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# Developing Students' Core Competencies in English Teaching Through Multi-modal Reading Instruction

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**Abstract:** General Senior High School Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition) puts forward the idea of core competencies in the English subject at the high school level, and the traditional single-modal English reading teaching mode can't meet the needs of students' development of core literacy. Therefore, teachers should adopt a multi-modal teaching approach in the process of reading teaching, combined with specific teaching tasks and contents, effectively develop students' core literacy in English subject. Based on the theory of multi-modality and multi-modal teaching, and with specific cases of English reading teaching, this paper aims to explore the positive role of multi-modal reading teaching in the cultivation of core literacy in English.

**Keywords:** Multi-modal instruction; Core literacy; English reading

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## 1. Introduction

General Senior High School Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the Standard) points out that the core competencies achieved through the learning of a school subject, which consist of correct values and attitudes, indispensable qualities, and key abilities (Ministry of Education, 2018). In the teaching of many skills in English classrooms, reading is undoubtedly the main way to improve the core competencies of the English discipline. However, in the current high school English reading teaching, many teachers do not fully realize the importance of the teaching mode to improve the teaching effect of the classroom and the learning ability of students, and tend to use only a single language mode for reading teaching, which has many problems, such as dull classroom atmosphere, low students' interest in learning, poor learning effect, and very limited effect on improving students' core literacy in the English subject (Wang Xin et al., 2021). Therefore, it is necessary for us to adopt a multi-modal English reading teaching mode in the teaching process in conjunction with the teaching tasks and contents, fully use modern teaching equipment and conditions, and practically improve the effectiveness of English reading teaching, so as to enable students to improve their reading ability and effectively promote the development of core literacy at the same time.

## 2. The definition of core competencies and multi-modal reading instruction

The core competencies of the English subject mainly includes language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity and learning ability. Language proficiency is the ability to understand and express meaning in social situations by listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing, as well as the language awareness and sense of language formed in the course of learning and using the language; cultural awareness refers to an understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures, recognition of excellent cultures, and cross-cultural cognition, attitudes and behaviors which students demonstrate in the context of globalization; thinking capacity refers to students' skills employed in thinking and the capacity of thinking in terms of logicity, criticality, and innovativeness; learning ability refers to students' awareness and ability to use and adjust English learning strategies actively, and expand English learning channels so as to increase the efficacy of English learning (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Generally speaking, multi-modality refers to five communicative modalities under five perceptual channels, i.e., visual modality, auditory modality, tactile modality, gustatory modality and olfactory modality (Li Jing, 2020). People achieve better communication through multiple perceptions, with the help of sound, words, images, body movements, space and other channels.

In 1996, the New London Group first study how to apply multi-modal theory to language teaching. They pointed out that "in the process of language teaching, the development of students' multiple competencies and multi-modal meanings is regarded as the main task of teaching." Multi-modal teaching advocates the appropriate use of multi-modal symbolic resources (e.g., language, gestures, media tools, etc.) and their interaction in actual teaching, only in this way can the expression of discourse meaning be expanded and students' enthusiasm and initiative be stimulated. Multi-modal teaching helps to create a relaxed, democratic and free learning atmosphere, and also assists learners to fully

understand and deeply memorize the teaching content, so as to achieve the desired teaching effect, that is, the learners' ability to listen, speak, read, view and write will be comprehensively developed.

Multi-modal reading teaching is the application of multi-modal teaching theory to high school English reading class. The multi-modal reading teaching mode can use many modalities, such as oral modality, visual modality, auditory modality, expression modality and so on, to fully mobilize the students' senses and thinking, so as to promote the improvement of students' core competencies in English.

### **3. The Path of Cultivating Core Competencies Based on Multi-modal Reading Instruction**

The reading material in this lesson is taken from Section B of the first unit Where did you go on vacation?. This unit centers on the topic of "Festivals and Holidays". Taking the teaching process of Section B Reading as an example, this paper explores how to cultivate students' English core competencies in multi-modal teaching. This part is in the form of an English diary of a student, Jane, and her family's insights and anecdotes about their vacation in Malaysia, which is in line with the psychological characteristics of students in middle school (Au yun, 2020).

#### **3.1 Cultivation of language skills**

The author designs the following activities by combining listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing around the contents of each part of Section B to develop students' language skills.

##### **3.1.1 Based on words and pictures, constructing classroom interaction to improve oral expression skills**

This section reviews the usage of the general past tense with the help of words and pictures (visual modality) and through discussion between teacher and students (oral modality), activating students' schema while introducing the theme of the lesson. Students develop and improve their oral expression skills through browsing questions, sharing travel experiences, and teacher-student interaction.

##### **3.1.2 Reasonable design of reading for writing tasks to exercise written expression ability**

In the post-reading stage, after students finish the retelling of the main content, the teacher guides students to observe the stylistic features of this article, so that students can pay attention to the format and tense features of the English diary and write a diary to record what happened around them today, paying attention to the use of format and tense. In this activity, the teacher makes use of the stylistic features to emphasize the writing format of English diary (visual modality and oral modality) and lets the students consolidate the writing format by writing a diary, which also trains the writing ability.

#### **3.2 Cultivation of Cultural Awareness**

In the pre-reading stage, the teacher shows students a map of Malaysia and briefly introduces basic information about Malaysia. Then students watch a video introducing Penang and discuss what they imagine Penang to be. This step mainly uses visual modality. Teachers use videos and pictures to create a teaching situation close to the content of the article, which can not only let students understand the cultural background of this article and cultivate their cross-cultural awareness, but also stimulate students' interest in learning, and naturally introduce students into the situation of this article.

#### **3.3 Cultivation of thinking capacity**

Teachers can integrate and design a variety of activities according to the content of the chapter, such as the use of forms, throwing questions to the students, through layers of questions, to cultivate the logic of students' thinking.

##### **3.3.1 Ask questions to cultivate logical thinking.**

Cultivating students' thinking capacity requires teachers to design gradient, depth and breadth based on the teaching content (Zhao Yulian, 2019). In the first task of the reading-in session, students were required to skim the article quickly within a specified period of time and complete the table according to the questions, and then check the answers collectively. Before starting to read, the teacher clarified the reading requirements to the students and guided them to locate the information according to the key words.

##### **3.3.2 Analyzing the factual details of the chapter, organizing students' discussion, and cultivating critical thinking**

In the second task of the reading-in session, students read in detail, complete the table and communicate with their peers, revise their conclusions and improve the content of the table. Teachers provide students with assistance and guidance.

#### **3.4 Cultivation of learning ability**

The mid-reading session is the focus of reading teaching, and the cultivation of students' learning ability is mainly realized through visual modality in the mid-reading session. First of all, with the three forms in reading progressing step by step, students' skimming and detailed reading ability is gradually improved; secondly, in the process of completing the three tasks in reading, students transform the chapter content in the form of diary in the textbook into the form of dialogues, in which the students' textual information processing ability is cultivated and

improved; in the task of imitating a diary, students will pay more conscious attention to the stylistic format of the text and the use of words and phrases, and the capacity of students' thinking and learning ability will be improved.

#### 4. Conclusion

Multi-modal communication enables the addressee to obtain information through multiple channels, which is easier for the addressee to understand and remember than uni-modal discourse. The concept of multi-modal teaching is to innovate the teaching method, enrich the learning experience, stimulate the learning interest and strengthen the understanding. This paper takes reading teaching as a case study to utilize multi-modal approach, and effectively develops students' core competencies in the English subject such as language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity and learning ability by designing tasks such as presentation, performance and writing.

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