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A Study on the Application of Discourse Analysis Theory in English Reading Teaching in Senior High School

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Abstract: Reading is not only one of the purposes of English teaching, but also an important way of English learning. Reading plays an essential role in student language input, and it occupies a large proportion at different kinds of English tests. However, in the traditional reading classes, the key point is to explain language points and ignores to develop students' ability of analyzing discourse. Thus, students have little interest in reading, and the lack of knowledge of discourse, causing students lack of confidence when doing reading. *The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School* requires students to deepen the understanding of discourse, attach great importance to the analysis of discourse, and improve their reading ability. Therefore, this study aims at discovering the current situation of senior high school students' discourse analysis ability and figure out the factors that prevent teachers from applying discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching. The research participants are 110 students and 2 English teachers in senior two in Kunming. And the research instruments include questionnaire interview and classroom observation. Questionnaire is used to know the change of students' discourse awareness. Based on data analysis, the researcher has three main findings. Firstly, students' discourse analysis abilities on both macro and micro levels are only moderately developed and relatively low. They struggle with aspects such as genre recognition, background knowledge utilization, and coherence understanding, indicating a lack of proficient discourse consciousness. Secondly, although teachers are making efforts to apply discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching, their teaching objectives and methods vary significantly. Thirdly, teachers' understanding of discourse analysis theory (DAT) is not unified. Their different interpretations and approaches result in an unsystematic application of DAT in teaching practice.

Keywords: discourse analysis theory; English reading teaching; senior high school; reading comprehension; student engagement

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1. Introduction

Reading is a very important way of acquiring information for foreign language learners. As one of the fundamental ways for students to obtain information, reading plays an essential role in the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools requires that students should be able to understand the meaning of discourse comprehensively, predict the theme and discourse content according to the title; infer the meanings of words from contextual clues, recognize discourse structure and language features, identify the reference of pronouns and the logical cohesion. In recent years, with the reform of the college entrance examination, the score of English reading comprehension in the college entrance

examination is getting much larger than before. However, in the current high school English teaching, most teachers still focus on the traditional language explanation. Most English teachers pay more attention to the form of the language, including how to distinguish the meaning of words, to analyse the grammatical structure, and explain important and difficult points. By doing this, students can understand the meaning of each word, and at the same time can have a clear understanding of the structure of each sentence, helping students understand the local. But this approach ignores the connections between sentences and sentences, paragraphs and paragraphs. Teachers always use reading materials as explanation materials for vocabulary and grammar, but they ignore the guidance of students' reading comprehension methods. Due to the lack of relevant reading skills, students are still unable to improve their reading ability despite a large number of extracurricular reading activities [1].

So far a lot of researches have been conducted into the discourse analysis theory (DAT). In theoretical study, scholars have discussed methods of the application of discourse analysis theory (DAT) in English reading. However, there is few studies with statistics and cases. In experimental study, many scholars at home and abroad have already conducted research into how to apply discourse analysis theory (DAT) in the English reading class [2]. Among them, some researchers make comparison and contrast between discourse analysis method and traditional teaching method. And some researchers test the effectiveness of applying discourse analysis theory (DAT) to English reading teaching. However, they neglect the current situation of senior high school students' discourse analysis ability and factors that prevent teachers from applying discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching.

Therefore, this study aims to survey the current situation of senior high school students' discourse analysis ability and factors that prevent teachers from applying discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching. The questionnaire is to investigate the status quo of senior high school students' discourse analysis ability. Interview and classroom observation are used to collect oral information to help to discover and confirm the the factors that prevent teachers from applying discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching. Suggestions will be made for teachers to improve their teaching method, which are beneficial to cultivate students' discourse awareness and improve students' English reading ability.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Discourse Analysis

The general idea of the item discourse mainly relates to the meaning conveyed by the sentences and paragraphs. Discourse is the use of the sentences relating to each other which emphasizes the meaningful connection between the sentences and clauses [3].

Except for the meaning behind the sentences, discourse also emphasizes language use. The study of discourse is something about the research on pragmatic which focuses on language use [4]. Richards and other researchers also consider discourse to be examples of language use and the product of communication and interaction. In detail, discourse can be used through any form such as written or spoken language to convey its meaning. Discourse not only expresses ideas, but also adheres to the unity of form and meaning.

The definition of discourse analysis has changed with time and becomes more precise. Scholars explain the term discourse analysis from such two aspects as discourse function and discourse organization. Scholars points that discourse analysis refers to taking the discourse as the basic unit and starting from the overall perspective of the discourse to analyze, understand, evaluate and appreciate the text [5]. Discourse analysis requires readers to scientifically and systematically analyze how the language materials generate meaning in their corresponding positions in the text, and identify the structural patterns

in the text as well as the linguistic means that define the markers of these structural patterns. The purpose of discourse analysis is to discover these rules. Also proposes that discourse analysis is the study of communicative language, which involves in the relationship between language and its context [6]. To sum up, discourse analysis is to study how sentences are used in conversations, paragraphs and interviews.

Other scholars define the term discourse analysis from the perspective of discourse organization. The goal of discourse analysis is to explore language structure on the level of phrases and sentences [7]. He focuses on studying large language units like situational dialogue and written text.

In the study of discourse analysis, most of the scholars analyse the discourse from two perspectives: macro analysis and micro analysis. From the macro perspective, it refers to understanding the discourse from macro level by analyzing background knowledge, genres and discourse patterns. From the micro perspective, it refers to identifying cohesion and coherence in the discourse.

2.2. English Reading

The definitions of reading can be divided into two different concepts based on time. Before 1970s, reading is a way of getting information, which is different from listening. Researchers give definitions of reading from the perspective of information acquisition [8]. After 1970s, reading is regarded as a course of the translation or decoding of written letters or words, which defines that reading is a process that involves identifying and recognizing of the printed symbols which helps learners remember the meaning [9].

According to different reading order and comprehensive way, English reading could be divided into different models. The three most influential reading models are bottom-up model, top-down model and interactive model. American psychologist Gough put forward the bottom-up model. It follows a linear process from the recognition from letters to words, to phrases, to sentences, to paragraphs, and then to the meaning of the whole text. Goodman comes up with top-down model. It is a meaning-driven process. Rumelhart proposes the interactive reading model. It attempts to absorb the effective points of the bottom-up and top-down models, and it becomes one of the most promising approaches to the theory of reading today.

2.3. Studies of Discourse Analysis Theory (DAT) in English Reading Teaching

1) Previous research abroad

Many foreign scholars have studied the application of discourse analysis theory (DAT) in reading teaching. Researchers point out that information at a high level is more accessible to describe than information at a low level [10]. Moreover, the use of discourse analysis theory (DAT) to guide reading teaching can significantly improve learners' reading ability.

Over time, discourse analysis theory (DAT) has developed further. Some scholars have conducted experiments to train students in content structure analysis, helping them grasp the main ideas and structure of texts. Studies have shown that after undergoing discourse-based instruction, ESL learners can significantly improve their reading comprehension [10].

Currently, many scholars strive to provide a user-friendly definition of discourse analysis theory (DAT) to encourage teachers to integrate it into their ESL classrooms. They also propose concrete measures to help teachers apply discourse analysis effectively in ESL teaching.

2) Previous Research at Home

In the 1980s, discourse analysis theory (DAT) has been introduced to China. Some scholars even have carried out theoretical research on it. Some scholars have applied the results of discourse analysis theory (DAT) to reading teaching and practice, which provides strong support for foreign language teaching.

Some scholars apply discourse analysis theory (DAT) from macro structure analysis and micro structure analysis to teach English reading in the test of TEM-8 to sophomores of Nankai University. Then they compare discourse analysis teaching method with traditional teaching method and find that students who received the training of discourse analysis can get higher points in the reading comprehension part of TEM-8 than the others. Their study proves that discourse analysis teaching is an effective way to improve students' reading ability. A research to discuss how to carry out English reading teaching under the guidance of the theory of discourse analysis by the data collected from the students' questionnaires before and after the conduction of action research [11]. Their research suggests that the application of discourse analysis theory (DAT) in English reading teaching could enhance students' reading interest.

To sum up, foreign scholars pay more attention to definition of discourse analysis and the use of discourse analysis in the ESL classroom. However, Chinese scholars focus on the discourse analysis theory (DAT) from the macro level and micro level. Few of them concentrate on the factors that prevent teachers from applying discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching. Therefore, the study aims to find out the factors that prevent teachers from applying discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching and try to give some useful suggestions to high school English teachers to help them apply discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Questions

- 1) What is the current situation of senior high school students' discourse analysis ability?
- 2) What are the factors that prevent teachers from applying discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching?

3.2. Participants

In this study, the participants are from Kunming Y High School. There are 110 students in grade 2 of senior high school, and 2 teachers who teach in grade 2. Students in grade 2 have learned English for several years and they can have a better understanding of discourse analysis theory.

3.3. Instruments

- 1) Research Questionnaire

The questionnaire is to investigate the status quo of senior high school students' discourse analysis ability. Considering the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, it refers to many questionnaire samples of relevant studies. On the basis of these questionnaire samples, this questionnaire adopts Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). There are 18 questions, which are divided into three dimensions: macro structure analysis, micro structure analysis, and discourse analysis teaching method. This study adopts the Likert scale five-point measure questionnaire, ranging from 1 to 5, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", and the distribution of the content is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions of the Questionnaire.

Dimensions	Content	Item	
Macro structure analysis	Genre	1, 2, 4, 12	
	Background knowledge	8, 15	
	Coherence	5, 10, 16	
Micro structure analysis	Cohesion	Reference	6
		Substitution	9
		Ellipsis	11

	Conjunction	13
	Lexical Cohesion	7
Discourse analysis teaching method	Application of DAT in English teaching	3, 14, 17, 18

Before the formal test, the researcher conducts an analysis to test the reliability of the questionnaire, which mainly concentrates on the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

The Cronbach's Alpha value of total scale is 0.961, higher than 0.80 and close to 1, which indicates that the questionnaire has a high reliability (Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability Statistics of the Questionnaire.

Cronbach's Alpha	Items
0.961	18

After the test of the reliability, the researcher conducts an analysis to test the validity of the questionnaire, which chiefly concentrates on the KMO value and the Bartlett's value.

As depicted in Table 3, KMO value of the questionnaire is 0.877, higher than 0.6 and close to 1, indicating that the questionnaire boasts a good validity. And the value of Bartlett test is .000, less than 0.05, which indicates that the questionnaire can be performed. All in all, the questionnaire has a good validity.

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy	0.877
Approx. Chi-Square	2154.847
Bartlett's test of Sphericity	
df	561
Sig.	0.000

2) Interview

In order to make the study more reliable, interview is used to collect oral information to help to discover and confirm the the factors that prevent teachers from applying discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching. The interviewees are 2 English teachers who teach Grade 2 in Kunming Y High School, Teacher W and Teacher S. The interview consists of 5 questions. In order to facilitate further data analysis, the whole conversation will be recorded.

3) Classroom Observation

In order to find out the factors that prevent teachers from applying discourse analysis theory in English reading teaching, the classroom observation last for two months, from October to December in 2023. The researcher observes 6 English reading classes for each teacher, so 12 English reading classes in total and each class lasts 45 minutes.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Students' Discourse Analysis Ability on Macro Level

In the questionnaire, six questions are used to discover the current situation of senior high school students' discourse analysis ability on the macro level. As shown in Table 4, it is an overall analysis of the five questions on the macro level.

Table 4. Students' Discourse Analysis Ability on Macro Level.

Labels	N	Mean	SD
Students' discourse analysis ability on the macro level	110	3.15	0.58

According to Table 4, although the mean score of students' discourse analysis ability on the macro level is 3.15, among 3-4, it is not positively high-level. And the standard deviation value is 0.58, which means students' discourse analysis ability on the macro

level is relatively steady. On the macro level, there are two dimensions, genre and background knowledge. There is an obvious difference in students' discourse analysis ability regarding background knowledge, so the researcher will focus on analyzing students' discourse analysis ability in this area.

There are two items under the dimension of students' discourse analysis ability of background knowledge. Question eight is to test whether students have the ability in predicting the reading content from the title and the illustrations in a text. As shown in Table 5, 40.9% of students are uncertain about whether they can predict the reading content. 29% (20.9% disagree + 8.1% strongly disagree) of students do not predict the reading content. Actually, it is useful for students to predict the reading content from the title and the illustrations in a text. Therefore, English teachers are supposed to encourage students to do prediction and teach them more prediction skills in English teaching.

Table 5. Students' Discourse Analysis Ability of Background knowledge.

Item	Option	N	P(%)
8	A = Strongly disagree	9	8.1%
	B = Disagree	23	20.9%
	C = Uncertain	45	40.9%
	D = Agree	25	22.7%
	E = Strongly agree	8	7.2%
15	A = Strongly disagree	7	6.3%
	B = Disagree	21	19.1%
	C = Uncertain	51	46.4%
	D = Agree	27	24.5%
	E = Strongly agree	4	3.6%

Notes: N: numbers of students; P: percentage.

Question fifteen is used to find out whether students can activate relevant prior knowledge to better understand the new text. According to Table 5, 46.4% of students are uncertain about whether they can use the prior knowledge to help them understand the text. 28.1% (24.5% agree + 3.6% strongly agree) of students do can use the prior knowledge to help them understand the text, still 25.4% (6.3% strongly disagree + 3.6% disagree) of students don't have the ability to activate their prior knowledge. Therefore, English teachers should encourage students to utilize prior knowledge to help them comprehend the text in English teaching.

4.2. Students' Discourse Analysis Ability on Micro Level

The second dimension in the questionnaire is designed to investigate students' discourse analysis ability on the micro level, including coherence and cohesion.

As shown in Table 6, although the mean score of students' discourse analysis ability at the macro level is 3.38, which falls between 3 and 4, it is not considered a high score. And the standard deviation value is 0.61, which means students' discourse analysis ability on the micro level is relatively steady. On the micro level, there are two dimensions, coherence and cohesion. The difference of students' discourse analysis ability of coherence is obvious, so the researcher will focus on the analysis of students' discourse analysis ability of coherence.

Table 6. Students’ Discourse Analysis Ability on Micro Level.

Labels	N	Mean	SD
Students’ discourse analysis ability on the micro level	110	3.38	0.61

There are three items under the dimension of students’ discourse analysis ability of coherence. Question five is intended to investigate whether students can find out the topic sentence in each paragraph and the main idea of each paragraph. As shown in Table 7, 37.3% of students have the ability to find out the topic sentence in each paragraph and the main idea of each paragraph. While 24.6% (19.1% disagree + 5.5% strongly disagree) of students can’t find out the topic sentence in each paragraph and the main idea of each paragraph, and 38.1% of students are not sure whether they have the ability. Therefore, English teachers are supposed to cultivate students good reading habits to find out the topic sentence in each paragraph and figuring out the main idea of each paragraph.

Table 7. Students’ Discourse Analysis Ability of Coherence.

Item	Option	N	P(%)
5	A = Strongly disagree	6	5.5%
	B = Disagree	21	19.1%
	C = Uncertain	42	38.1%
	D = Agree	34	30.9%
	E = Strongly agree	7	6.4%
10	A = Strongly disagree	8	7.3%
	B = Disagree	19	17.3%
	C = Uncertain	41	37.3%
	D = Agree	36	32.7%
	E = Strongly agree	6	5.4%
16	A = Strongly disagree	4	3.6%
	B = Disagree	17	15.5%
	C = Uncertain	39	35.5%
	D = Agree	47	42.7%
	E = Strongly agree	3	2.7%

Notes: N: numbers of students, P: percentage.

Question ten is used to find out after reading, whether students can do a summary of a text in English. As shown in Table 7, 37.3% of students are uncertain about whether they can do an English summary after reading a text. 38.1% (32.7% agree + 5.4% strongly agree) of students have the ability to do a summary of a text in English. Still 24.6% (7.3% strongly disagree + 17.3% disagree) of students have difficult in doing an English summary after reading. In the process of classroom observation, teachers nearly don’t make any demands on the students’ ability in this aspect. Therefore, English teachers are supposed to guide students to do English summary in daily practice.

Question sixteen is designed to find out whether students can figure out author’s intent and attitude in an article. As shown in Table 7, 35.5% of students are uncertain about whether they can get the intention and attitude of the author. 45.4% (42.7% agree + 2.7% strongly agree) of students can master the author’s intent. Still 19.1% (3.6% strongly disagree + 15.5% disagree) of students have trouble in grasping the intention and attitude of the author. Therefore, English teachers should design more relevant activities to help students understand the intention and attitude of the passage.

4.3. Factors that Prevent Teachers from Applying DAT in English Reading Teaching

After finishing the analysis of the research of questionnaire, the researcher tries to figure out the factors that prevent teachers from applying DAT in English reading teaching. In this study, the results of interview and classroom observation are used to discover the factors. In the interview, there are five questions. However, the results of three questions can help to summarize the factors. Therefore, the researcher will focus on analyzing the results of three questions and classroom observation.

The first question is “what do you think is the teaching objectives of English reading in senior high school?” When asked about the teaching objectives of English reading in senior high school, Teacher W and Teacher S provided different yet insightful perspectives. Teacher W firmly believes that the primary objective is to cultivate students' language proficiency. This includes enhancing their vocabulary knowledge by teaching new words and phrases from the reading texts and ensuring students can accurately understand and use them in different contexts. Grammar learning is also emphasized, as Teacher W spends a significant amount of time explaining complex sentence structures and grammatical rules found in the readings. By doing so, students are expected to improve their reading comprehension at the sentence level and be able to translate and analyze sentences with ease. Additionally, Teacher W aims to train students' reading speed through regular timed reading exercises, enabling them to quickly extract information from the texts.

On the other hand, Teacher S holds a different view. They consider that the core teaching objective should be to foster students' critical thinking and cultural awareness. Teacher S encourages students to question and analyze the content of the reading materials, rather than simply accepting the information presented. In terms of cultural awareness, Teacher S incorporates cultural background knowledge related to the texts into the teaching process. This helps students understand the cultural connotations behind the words and expressions, and promotes cross-cultural understanding. Teacher S also organizes group discussions and debates to encourage students to exchange ideas and develop their own viewpoints.

It is evident that Teacher W focuses more on the language skills aspect, while Teacher S places greater emphasis on the cognitive and cultural development of students. Both views have their merits, and a balanced approach that combines language proficiency improvement with critical thinking and cultural awareness cultivation may be more beneficial in achieving the overall teaching goals of English reading in senior high school.

The second question that “how do you understand or deal with the requirement of improving students' discourse analysis ability?” When it comes to the question of how to understand and deal with the requirement of enhancing students' discourse analysis ability, Teacher W and Teacher S present distinct approaches.

Teacher W approaches this task from a systematic instruction perspective. He believes that it is essential to break down the process of discourse analysis into manageable steps for students. Firstly, in the pre-reading stage, Teacher W focuses on activating students' prior knowledge related to the topic of the text and use brainstorming activities or short discussions to help students build a mental framework for understanding the upcoming content. During the reading process, Teacher W explicitly teaches students to identify different types of cohesive devices such as pronouns, conjunctions, and lexical repetitions. He uses examples from the text to illustrate how these devices work to connect ideas and create a coherent whole. After reading, students are required to summarize the text not just by listing the main events but also by explaining how the ideas are organized and connected. However, Teacher W acknowledges that students may sometimes struggle with applying these skills in new texts, and more practice and reinforcement are needed.

Teacher S, on the other hand, takes a more student-centered and exploratory approach. He thinks that students should be given more autonomy in the process of developing discourse analysis ability. Teacher S often organizes group projects where students work together to analyze a text. In these groups, students are encouraged to discuss their own understandings of the text's structure and meaning, and to challenge each other's ideas. He also encourages students to keep a reading journal where they record their thoughts and questions about the texts they read, as well as their attempts to analyze the discourse. However, Teacher S admits that this approach may sometimes be time-consuming and requires careful guidance to ensure that students stay on track.

In conclusion, both Teacher W and Teacher S are making efforts to improve students' discourse analysis ability, but their methods differ significantly. A combination of their approaches might provide a more comprehensive and effective way to meet the requirements of developing students' discourse analysis skills.

The third question is "do you teach students background information about the passage in English reading?" Teacher W states that he usually teach students background information about the passage in English reading. He believes it helps students better understand the context and makes the reading process smoother. For instance, before reading a text about a historical event, Teacher W would introduce the background details such as the time, place, and main figures involved. This information is presented through short lectures or the use of visual aids like pictures or maps.

Teacher S, however, has a different stance. He only provides background information selectively. Teacher S thinks that students should learn to explore and research the background on their own to some extent. He might give some hints or guiding questions to prompt students to look for relevant information before delving into the text. This way, students can develop their independent learning ability and become more actively involved in the reading process.

To sum up, Teacher W and Teacher S have different teaching methods regarding providing background information. Teacher W prefers a more direct teaching approach, while Teacher S focuses on fostering students' independent research skills. Both methods have their own advantages and potential drawbacks, and it is necessary to further explore how to balance them to achieve better teaching results in English reading.

5. Conclusion

The findings revealed that students' discourse analysis abilities on both macro and micro levels were only moderately developed and relatively low. They faced difficulties in aspects such as genre recognition, background knowledge utilization, and coherence understanding. Meanwhile, teachers exhibited diverse teaching objectives and methods. Some teacher emphasized language proficiency, while others focused on critical thinking and cultural awareness, and their approaches to developing student' discourse analysis abilities differed significantly.

To improve this situation, teachers need to take several measures. Firstly, they should design more targeted teaching activities. For macro analysis, specific training on genre recognition and background knowledge activation can be carried out, such as organizing group discussions before reading to help students predict content and recall prior knowledge. In micro analysis, more exercises on identifying cohesive devices and analyzing text coherence should be provided, using sample texts to teach students how to find topic sentences, summarize, and understand the author's intent. Secondly, a balanced teaching approach that combines language skills training with the cultivation of critical thinking and cultural awareness should be adopted. When teaching texts related to cultural topics, teachers can not only explain language points but also deeply explore cultural background knowledge to encourage students to think critically. Finally, in teaching background knowledge, a combination of direct teaching and student self-exploration is advisable. Teachers can provide some basic background information directly and also assign

tasks for students to independently search for and analyze relevant information to enhance their independent learning ability and text understanding.

In conclusion, continuous efforts are necessary to enhance the application of discourse analysis theory in senior high school English reading teaching and effectively cultivate students' reading abilities and discourse awareness.

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