

A Study in Senior High School Reading Teaching Based on Core Literacy

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Abstract. As a key language competence, reading exerts a foundation role for English learners. Reading teaching plays a significant role in language teaching as well. For traditional language teaching, reading teaching in senior high school focuses on the lecture-based, textbook-centered, and teacher-centered models, which diminishes students' autonomy and motivation for learning. It is, therefore, the newly published National Curriculum Standards that emphasizes core literacy, including language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. Core literacy as a teaching goal facilitates students' comprehensive and individual development and lays the base for lifelong learning. This thesis concentrates on a study in senior high school reading teaching based on core literacy. Firstly, it introduces definitions, theoretical background information, and elements of core literacy. Secondly, it mainly analyzes the concrete application from three aspects, such as teaching design, process, and reflection, concerning problems in senior high school reading teaching and requirements of National Curriculum Standards. And finally, this thesis proposes suggestions for senior high school reading teaching based on core literacy from the perspective of both teachers and students. This thesis concentrates on a study in senior high school reading teaching based on core literacy to explore effective ways to cultivate students' reading abilities and optimize learning efficiency to enhance the effectiveness of senior high school English teaching.

Keywords: Core literacy · Reading teaching · Senior high school English

1 Introduction

Nowadays, English plays a crucial role in the era of globalization. English learning is therefore of overriding significance to achieving cross-cultural communication, which indicates that English is not only a subject in exam-oriented education but an opportunity to cultivate students' core literacy and overall development. Particularly, with the implementation of *the National Curriculum Standards for High School* (2017 Edition), English reading teaching in senior high school is increasingly facing higher demands and challenges. The promotion of language ability, cultural consciousness, critical thinking as well as learning ability should be incorporated into the development of core literacy. Under this circumstance, core literacy has become an indispensable trend for students' all-around development.

Core literacy is based on the theory of holistic education and multiple intelligence, which prods students to actualize their potential and elicit them to master English learning strategies, analyze, and work out the problems either individually or in groups, to nourish the inherent potential of development. According to the requirement of *the National Curriculum Standards for High School* (2017 Edition), this paper targets the study of senior high school reading teaching based on core literacy to foster students' comprehensive development, following problems and suggestions in senior high school reading teaching.

Core literacy exerts a paramount role to facilitate students' integrated ability, to some extent, and this objective can modify the drawbacks of traditional teaching that emphasizes professional knowledge rather than ethical principles. Based on the analysis, this article aims the study senior high school reading teaching based on core literacy, which puts students in the kernel position. It not only conduces to enliven students' thinking and advance multiple intelligence but also enhances teachers' professional development. Meanwhile, this paper expounds on the teaching procedure from three dimensions and makes suggestions based on problems in senior high school reading teaching. It is hoped that senior high school reading teaching efficiency can be enhanced through the discussion by this study.

2 High School English Subject Literacy Under the New Curriculum Standard

This section will provide theoretical background information in two aspects. It will introduce core literacy of English subjects, including definitions, theoretical background information, and elements. Additionally, this chapter will analyze current situations in senior high school reading teaching under the requirements of *National Curriculum Standards in Senior High School* (2017 Edition).

2.1 Core Literacy in the New English Curriculum Standard

The term core literacy first was proposed in the documents of several international organizations. The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) interpreted core literacy in 1997: it helps societies and individuals to achieve valuable outcomes that can relate to all aspects of life and meet relevant needs [1]. In 2006, the Council of the European Union suggested that core literacy embodies the skills that each individual should acquire to develop his or her competencies in practice, integrate into society, and perform any job efficiently, and that it is universally transferable and multifunctional and universal.

The National Curriculum Standards in Senior High School (2017 Edition) defines English subject core literacy as "the necessary character and key abilities that students gradually form and improve in the process of receiving education in English courses of the corresponding academic level to meet the needs of their lifelong personal and social development, which are comprehensively expressed as four major literacies, consisting of language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability" [2]. The main purpose of English curriculum reform in senior high schools is to enhance students' core literacy, which includes the comprehensive development of their language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. Among them, *the National Curriculum Standards in Senior High School* (2017 Edition) puts forward the level that students should achieve, which mainly includes: correctly distinguishing special phenomena of different languages and cultures, optimizing and integrating information, establishing new logical concepts, correctly judging different ideas and to think independently in English.

2.2 Theoretical Background of Core Literacy

Holistic Education. Holistic education as an educational movement emerged in the mid-1980s in response to the then-dominant view of mainstream education, often regarded as fragmented and mechanistic [3]. The goal of holistic education is to nourish the inherent potential of human development. Therefore, the overall development (physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual) of the individual is the primary concern of education.

A holistic view of education underlies *the National Curriculum Standards in Senior High School* in that it emphasizes such principles as "considering all students, focusing on quality education" "emphasizing the active nature of students, respecting individual differences". China has a tradition of education aiming at all-around (mental, academic, physical, aesthetics and labor education) developments of individuals. *The National Curriculum Standards* have pushed this understanding forward through its interpretation of holistic education.

Multiple Intelligence Theory. In 1983, Howard Gardner, an American professor of psychology, proposed a new theory of human intellectual development called multiple intelligence. He proposed that every person has at least eight intelligence, including linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, musical intelligence, introspective intelligence, and naturalist intelligence [4].

The English curriculum in senior high schools should focus on "internalization" and "externalization", which means that gives priority to the development of students' acquisition of English knowledge and their ability to use it. The theory of multiple intelligence guides the implementation of *the National Curriculum Standards*. Designing English teaching from this perspective will help cultivate students' subject core literacy, develop their abilities and promote their all-around and individual development.

2.3 Elements of Core Literacy

Core literacy consists of four main aspects, including language proficiency, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability.

Language proficiency refers to the ability to understand and express meaning, intention and emotional attitudes in social situations by listening, speaking, reading, watching and writing. As a foundational element of the core literacy of the English subject, language ability provides a prerequisite for the development of students' cultural identity, thinking quality, and learning ability.

Cultural awareness relates to the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and the identification of excellent cultures and is the cultural communication, and humanistic cultivation that students show in the context of globalization. In the framework system of English subject core literacy, cultural awareness is its concrete expression in humanistic values and behavioral orientations.

Thinking quality is regarded as the personality characteristics of a person's thinking, reflecting his or her ability and level of performance in thinking logically, critically and creatively [5]. Additionally, thinking quality focuses on the level of development of students' mental abilities, such as observation and comparison, induction and construction, and criticism and innovation.

Learning ability refers to students' awareness and ability to actively adapt English learning strategies and strive to improve the efficiency of English learning. Learning ability is reflected in the areas of interest and motivation, goals and plans, autonomy and cooperation.

3 Senior High School Reading Teaching Status Based on Core Literacy

This chapter is about the analysis of core literacy in senior high school reading teaching through detailed teaching cases and specific teaching procedures. In this part, the passage of *Festivals and Celebrations from Module 3 Unit 1 Festivals around the world in People's Education Edition of senior high school English Book* (2019 Edition) is set as an example.

3.1 Teaching Design

By analyzing the theory of core literacy, the teacher should follow the requirements of *the National Curriculum Standards for High School* (2017 Edition) and get students prepared for the lesson based on core literacy by teaching plan and designing the task.

Teaching Plan. The main purpose of English curriculum reform in senior high schools is to enhance students' core literacy, which includes the overall development of their language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. Among them, *the National Curriculum Standards in Senior High School* (2017 Edition) puts forward the level that students should achieve, which mainly includes: correctly distinguishing special phenomena of different languages and cultures, optimizing and integrating information, establishing new logical concepts, correctly judging different ideas and to think independently in English [6].

Talking about the teaching objectives, the teacher should propose three dimensions, including knowledge aims, ability aims and emotional aims [7]. When it comes to the passage of *Festivals and Celebrations*, students will be able to master the main idea and

some detailed information about this passage, improve their reading skills, such as scanning, skimming and know about diverse festivals customs and form a sense of cultural community by the end of class. According to the key and difficult points, the teacher had better adapt different teaching methods, such as task-based learning method, questions and answers, the audiolingual method and the communicative approach. Besides, the teacher needs to manage different forms of activities, such as group work, pair work and individual work. At the same time, the teacher should be good at using a variety of teaching tools and multimedia equipment to keep up with the times and stimulate potentially students' interest in learning English.

Task-Based Teaching Preparing. Planning helps students understand the how, why and what in accomplishing a task. Core literacy emphasizes the aim to enhance students' learning abilities before, during, and after class. The teaching preparation session is the process of conducting pre-class planning, which will directly affect the effectiveness of learning. The National Curriculum Standards place the task-based language teaching method (TBLT) at the core, and to some extent, the approach of TBLT manifests itself in the pre-course stage as strategic planning [8]. Before the class, teachers should assign targeted teaching tasks based on the content of the lesson to promote students' comprehensive skills and cultural awareness. The teacher makes appropriate use of modern technology to deepen students' understanding of cultural similarities and differences based on the cultural knowledge carried by the text. For example, the teacher can adapt the flipped classroom model to elicit students to learn about the cultural background knowledge in advances, such as the similarities and differences of customs between people in western countries and Chinese people. This will help the teacher to introduce the text naturally in the classroom and to examine students' understanding in the form of questions.

In addition, the preparation session for the task also includes understanding the specific teaching content. For example, the passage of *Festivals and Celebrations* from Module3 for senior high school students refers to famous festivals around the world in the process of task planning. The teacher is required to assign the pre-learning task and get familiar with the syllabus and textbook thoroughly and completely, containing key and difficult points. Meanwhile, students must preview vocabularies related to festivals and gather information on how to celebrate the holidays. Furthermore, the teacher should design innovative and various activities to improve students' reading strategies, especially activities are pertinent to the subject, their interests and experience to make sure that each one is participating. Teaching tools are assorted, including PPT, the whiteboard, visual pictures as well as short videos, in order to activate students' academic interests. The teacher had better be aware of students' present level of competences and design unique activities associated with their availability and personality characteristics.

3.2 Teaching Process

How can the theory of core literacy be applied to English reading teaching in senior high schools effectively and successfully? Below are three reading teaching procedures, combined with the passage of *Festivals and Celebrations*.

Pre-reading. Pre-reading refers to preparation for reading. Questionnaire and brainstorming are frequently-used activities in this stage for senior high school students who have already mastered fundamental thinking awareness and communicative capability.

To begin with, the teacher capitalizes on the activity of questions and answers "what festivals or celebrations do you have in your city or town?" and shares some pictures of typical festivals to arouse students' curiosity and motivation. This step exercises students' thinking skills and conduces them to anticipate the content of the text. Students are encouraged to use their known knowledge which exists in the cognitive domain to speculate on article content, such as the music, the sights and the food. It is an effective way to widen students' thinking space and help them get into the class quickly. Besides, the teacher plays a short video about celebrations to establish an authentic situation and stimulate students' background information. After the video, students will gain an initial understanding of the passage. The teacher poses a problem ulteriorly: what festivals are mentioned in the article and what are the characteristics of each. This question is the core idea of the lesson based on core literacy and can be regarded as the driving force of the following activities. Core literacy emphasizes the development of students' thinking awareness in reading learning. It follows that the problem posed that covers the whole passage are difficult for senior high school students, and the teacher needs to cultivate their independent problem-solving ability.

Subsequently, prediction as an English reading skill plays a vital role in teaching based on core literacy. Then, the teacher presents the pictures and title of the passage and elicits students to discuss what kind of information they think will be introduced in this article. The teacher should create an atmosphere that helps students to make predictions in the high school English curriculum, which shifts the reading process into an active and communicative process and promotes expression skills. Therefore, students will be divided into several groups, 4–6 for each one, then the teacher asks students to discuss the question and predict the content of this article to train their logical skills. Students had better take down notes, exchange opinions and make assumptions with each other. It is a valid way to stimulate the spirit of inquiry and cultivate divergent thinking.

While-reading. The stage of while-reading carries important implications for accomplishing teaching aims, guiding students to grasp the whole passage and enhancing reading skills. According to the article *Festivals and Celebrations*, the main idea of the while-reading stage is to identify the bold words related to the festivals and sentence patterns of the simple present tense, to practice reading strategies, incorporating skimming and scanning. The combination of core literacy and reading instruction requires students to read the passage at least two times.

Initially, the teacher asks students to browse the text for the first time and check their prediction by means of segmentation, then get the general idea of this passage. It requires students to circle keywords or sentences while skimming the text. In the same vein, the teacher is supported to teach some reading skills to tell students that the first sentence and the last sentence of each paragraph often serve as a summary when reading an article. For the second time, after the students have a basic understanding of the article, the teacher had better give students appropriate praise, and positive feedback and suggest more complex activities. Then the teacher should guide students to analyze the problem of "Why do different countries hold different festivals and what are their customs and meanings?" and get some detailed information to fill in the table. When students are finished, the teacher encourages students to share their ideas with their peers to reflect on and revise their answers. In the process of discussing with peers, students can not only spread their minds and practice spoken English, but they can also deepen their understanding of the text.

In addition, the stage of analyzing the problem is of great benefits to the cultivation of core literacy in reading teaching. The activity of questions and answers is boring and does not stimulate students' interest in learning. The table borrowed from the task-based language teaching method in a visual format benefits students to clarify the question and seek proper information in the passage [9]. Based on the students' knowledge of the article, the teacher will group 4–6 students to test the students' ability to extract information, and ask students to identify the similarities and differences between the celebrations. The comparison-type activity entails students to think deeply and logically. Moreover, learning to analyze the problem from a comparative perspective not only can enhance students' language competence and prudent thinking skills but also can further language organization capability by listing key information to summarize the content.

Post-reading. Reading comprehension is frequently followed by post-reading activities such as conversation, debate, report or role-play. As an important incarnation of output, the knowledge that students have got from reading will be internalized for the purpose of production in the post-reading activities. Meanwhile, students' speaking skills and cultural awareness will be facilitated in the post-reading part.

Grouping is an effective means to cultivate collaborative awareness, innovative thinking and teamwork skills. According to the previous grouping, the teacher elicits students to discuss their views with group members in order to modify and summarize a complete chart. Different members play different roles in a group, including a leader, a recorder, a communicator, or a presenter, and students need to clarify the task list. Particularly, it is necessary for teachers to know about the role and function of each student to avoid some introverted students from being reluctant to participate in the discussion. While discussing, students ought to share opinions to debate with and correct errors for each other. Then the presenter gives an account of the result and does a retelling with respect to their group's opinions.

Based on the comparative information about the topic in the textbook, the teacher asks students to reorganize the content in their own words and encourages them to expand their ideas appropriately to achieve a retelling of the passage, which is a beneficial way to promote students' logical thinking ability. Besides, it is an inevitable aspect of reading teaching to upgrade senior students' communicative skills. To be specific, it requires them to do a role-play, which means that student A is a reporter and student B is a survivor. The teacher guides students to make a dialogue in terms of this passage, for example, "what do people usually do at spring festivals?". This activity is very suitable for high school students, which not only requires them to exchange opinions but also tests their ability to answer questions flexibly.

After praising achievement, the teacher needs to prod students to make a summary of what they have learned and evaluate each other. The teacher embellishes the passage with cultural knowledge, for instance, students are duty-bound to love our traditional festivals while embracing the customs of different countries and accepting differences in the age of globalization. *The New Curriculum Standard* emphasizes the principle of "fostering virtue through education" in English teaching, and enriching students' cultural awareness is the key to moral education. Ultimately, the teacher assigns the homework, doing research to learn about famous festivals in different countries and understand their importance, in order to test the learning ability and mastery.

3.3 Teaching Reflection

As for *the National Curriculum Standards*, the evaluation system for an English course should reflect the diversity of subjects and have a variety of evaluation forms, according to the principle of multi-dimensional assessment, including the self-evaluation, the peer-evaluation and the teacher-evaluation.

Self-evaluation. Students are the main subjects, but the traditional objective of evaluation may count on merely the accuracy of the subject matter with the lack of learning ability and focus on the teacher evaluation. Confucius said, "Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous." This principle is true for English reading teaching based on core literacy [8]. Self-evaluation is an inalienable stage to discover problems in learning and increase learning efficiency. Students are suggested to evaluate their performance in the class. For instance, moving on to the passage of *Festivals and Celebrations*, the teacher is prone to ask students to dwell on whether they have a perfect understanding of the context and master reading strategies, and whether they can analyze problems effectively, and retrieve information and approach questions. It is worth noting that a rating scale is an effective and time-saving tool for self-evaluation, and it can diagnose students' merits and drawbacks. Moreover, after the course, students should reflect on their mastery continuously, identify their deficiencies and adjust learning strategies in order to improve learning efficiency.

Peer-Evaluation. The theory of core literacy focuses on cooperative learning, thus peer-evaluation can ensure that teamwork skills are effectively applied. The teacher uses reflection cards to elicit students to comment anonymously on their peers, such as strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions. To be specific, students should recall the process of communicating with peers or group members, and reflect and record them one by one. It seems that strengths can enhance students' self-confidence, and weaknesses can be alerted to improve their learning efficiency in the future. In this stage, students switch roles to evaluate others' achievements from an impartial perspective, which conduces to their independent and critical thinking skills. It is useful to identify problems from others and learn from previous experience to revise their learning methods. Students' teamwork skills can be significantly boosted through peer evaluation.

Teacher-Evaluation. Teacher evaluation is a helpful approach to verify whether the learning objectives are achieved, whether the activities are valid and whether the content is reasonable. *The National Curriculum Standards* based on core literacy require teachers to concentrate on the formative assessment, instead of exclusively on the students'

final scores. On the one hand, the teacher should assess students' development of language ability, reading skills, emotional attitudes, and cultural awareness by means of the teaching process. For instance, if the teacher wants to examine students' understanding of the entire passage of *Festivals and Celebrations*, they had better encourage students to extract key information to complete the task. Then the teacher should assess their performance and guide them to find their strengths and face up to their weaknesses. Meanwhile, the teacher can modify the teaching schedule, refine teaching goals and vary appropriate guidance in accordance with individual distinction. On the other hand, teacher evaluation also refers to assessing the teaching process. The teacher gives priority to evaluating the accuracy and validity of the questions posed and reflects on whether the activities potentially mobilize students' creative thinking skills. Furthermore, the teacher ought to reflect on whether the design of the reading procedure is closely related to the text. Most importantly, the teacher is supposed to reflect on the deficiencies in the teaching process so as to improve teaching quality.

4 Problems and Suggestions of Senior High School Reading Teaching Based on Core Literacy

Through the analysis of core literacy, it can be seen that this theory is a beneficial guide in senior high school English reading teaching. This chapter will introduce the current situations and suggestions in senior high school reading teaching in terms of both teachers and students.

4.1 Problems in Senior High School Reading Teaching

Nowadays, current teaching problems are still existing in senior high school reading teaching, which makes unsatisfactory teaching effects. Teachers incline to impart knowledge directly and explain the context via a word-by-word literal translation. Meanwhile, as for students, the practice is usually restricted to answering questions mechanically and doing a lot of written exercises. Another issue is that students have little or no opportunity to engage in the class and actualize their potential in a teacher-led model. Besides, the course focuses on "nearsightedness culture" and "the score comes first", and lacks the promotion of students' problem-solving, creative and self-educated abilities. Hence, it is imperative for teachers to change their teaching philosophy and teaching style, and shift the focus from "how to teach" to "how to learn" is an important task of high school English curriculum reform.

Compared to the traditional high school English curriculum, current teachers should pay attention to the principle of goal orientation, which requires core literacy as the purpose of high school English reading instruction [10]. Teaching objectives should integrate the teaching process, reflect teaching activities, and involve classroom evaluation. Besides, the content of teaching should be reasonably planned to make its content structure more systematic and complete. The main body of teaching should meet the needs of students' physical and mental development, and follow the orderliness and rationality of knowledge presentation, which enables students to use English in real-life situations, rather than just taking tests.

4.2 Suggestions for Students' Overall Development

Students are the subjects in senior high school teaching that combines both instrumental and humanistic aspects [11]. The high school English reading teaching based on English core literacy plays a key role in improving students' overall development. Students are the main body of the classroom, and they should be given full play to their subjectivity in the English curriculum. Initially, students should take the initiative to prepare the review before the class and search for information related to the content of the text, which is beneficial for further learning. At the same time, students should build up a sense of globalization and experience the charm of different countries and cultures in their English learning to enrich their knowledge. Besides, students ought to form a sense of inquiry and innovation, actively participate in group discussions, dare to express their own opinions, and develop a sense of discernment.

Guiding students to use English in authentic situations is one of the requirements of teaching English under core literacy. The ultimate goal of students' English language learning is to output. In the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, most current senior high school students merely tend to read and write compositions, without the ability to communicate. English teaching based on core literacy requires teachers to teach in social contexts, such as topics related to daily life, in order to achieve authentic situations. Meanwhile, it requires students to actively participate in teacher-created scenarios when understanding unknown knowledge or reviewing existing knowledge, so that they can deeply grasp the vitality of knowledge. When topics in daily life are linked to what students are learning, students are more willing to accept new knowledge and are motivated and interested in the class so as to develop a sense of independent and lifelong learning.

4.3 Suggestions for Teachers' Professional Development

Human culture has gone through a process from "monoculture" to "multicultural" coexistence [12]. Facing the challenges of globalization, the diversity of educational theories, and the flexibility of teachers' thinking ability that teachers need to develop a multicultural perspective. In traditional English teaching, teachers prefer to focus on developing students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, instead of thinking capacity. In the context of exam-oriented education, teachers often require students to quickly write down what they have learned in their notebooks to keep up with the teaching schedule, and students tend to memorize mechanically while ignoring the essence of knowledge, lacking opportunities for independent thinking. A teacher's multicultural vision can analyze the attributes of things from different perspectives, as well as the background of educational topics, including different countries, regions, and ethnic groups, which enables students to embrace the multi-culture.

In addition, teachers need to change the previous teaching evaluation to promote the overall development of students and stimulate their creativity, rather than focusing solely on academic achievement. The teacher is the organizer and guide of students' learning activities, and a teacher who lacks a sense of thinking will make his students lack learning motivation. Conversely, a teacher with a rich sense of thinking will make his or her classroom full of humor and fun. Therefore, teachers should aim at cultivating students' thinking with communicative skills, making students understand the structure and main idea of the discourse, so that students' autonomous learning ability will be boosted. Under the core literacy requirement, the measure of a teacher's excellence is no longer limited to the examination, and the cultivation of well-rounded students should be an important goal of teaching efficiency.

5 Conclusion

In the 21st Century, English plays an important role as the official language of global communication. With the implementation of *the National Curriculum Standards for English in Senior Middle School* (2017 Edition), the objective of senior high school English teaching focuses on core literacy, which aims to enhance students' overall development. Since traditional English teaching is centered on teachers, courses, and textbooks, there are many problems with using tests as the only means of measuring students, such as reducing students' motivation and initiative for learning.

According to the theory of holistic education and multiple intelligence, core literacy has been placed in a more prominent position. English subject core literacy requires students to gradually form correct values and acquire necessary competencies through learning, which mainly includes language proficiency, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. Therefore, this paper has analyzed a specific example of the passage of *Festivals and Celebrations* from the senior high school textbook. It introduces definitions, theoretical background information and elements of core literacy. In addition, this paper analyzes the concrete application based on core literacy from three aspects, including teaching design, teaching procedure and evaluation. Finally, this article summarizes problems in senior high school reading teaching and makes some suggestions from both the overall development of students and the professional development of teachers.

Core literacy refers to the key competencies, knowledge and skills, attitudes and emotions that individuals are required to possess in the future. Core literacy emphasizes the individual's ability to acquire knowledge and skills proactively and methodically, in terms of human growth and development of the future society. The role of core literacy goes beyond the vocational and school context so as to help students cultivate more capacities that will promote all-around development. According to PISA data, Chinese students have significantly improved their skills in mathematics, reading, and science with the implementation of *the National Curriculum Standards for High School* (2017 Edition). Core literacy will certainly be a major focus of future teaching and learning reforms. Applying core literacy to the learning and teaching of English is not an easy task, and it will take a long time to reach a more satisfactory state, as this pedagogy not only poses new challenges to teachers' teaching methods but also places higher demands on students' abilities. However, shortly, core literacy will be able to play its proper role in the teaching field and greatly enhance the quality of English teaching.

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