students

Keywords: graded reading; reading ability; high-grade primary school students

1. INTRODUCTION

Compulsory Education English Curriculum (2022 Edition) (referred to as the New Curriculum Standard) has significantly improved the understanding requirements of English reading ability. First of all, the new curriculum standard requires students in grades five to six to use 500 words initially [1], which is added 100 words compared with the compulsory English curriculum (2011 edition) (referred to as the old curriculum standard for short). In addition, students are required to learn the 3 level vocabulary, which is about 100 to 300 words within the relevant attention range according to the actual situation. Secondly, the old curriculum standard only requires students to "understand the logical relationship between sentences in paragraphs", but in the new curriculum standard, it becomes "to understand the explicit or implicit logical relationship in discourse" and "to understand the meaning conveyed by non-literal resources in multimodal discourse". Finally, the new curriculum standard also requires that the viewpoint of the article, the attitude of the article and the structure of the whole text should be understood so as to improve the overall logical level. It can be seen that the new English curriculum standard requires higher reading vocabulary, more difficult reading and pays more attention to the practical application ability of reading.

Graded reading has been used to cultivate students' English reading ability for nearly one hundred years. As early as 1836, American educator William McGuffey published the first set of graded reading. [2] However, the research on graded reading in China started late. In 2008, the concept of graded reading was introduced in China. [3] In 2011, Wang Qiang launched the national project of developing a graded English reading system for primary and secondary schools in China. In 2015, Wang Qiang put forward the theoretical and practical exploration of improving primary school students' English reading literacy-based on the research of the "Twelfth Five-Year Plan" of national educational science. [4] and also did other practical research on English graded reading materials in primary and secondary school English classrooms. In 2016, Wang Qiang Chen Zehang compiled and published English graded reading for primary and secondary school students in China (experimental draft), which proposed the English graded reading of "three steps and nine paragraphs" "from the first

grade of primary school to the high school grade and the corresponding relationship with grades". [2] The research on graded reading by Wang Qiang and others is a beneficial attempt to establish graded reading in China. However, there is still a big gap between the concrete implementation of graded reading and the new curriculum standard under the premise of exam-oriented education, especially for primary school English in remote districts and counties, which is difficult to meet the requirements. More practice is needed to prove the practicality and feasibility of graded reading. Therefore, this study attempts to use graded reading materials as supplementary reading materials for high-grade primary school students, and adopts picture tour method [5] and story map method [6] to implement graded reading teaching in QSL fifth grade primary school in PS County. Through a 9-week teaching control experiment, this study verifies whether graded reading has a significant impact on improving English proficiency, especially English reading proficiency of high-grade primary school students. Finally, through a questionnaire survey, it is verified whether graded reading in class is helpful to improve the reading interest of high-grade primary school students.

2. STUDY DESIGN

2.1. Study Problems

This study is mainly to discuss three questions:

- a. Does classroom graded reading have any influence on the English language knowledge level of high-grade primary school students?
- b. Does classroom graded reading have any influence on English reading comprehension ability of high-grade primary school students?
- c. Does graded reading have any influence on the cognitive and creative divergence of English reading of high-grade primary school students?

2.2. Study Object

Two homogeneous classes in Grade 5 of QSL Primary School in PS County, Sichuan Province are taken as the research objects, in which Class 2 of Grade 5 is the experimental class and Class 4 of Grade 5 is the control class. The two classes have the same teacher, the number of students is the same (both 50 students), the ratio of male to female is similar (the ratio of experimental class is male: 37.04%, female: 62.96%. The ratio of control class is male: 36.88%, female: 63.12%), and the academic level is equivalent too. (the average number of experimental class is 74, and the control class is 74.6)

Table1. Basic situation of research object

class	number of students	male-female ratio	academic level
experimental	50	male:37.04% female: 62.96%	74
control class	50	male:36.88% female:63.12%	74.6

2.3. Graded Reading Material

The ratio of students' vocabulary recognition and reading comprehension can help teachers determine the reading difficulty of reading materials. If students can correctly recognize more than 95% of vocabulary and understand more than 75% of content, this material can be used in classroom teaching. [7] According to the reading requirements of the new curriculum standard for primary school students from Grade 5 to Grade 6 (Grade 2+) and comparing with the graded reading materials with Lansis Index of 200-300L, this study chooses *Oxford Reading Tree* 4-5 level as experimental reading materials.

2.4. Experimental Teaching Procedures

This study adopts the picture tour method and story map method suggested by Wang Qiang's team as the teaching of graded reading in class. In the picture tour method, teachers "interpret text stories into life stories" [8] Guided by problems, guide students to actively observe, predict, imagine and think through cover illustrations, find problems and solve problems in constant speculation and reading, and cultivate their critical and divergent thinking. The specific teaching steps are shown in Figure 1.

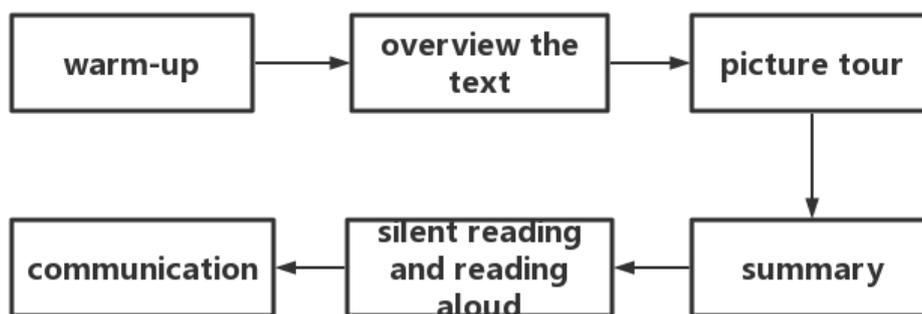


Figure1. Basic steps of picture tour

As shown in Figure 1: (1) warm-up, teachers use songs, pictures, videos and other teaching aids to lead to the theme of reading materials to activate students' existing knowledge and reading interest. (2) Overview the text, teachers guide students to know the main background of the title author, cultivate students' conceptual awareness of the text, and enhance their overall perception of the theme and content of the picture book. (3) Picture tour, teachers ask questions from the students themselves according to the observation and prediction of picture information. (4) Summary, teachers sort out the flow chart to help students summarize the main idea of the article and deepen their understanding of internalized language. (5) Silent reading and reading aloud, through silent reading and reading activities, students can be provided with a complete and rich reading experience to improve their reading fluency. (6) Communication, this is a more demanding step. You can try to do it for students who have completed the previous steps. It is mainly to create different contexts to encourage students to creatively express their feelings about the story, evaluate the characters of the story, continue to write the ending of the story, or try to innovate reading the story to promote the transfer and innovation of language use.

The rule of story map means that teachers form the corresponding visual schema according to the conceptual schema or story grammar generally followed by story reading materials. Students learn to read stories, understand stories and create stories by using story maps to discover and sort out the structure and general idea of stories in reading, so as to cultivate students' independent reading ability. The specific teaching steps are as follows: (1) Summarize and arrange the main roles of the main events in the story in chronological order; (2) Put the general idea of the story in the center of the story map; (3) Draw lines around the main idea of the story to connect the main events and roles; (4) Add minor events and topics around major events and roles.

2.5. Procedure of Questionnaire Survey

After the experiment, a questionnaire was made for the influence of graded reading on the students in the experimental class. The questionnaire mainly includes two dimensions: one is the attitude towards graded reading. Second, the gains after learning through graded reading. All the questionnaires were distributed online through the questionnaire star applet. As of January 23, 2023, 50 questionnaires were collected, including 50 valid questionnaires. The recovery rate is 100%. The reliability of this questionnaire (Cronbach's α) is 0.892, which is greater than 0.60, so the reliability of the questionnaire is high. The KMO value is 0.843, which is greater than 0.60, and the validity is high.

Table2. The reliability of the questionnaire

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach Alpha	Number of items
.892	7

Table3. *The validity of the questionnaire*

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.843
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	254.021
	df	28
	Sig.	.000

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. On the Influence of Graded Reading on the Language Knowledge Level of High-Grade Primary School Students

According to the independent sample test of pre-test scores of the experimental class and the control class, $P=0.929 > 0.05$, there is no significant difference in English scores between the two classes, and the English proficiency of the students in the two classes is roughly equal and comparable.

Table4. *The Independent Samples Test of pre-test scores*

		Independent Samples Test							
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
								lower	
score	Equal variances assumed	3.337	.073	-.090	58	.929	-.133	1.485	-3.106
	Equal variances not assumed			-.090	50.480	.929	-.133	1.485	-3.116

After the 9-week experiment, the experimental class and the control class were tested. The average English score of the experimental class was 82.8, and that of the control class was 81. There is no significant difference in English scores between the two classes according to the independent sample of post-test scores of the experimental class and the control class ($P=0.670 > 0.05$) The data results may be affected by the short experimental time and the different questions in the two exams

Table5. *The Independent Samples Test of post-test scores*

		Independent Samples Test							
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
								lower	
score	Equal variances assumed	.583	.448	.428	58	.670	1.800	4.205	-6.618
	Equal variances not assumed			.428	55.457	.670	1.800	4.205	-6.626

3.2. On the Influence of Graded Reading on the Reading Ability of High-Grade Primary School Students

In order to further demonstrate the influence of graded reading on the reading comprehension ability of high-grade primary school students, the author selected the reading scores from the post-test papers of two classes of students for independent sample t-test as shown in Table 4. The independent sample t-test table $P=0.582 > 0.05$. According to the level of $\alpha = 0.05$, it is considered that there is no significant difference in English reading performance between the experimental class and the control class.

Table6. The Independent Samples Test of reading scores

		Independent Samples Test							
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
									lower
score	Equal variances assumed	.216	.643	.554	58	.582	1.267	2.286	-3.310
	Equal variances not assumed			.554	56.915	.582	1.267	2.286	-3.312

3.3. On the Influence of Graded Reading on English Reading Interest of High-Grade Primary School Students

In the experiment, it is found that some students in the experimental class actively seek graded reading resources from teachers after class. Interested in the trend of the story that has not been presented in each reader. After returning home, students will read the rest graded reading books on their own electronic media. In order to further demonstrate whether students are interested in English learning through graded reading class and the changes in reading cognition and divergent thinking, a questionnaire survey on graded reading was conducted after the experiment.

First of all, the first dimension of the questionnaire "attitude towards graded reading" is carried out, For example, in the second question: "Do you like reading graded picture books in every class?", it is found that 42.59% choose to like it and 20.37% choose to like it very much, which shows that graded reading has aroused great interest of students.

Table7.The influence of graded reading on English confidence

2. Do you like reading graded picture books in every class?	
options	proportion
completely dislike	1.85%
dislike	7.41%
uncertain	27.78%
like	42.59%
like it very much	20.37%

After that, the second dimension of the questionnaire, "the gain after learning through graded reading" is carried out, such as, in the eighth question: " You have increased your vocabulary through graded reading." and in the ninth question: " You have a better understanding of passages through graded reading." It is found that 66.67% and 24.07% of the students think that they have increased vocabulary, 62.96% and 16.67% of the students can understand the reading passage better through graded reading. It shows that students think that the expansion of vocabulary and the improvement of reading comprehension ability after graded reading in class.

Table8.*The influence of graded reading on vocabulary*

8. You have increased your vocabulary through graded reading.		
options	proportion	
Deeply disagree		1.85%
Disagree		0%
Uncertain		7.41%
agree		66.67%
Very agreeable		24.07%

Table9.*The influence of graded reading on reading understanding*

9. You have a better understanding of passages through graded reading.		
options	proportion	
Deeply disagree		1.85%
Disagree		7.41%
Uncertain		11.11%
agree		62.96%
Very agreeable		16.67%

In addition, It is found that graded reading also had a positive effect on students' creativity and divergent thinking through Questionnaire Question 7 : “Do you discuss the plot or trend of the story with other students after each graded reading study in class?” About 53.7% and 14.81% of the students will guess or continue to write stories according to their own understanding of stories, thus the graded reading cultivates students' creativity and divergent thinking to a certain extent.

Table10.*The influence of graded reading on creativity and divergent thinking*

7. Do you discuss the plot or trend of the story with other students after each graded reading study in class?		
options	proportion	
Deeply disagree		3.7%
Disagree		5.56%
Uncertain		22.22%
agree		53.7%
Very agreeable		14.81%

3.4. Study Conclusions and Suggestions for Improvement

Through experimental research and questionnaire survey, the following preliminary conclusions can be drawn (1) There is no significant improvement in the English reading ability and language knowledge level of high-grade primary school students after the 9-week class graded reading. (2) The 9-week graded reading in class can improve the students' confidence in English learning, expand their English vocabulary and improve their English reading comprehension.

Although this is an effective attempt by using grade reading material as the classroom teaching assist, but the achievement post-test independent sample t-test result does not have the remarkable difference. Probably due to the classroom experiment time insufficient, therefore, in the later experiment, experiments and experimental time can be increased. For example, the ten-minute reading teaching four times a week is changed into the twenty-minute reading teaching twice a week; The total time of the experiment is at least one semester.

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