

## An Examination of English Majors' Literary Reading Ability and the Cultivation of Their Patriotism

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**Abstract:** 165 English majors from a secondary college in east China were selected to be in this study for an investigation of their literature literacy and reading ability. After an analysis of the English majors' literature reading, i.e. their literature literacy, reading interest, reading habits and the barriers for them), this study focuses on examining the factors that interfere in the improvement of the English majors' literature reading ability, attempting to stimulate their intrinsic motivation of literature reading, to cultivate their patriotism and explore an effective way out of English literature teaching dilemma by regulating the reading contents, and changing the teaching methods and evaluation mechanism in the future.

### 1.Introduction

As some literary critics have pointed out, literary classics, bearing knowledge and understanding of nature and civilization, stand for the essence of the wisdom of a nation, a language or an era. Literary classics will not only present knowledge of human beings and the world around them, but also perfect the audience. (Qian, 2006; Luo, 2004; Nie, 2013). In addition, literary classics are of special significance for English majors: literary classics not only outline a map of a literary history (Nie, 2013), but also demonstrate the essence of a language and the culture in it. Reading literary classics contributes to a better understanding of a literary development, a language, and the culture in it. However, as some scholars have observed, visual culture and digital culture (Zhou, 2016; Zhao, 2008) greatly challenge the traditional reading way, change people's reading ways, and seriously affect the reading quality. Today's popular reading has become faster, shorter, shallower, and more broken and inclusive. Nowadays, electronic reading has profoundly changed the English majors' reading habits in the sample college and has undermined the literature course. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the English majors' literature literacy and to explore ways of improving their literature reading ability in the sample college.

### 2.Literature Review

Chinese scholars have paid attention to the English majors' literature reading since 2011. In the past two years, new progress has been made in this field; nearly ten related papers have appeared, putting forward the several suggestions or countermeasures of improving English majors' literature reading ability. (Shi, 2011; Huang, 2013; Deng, 2019; Yang, 2020; Ju, 2020)

The *American literature* course syllabus in the sample college targets junior English majors. The purpose of the course is to present the junior English majors with an introduction to the development of American literature, the representative writers and their works in each stage, and the basic approaches to literary criticism, aiming to cultivate their ability to read, to understand and to appreciate American literary masterpieces and to enhance their understanding of American culture.

The National Standard for Teaching Quality of Foreign Languages and Literature (2018) and the teaching guide for Foreign Languages and Literatures (2020) propose that foreign-language majors should be patriotic and have international vision. The splendid Chinese culture gave birth to patriotism, building cultural self-confidence. Inheriting and spreading Chinese culture helps to realize the Chinese Dream. The Ministry of Education launched in 2019 the "Six Excellences, One

Top” program 2.0 (or the “Double Ten Thousand Program”), putting forward ideas for a construction of new liberal arts, setting off a “quality revolution” in universities nationwide. The “Six Excellence, One Top” plan advocates breaking through the existing disciplinary pattern and promoting cross-border integration, thus putting forward higher requirements for English majors’ cross-disciplinary competence and multi-dimensional literary vision. In the context of the “New National Standards” and the “Six Excellences, One top” program, the course of American Literature carries a new mission of cultivating students’ patriotism, spreading Chinese culture and improving students’ cross-cultural communicative competence, which will be achieved in the literary classic reading.

Before entering the course of *American Literature*, it is necessary to make a survey on English majors’ literature literacy and reading ability in the sample college so as to select the fittest literary texts for the course. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the English majors’ literature literacy and their reading ability in our college, focusing on the following five issues: 1) the English majors’ literature literacy; 2) the English majors’ reading interest; (3) the English majors’ reading habits; (4) the barriers for English majors’ literary reading; (5) English majors’ better understanding of the patriotism. The exploration of these issues will enrich the literature reading research, and shed some light on how English majors should adjust their English learning motivation, and has certain reference value for teachers as to cultivate the English majors’ patriotism.

### **3. Research Design**

#### **3.1 Research Context and Participants**

The study was conducted at a secondary college in a normal university in East China, which aims to cultivate elementary and middle school teachers in various disciplines and most of whose students are from a province in eastern China. American Literature is a required course for junior English majors. Compared with the English majors in other universities, the English majors in the sample college demonstrate weaker English and poorer learning ability. Although the sample students have been learning English for more than ten years, their English reading ability is undesirable. The study included 165 junior English majors. The sample size was assumed to be representative of participants in three majors (English, English Teacher Training and Translation). In this study, the participants’ reading literacy and reading ability were investigated by a online questionnaire, in which the English majors’ literature literacy, their reading interest, the reading habits and reading barriers for them were compared.

#### **3.2 Research Methods**

In this study, an online questionnaire survey with 22 questions was conducted to examine how the sample students who took part in the course of American Literature interpret patriotism by dealing with their literature literacy, their reading interest, their reading habits, the barriers for reading and their literary reading ability, aiming to explore several strategies of improving the participants’ literary reading ability.

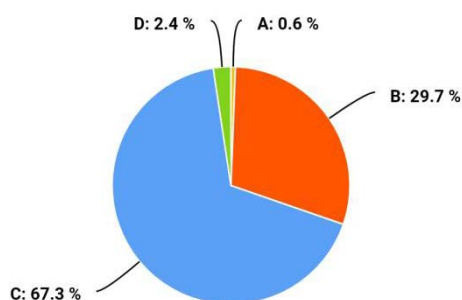
#### **3.3 Data Analysis**

There are 13 boy students and 152 girl students involved in the survey; 75 of the participants were students of Liberal Arts while 90 were students of Science when they were in the high school. However, the participants’ gender and their academic background exert little influence on their literature literacy or literary reading ability.

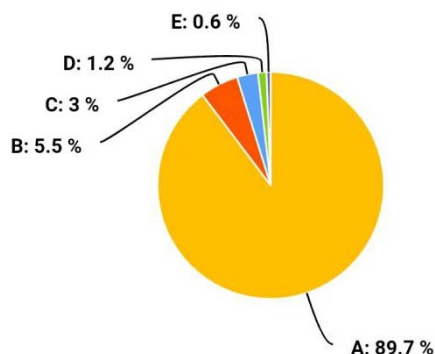
##### **3.3.1 Reading Interest**

As the first pie chart demonstrates, rare cases who never show any interest in literary reading can be found in the participants; and nearly one third of them only show little interest in it; nearly two thirds of them show some interest in it; and very few of them show great interest in it.

The second pie chart shows that nearly nine tenths of the participants intend to read fiction, 5.5% of them prefer essays, 3% of them love poetry; 1.2% favor dramas and only 0.6% of them find other genres more interesting.

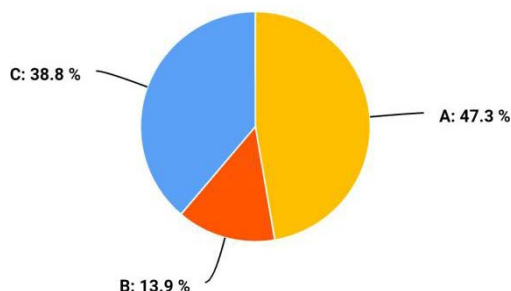


Pie Chart 1 The Participants' Reading Interest

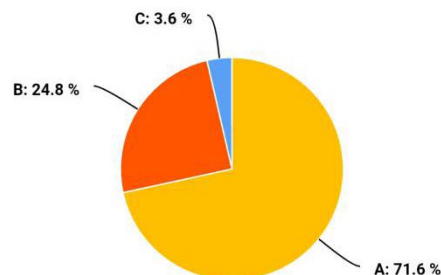


Pie Chart 2 Literary Genres

According to the third pie chart, 47.3% of the participants intend to read Chinese works; 13.9% of them prefer foreign works; 38.8% of them shows no preferences. Therefore, for 71.6% of the participants, Chinese works dominate their reading; for 24.8% of them, Euramerican works prevail; for 3.6% of them, Asian works account for the greatest proportion; while literary works in other districts attract no attention, which is well illustrated in the fourth pie chart.

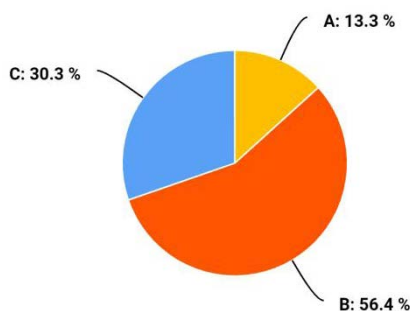


Pie Chart 3 Literary Works at Home and Abroad

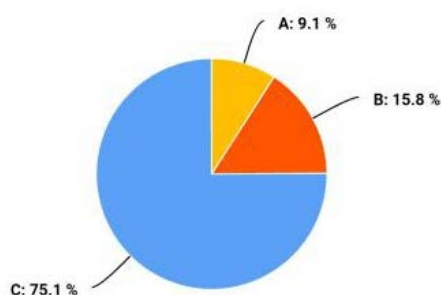


Pie Chart 4 Literary Works in Different Districts

According to the fifth pie chart, 13.3% of the participants intend to read ancient Chinese works; 56.4% of them prefer modern Chinese works; while 30.3% of them shows no preferences. The sixth pie chart reveals that 9.1% of the participants intend to read works written by male writers, 15.8% of them prefer female writers while 75.1% of them shows no preferences.



Pie Chart 5 Literary Works in Different Periods



Pie Chart 6 Male Writers and Female Writers

The 14<sup>th</sup> item in the survey proves to be very referential. It reveals that when choosing literary works, 156 of the participants pay attention to the plot, 101 of them are interest in the language, 103

of them care the style, 100 of them focus on the themes, and 21 of them even notice more details in the literary works.

### 3.3.2 Reading Habits

The 4<sup>th</sup> item in the survey illustrates a tough fact. When asked how they got to know a classic, 134 of the participants' answer is movies or TV plays, 104 of them get to know literary classics via friends or literature guides, 119 of them hear of the classics at school, 90 of them read the classic, and 43 of them get in touch with the literary works via other ways.

The 13<sup>th</sup> item in the survey illustrates a more disappointing fact. When asked what they care most about a classic, 91 of the participants' answer is the interesting plot, 57 of them care the themes, and several of them examine the structure, the writer and the popularity of the books.

As the 16<sup>th</sup> item in the survey shows, 99 of the participants read literary classics independently, 48 of them turn to the teachers for a better understanding, and 16 of them take part in group reading and share their reviews.

The 17<sup>th</sup> item in the survey shows 90.4% of the participants read literary classics from cover to cover, 13 of them skip in reading, and 2 of them follow other patterns.

### 3.3.3 Literature Literacy

The 18<sup>th</sup> item in the survey asks the participants how much they know about American literary history. 39 of the participants don't know much, 119 of them know a little, and 7 of them know it well. The 19<sup>th</sup> item shares a similar idea with the 18<sup>th</sup> item, and the participants present similar responses, which confirm the result of the 18<sup>th</sup> item. The 20<sup>th</sup> item in the survey asks the participants how much they know about Chinese literary history. 24 of the participants don't know much, 116 of them know a little, and 25 of them know it well.

### 3.3.4 The Barriers in Their Reading

The 15<sup>th</sup> item in the survey deals with the barriers for reading. 125 of the participants think that language stops them from a better understanding, 26 of them choose the plot, 146 of them think that the cultural background is the most difficult to tackle, 56 of them think the evening are not sure about the themes, and 13 of them find other details hard nuts to crack. The barriers for them are also illustrated in the 5<sup>th</sup> item in the survey which asks for their English proficiency. 60 of the participants have passed the TEM-4, 108 of them have passed the CET-6, and some of the participants have got only the CET-4 certificate, which is not enough for the literary reading.

The last two items in the survey ask them for their interpretation of the patriotism. Most of the answers, detailed or short, demonstrate to be ambiguous.

## 4. Conclusions and Implications

As discussed above, the participants' gender and their academic background exert little influence on their performance in literary reading. Although the participants' interest in reading vary from person to person, while the majority find it acceptable. Besides, most of them find fiction easier to read. Another finding is that most of them don't judge the literary works shallowly because of their background or the times when they were published. What's more, most of the participants develop a pretty good reading habit, which enables them to be a careful reader.

The disappointing findings may be as follows: firstly, the participants are shallow when deal with the literary works; secondly, some of them are not perfect readers because of their poor English; thirdly, most of them display a lack of reading experience; lastly, most of them present a blurred definition of patriotism.

Therefore, it will be wise to choose fiction, a genre which are popular among the participants as the teaching materials. Besides, focus should be laid on patriotism, one of the key words in literary reading, and close reading of the designated bibliography. The most important is that the participants should get as detailed guide as possible, which will promise *American Literature* to be a effective training for them.

## Acknowledgment

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