



An Analysis of Strategies for Improving College Students' English Reading Ability

Ruoxi Liu

Guangzhou College of Applied Science and Technology, Zhaoqing 526072, Guangdong, China; Research Center for Urban and Rural Cultural Development, Guangzhou College of Applied Science and Technology, Zhaoqing 526072, Guangdong, China

Abstract: English reading ability is the core component of college students' comprehensive English competence, and it is also an important tool for them to acquire professional knowledge and participate in international exchanges. At present, college students in China have some problems in English reading, such as lack of vocabulary, lack of cultural background knowledge and improper use of reading skills, which lead to low reading efficiency. This paper systematically analyzes the strategies to improve college students' English reading ability from the five dimensions of language foundation, reading skills, cultural integration, teaching models and autonomous learning. Combining empirical research and teaching practice, it puts forward targeted suggestions to provide reference for college English teaching reform and students' autonomous improvement.

Keywords: College students; English reading ability; Reading strategies; Teaching reform; Autonomous learning

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, English is becoming more and more important as an international common language, and reading is the most important way to obtain English information. "College English Teaching Guide" clearly states that college students should have the ability to "read English articles on general subjects and simple documents related to majors". However, the current situation of college students' English reading ability is not optimistic: some students are difficult to disassemble semantics when faced with long and difficult sentences, misunderstand text connotations in cross-cultural contexts, and cannot efficiently grasp key information in time-limited reading. These problems not only affect their English test scores, but also restrict their academic research and international vision. Therefore, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to explore scientific and effective strategies to improve college students' English reading ability.

2. Consolidate the language foundation

Build the "cornerstone" of reading ability Linguistic basis is the prerequisite for English reading, including lexical, grammatical and textual knowledge. Without a solid language foundation, reading strategies are out of the question.

2.1 Vocabulary: From "accumulation of quantity" to "application of quality"

Vocabulary is the "smallest unit" of reading, and college students' vocabulary directly affects their reading fluency. Studies have shown that effective comprehension can only be achieved when readers have mastered more than 95% of the vocabulary in the text[1] At present, college students generally have the problem of disconnection between "passive vocabulary" (which can only be recognized) and "active vocabulary" (which can be used flexibly). Mechanical memorization of words leads to a high rate of vocabulary forgetting and weak ability to use context. To solve this problem, "contextualized vocabulary learning method" can be used: memorize words combined with reading materials, infer word meanings through context (such as synonyms, antonyms, causality and other clues), and simultaneously record word collocations and stylistic colors. For example, when reading the Economist's article on "climate change", you can simultaneously accumulate topic vocabulary such as "carbon footprint" and "renewable energy", which not only strengthens memory, but also improves the systematicness of topic vocabulary. In addition, using root affix methods (such as "bio-" means "life", "-logy" means "subject", and the meaning of "biology" can be deduced) and etymological stories to assist memory can significantly improve the efficiency of vocabulary learning.[2]

2.2 Grammar: Breaking through the "Bottleneck" of Long and Difficult Sentences

Grammar is the "skeleton" of language, and the comprehension obstacle of complex sentence patterns is the main pain point for college students to read. Attributive clauses adverbial clauses and non-predicate verbs are common structures in English which often lead to nested sentence elements and fuzzy logical relations. For example: "The study which was

conducted by researchers from Harvard University, whose findings were published in Nature last month, shows that regular exercise reduces the risk of heart disease." Such long sentences require grammatical analysis to dismantle the trunk ("The study shows that...") and modifying elements (attributive clauses, appositives) in order to clarify the logic. In teaching, teachers can adopt "sentence pattern modular training": first guide students to identify the signs of common complex sentences (such as relative pronouns "which" and "who", conjunctions "if" and "though"), and then analyze sentences through the three-step method of "backbone extraction-modification component positioning-logical relationship combining", and finally carry out replacement exercises of similar sentence patterns. At the same time, students are recommended to read "New Concept English (Volume III)" and other textbooks featuring complex sentence patterns, and strengthen their grammatical application ability by imitating sentences.[3]

2.3 Discourse: Grasp the "context" of the text

Textual knowledge refers to the structure and logic of the text, such as the "total-point-total" structure of expository texts, and the "argument-argument-conclusion" structure of argumentative texts. Students who lack discourse awareness often read sentence by sentence, but cannot grasp the cohesive relationship between paragraphs (such as "how" means turning, "in addition" means progression). During the training, the text logic can be visualized through the "discourse structure map": use the mind map to sort out the topic sentences, support sentences and transitional words of the article, and mark the causality, contrast and other relationships between paragraphs. For example, when reading an argumentative essay, first locate the argument (usually in the first or last paragraph), then find out how the arguments in each paragraph support the argument, and finally analyze the echo between the conclusion and the argument. This method can help students rise from "local understanding" to "overall grasp".[4]

3. Mastering reading skills: a "sharp weapon" to improve reading efficiency

Reading skills are methods to achieve efficient comprehension on the basis of language, including skimming, intensive reading, reasoning and guessing words, etc., which need to be flexibly selected according to the purpose of reading.

3.1 Skimming: Quickly capture "core information"

Skimming is suitable for obtaining the main purpose or general idea of an article, such as reading news headlines, summaries, etc. The key is to "grasp the big and let go of the small": focus on reading the first and last paragraphs, and the topic sentence of each paragraph (usually the first or last sentence), ignoring details such as specific examples and data. For example, when reading an article on "AI Development", you can know that the article discusses "AI Application Prospects and Ethical Controversy" by skimming the first and last paragraphs, and then judge the author's opinion on "AI Development Should Strengthen Supervision" position. During the training, a "time-limited skimming task" can be set: students are required to read a 300-word article within 1 minute and summarize the main purpose, and gradually improve their reading speed (the goal is 200-300 words per minute). At the same time, students are guided to pay attention to the "visual cues" such as the title, subtitle, and diagram of the text, which are often the direct embodiment of the main theme.[5]

3.2 Scanning: Accurate positioning of "detailed information"

Intensive reading is suitable for finding specific details (such as time, data, opinions), and is common in academic literature readings or detailed questions in exams. Its core is to "find the answer with the question": first clarify the key words in the question (such as the name of the person, the number), then go back to the original text to quickly locate the relevant paragraphs, and read this part of the content intensively. For example, when reading an experimental report, if you need to find the "sample number", you can directly locate the "Methods" section without reading the full text. In teaching, "information matching exercises" can be designed: give a number of questions (such as "What do the author think is the main cause of environmental problems?"), let students mark the position of the answer in the original text and analyze the basis, and cultivate "goal-oriented" reading habits.[6]

4. Integrating into the cultural background: the key to eliminating "understanding deviation"

Language is the carrier of culture, and many obstacles in English reading stem from unfamiliarity with Western culture (such as history, values, social customs). For example, without understanding the origin of "Thanksgiving", it is difficult to understand the symbolic meaning of "turkey" and "pilgrims" in the relevant text; If you are not familiar with Western "individualistic" values, you may misread the positive connotation of "self-relief".

4.1 Constructing a "Cultural Knowledge Map"

Colleges and universities can integrate culture teaching into reading courses to systematically supplement the cultural common sense of English-speaking countries: historical events (such as the impact of the "Revolutionary War" on American values), social customs (such as the etiquette norms of "tip culture"), religious traditions (such as Christian "Bible stories" on English proverbs), etc. For example, when reading excerpts from Shakespeare's plays, the social class system in the Elizabethan period is explained simultaneously to help students understand the behavioral motives of the characters in the plays. In addition, students are recommended to read books such as "An Overview of British and American Culture"[7], or watch BBC documentaries (such as "History of Britain"), and build a cultural cognitive system through multi-dimensional input.

4.2 Pay attention to "cross-cultural pragmatic differences"

The same word or expression may have different meanings in different cultures. For example, "dragon" symbolizes "auspiciousness" in Chinese, but it is often related to "evil" in English; "white elephant" means "something useless and expensive" in English, not a literal "white elephant". If such "culture-loaded words" are only understood literally, it is very easy to cause misunderstandings. In teaching, "cultural comparison notes" can be established: record the cultural differences expressed in Chinese and English, such as address (English "last name" is surname, Chinese "surname" comes first), taboos (English avoid asking privacy such as age and income), etc. At the same time, through "situational simulation" exercises (such as simulating conversations with native English speakers), pragmatic competence in cultural contexts is strengthened. [8]

5. Optimize the teaching mode: play the role of "guiding and empowering"

Teachers' teaching methods directly affect the improvement of students' reading ability. The traditional mode of "sentence-by-sentence translation and grammar explanation" is difficult to cultivate students' independent reading ability. It is necessary to shift from "knowledge imparting" to "strategy guidance".

5.1 Task-based teaching: driving "input" with "output"

Task-Based Language Teaching emphasizes "learning by doing", and promotes students to actively use reading strategies by designing real reading tasks (such as writing abstracts, debating, and role-playing). For example, after reading the English report on "Campus Garbage Sorting", students are required to write the "Campus Garbage Sorting Proposal" (English) in groups, and demonstrate the feasibility based on the data and opinions in the article. This task requires students not only to intensively read the text to extract information, but also to transform the information into practical expression, so as to realize the closed loop of "input-internalization-output".[9]

5.2 Flipped Classroom: Reconstructing the Process of "Learning and Teaching"

Flipped classrooms put "knowledge transfer" before class (students learn reading skills through micro-classes), and class time is used for "deep interaction" (such as group discussions on difficult problems, teacher-targeted guidance). For example, the teacher recorded the micro-class "How to analyze long and difficult sentences" in advance, and the students studied and completed the exercises before the class; In class, students share ideas for solving problems in groups, and teachers give advice on common problems (such as logical subject judgment of non-predicate verbs). This model can give full play to students' subjectivity and improve learning efficiency[10].

6. Conclusion

Improving college students' English reading ability is a systematic project, which needs to be based on language foundation, reading skills as a tool, cultural background as a support, teaching reform as a guide, and autonomous learning as a driving force. College students should realize that reading is not only a process of "obtaining information", but also a process of "thinking training" and "cultural dialogue". Through the application of scientific strategies, from "able to read" to "able to read" and then to "love to read", the comprehensive English ability will be improved in an all-round way, laying a solid foundation for academic development and international exchanges.

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