The Problems and Countermeasures of English Reading Comprehension

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Abstract: Reading is a comprehension by which one seeks out and understands the information from the multitude of reading sources. It also needs the readers to do with the visual information they get, such as decoding, processing and encoding. The reading problems in students from technological academies do not come from the visual information and non-visual information, but also their ineffective reading habits and subjective factors. With the hope to improve students' level of reading comprehension, the teachers should help students in accumulating the two types of information (visual and non-visual), and cultivating them in good reading mentation (concentration and persistence).

1. Introduction

According to *The New College English Syllabus to Teaching Requirements in* China, teachers should cultivate Ss in good ability of reading as well as listening, speaking, writing and translation so that Ss can use English as a tool to communicate. Reading is a comprehension by which one seeks out and understands the information from the multitude of reading sources. It also needs the readers to do with the visual information they get, such as decoding, processing and encoding. Meanwhile, it involves the reader's prediction mechanism, cognitive ability and textual analysis ability. Therefore, the above mentioned reflect in the level of reading. The factors or problems affecting reading comprehension come from multiple sides. Based on the personal teaching practice and questionnaire, this article mainly discusses the general factors to come up with strategies for improve the Ss' level of reading comprehension in the next.

2. The Problems in Reading Comprehension

2.1 In the Visual Information

In his book Reading, Smith believed (1978) that readers must make use of visual and non-visual information to understand the language [1]. The visual information refers to the information that eyes can see directly from the text. It is mostly a textual symbol, including letters, words, sentences and other language forms. Getting visual information means that readers understand the language forms and its literal meaning, furthermore, deeply understand the language combing the non-visual information. Therefore, the reading problems in Ss from technological academies come from the visual information, reflecting in the two aspects:

2.1.1 Less Vocabulary

The Discourse Organization Theory divides English text into word, phrase, clause, and sentence. Of them word is the most basic units and the elements of language. So words form a text according to certain grammar and language habits. In this aspect, the volume of English vocabulary directly affects the readers' comprehension. Some of the non-English majors in our school are from ethnic group or recommended by vocational middle school, which decides their poor English foundation than those of other universities. A questionnaire by the research team showed that although Ss spend a bundle of

time each day in words, they made little progress. During the tests, once Ss encounter the new words (actually the syllabus vocabulary), they got so frustrated that gave up easily, or misunderstood the information coming from the text for they were not familiar with words and failed to understand the text combing the sentences and text. Worse, some Ss stopped further reading to focus on guessing the meaning of a certain word due to visual problems. Hence, Ss regress to the sentences even text during which slowed down the reading speed, thus affecting the comprehension to the whole text.

2.1.2 Unfamiliar with Grammar

The American Heritage Dictionary defines grammar as the system of inflection, syntax and word formation of a language. The grammar in English reading teaching mainly refers to concrete syntactic rules and which underlies in English language. The reading problems from this aspect are mainly manifested in structural problems in grammar rules, such as tense, voice, subjunctive mood, non-predicate verb, clauses (including connective and relative pronoun, or relative adverb).

In the questionnaire, there is a biographical article about Albert Einstein. This article, with 7 sentences (about 230 words) has the following features: specific language, refined expression, but longer sentence. Take the seventh sentence in this article as an example:

The irony for this idealistic man (Albert Einstein) was that his famous postulation of an energy-mass equation, which states that a particle of matter can be converted into an enormous quantity of energy, had its spectacular proof in the creation of the automatic and hydrogen bombs, the most destructive weapons ever known [2].

Due to 52 words in this sentence, many Ss have difficulty in choosing the right answer because they do not have enough grammatical foundation and lack the ability to deal with long sentences.

Item: Einstein's famous postulation of an energy-mass equation "_____."
Options:
A: was originally presented for pacifism and liberalism
B: was the only novel written Einstein
C: states that an enormous quality of energy can be converted into a particle of matter
D: caused the creation of the automatic and hydrogen bombs

It is easy for the testee to exclude the options A and B for the low interference. Furthermore, the reader will exclude choice C as long as understanding the structure "his famous postulation...had its spectacular..." But for those Ss who fail to understand, the unfamiliarity with the grammar are obstacles indeed.

2.2 In the Non-Visual Information

The visual information refers to the information that eyes can see directly from the text, while, the non-visual information is accumulated in long-term memory by the readers in learning, work, and life [3]. Although the aspect of getting visual information lays the foundation of a successful reading comprehension, it is rather important for readers to use non-visual information to understand the text. Like the relationship among Chinese characters, meanings, images, and words. Ss read the words, but the meaning behind the words is actually the content to be expressed in the text. That is what we say one understands the content through words. When reading, Ss, on the one hand, have to make sense from words to thoughts, on the other hand, from thought to words. Therefore, when doing the information Ss get those such as decoding and disambiguating, Ss should use their prior knowledge, that is, non-visual information. In addition, the introduction of schema theory, a reading model, not only deeply marks the study of reading strategies, but also emphasizes the importance of readers' non-visual information in reading comprehension. As Smith argues, the more non-visual information a reader stores, the less he depends on visual information, and the easier he understands the article. Conversely, the less non-visual information a reader stores, the more obstacles he meets [4].

In addition, limited scope of knowledge and less cultural background knowledge are the common problems in non-visual information. For example, when Ss are reading "population growth is the *Achilles' heel* of economic development", they often fail to understand "*Achilles' hell*". Another sentence is that "He gets up very early and sits up to late and is *burning the candle at both ends*."

Absolutely, Ss understand the italic words. However, many Ss misunderstood the meaning as "*two sides of a candle*" because of less observation of daily life. As 21st century college students, while they are experiencing the flourishing development of natural sciences, humanities and life sciences, more reading materials from related fields are influencing their existing non-visual information.

Of course, the problems in non-visual information also result from the out-of-date reading teaching models. Most of the Ss from technological academies come from underdeveloped areas. As a result, the traditional reading teaching ways, such as emphasizing grammar, vocabulary, lacking of text analysis and skill teaching, plays a role. Ss have limited reading hours and a small amount of reading in the class. What are worse, heavy tasks before class, less extra reading materials and no guidance and supervision are also main problems. Over time, they feel that reading materials are so difficult that influence their reading comprehension.

2.3 Problems from Ineffective Reading Habits and Subjective Factors

For a long time, due to the tradition of emphasizing on the intensive reading rather than extensive reading, many college students apply the strategies of intensive reading to the extensive reading strategies. They look up every new word, analyze complex sentence structure, and translate each sentence. This common kind of reading habits directly affects reading speed and comprehension. It showed that students' ineffective reading habits are reflected on the following five points.

First, sub-vocalization: It is divided into lip-reading and thinking-aloud. Sub-vocalization is a way of reading without sounds but lip-moving, while, the latter is a way of reading neither sounds nor lip-moving, but pronunciation in mind. The language psychologists believe that although the inevitable meditation in the reading process, it does slower the reading speed.

Second, regression: In reading process, readers move his eyes back to the text just read before.

Third, word-by-word reading: When reading, students, afraid of missing or serial, read and point the text word by word by finger or pen.

Fourth, using dictionary frequently: When reading, students look up the new words frequently.

Fifth, Chinese thinking: When reading, students always translate the sentence or phrases into Chinese.

These five kinds of reading habits are closely related, which interferes with the further processing of information and the expansion of reading, as well as Ss' reading ability.

Besides the ineffective reading habits, the subjective factors affect Ss reading efficiency (comprehension and speed). In this regard, Liu Junhuai (2002), associate professor in Xi'an International Studies University, made a comprehensive analysis. He believes that the subjective factors, such as the purpose, attitude and affection, have a great impact on reading comprehension. Reading strategies, as an important part of the learning strategy, refer to "the behavioral process that learners take to solve the difficulties in reading." [5] Strategy study itself is based on the theories of psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, and second language acquisition. Therefore, in this process, Ss will use their own subjective factors and adopt different reading strategies for different reading purposes and reading materials. According to the survey, due to the purpose of testing, time and mood, when reading for test, the bad psychological state makes Ss nervous when reading, afraid of taking too much time. The more nervous they are, the more they can't understand, so impacting the reading effect. On the contrary, when performing an appreciation reading that is not subject to the above restrictions, Ss may fully internalize their non-verbal information, feel the connotation of the article, and even experience the author's inner world in a state of transcendental state and good mood.

3. Countermeasures to the Problems

3.1 Accumulation in Visual Information

According to the above, we know that there are two main reading problems in visual information: new words and complex sentences. Accordingly, it is necessary to improve reading comprehension from vocabulary and syntax.

3.1.1 Cultivating the Ability How to Enlarge Vocabulary

Speed, understanding, and vocabulary, are the three basic reading skills. In order to understand right and read fast, readers have to enlarge their vocabulary. Therefore, in this process, it is necessary for Ss to learn vocabulary strategies timely and properly. This article aims to guide Ss from technological academies overcoming the problems.

First, knowing about the important points, Ss should know the vocabulary in syllabus and non-syllabus, which means some words only need to be recognized and understood when heard or read, and some need to be used properly in speaking and writing. Surely, the former requires much less energy and time than the latter.

Second, memorizing words smartly, teachers should help Ss learn word-memorizing strategies. For example, for the compound words in the syllabus vocabulary are formed with different meaning by the basic roots of a vocabulary showing the meaning, with different prefixes, suffixes and words. Ss learn this strategy, then twice as much as can be achieved. The strategy of associative memory can be helped as well, that is, using synonym, antonym, affiliation, accompanying relationship, collocation, etc. to inductive associate. Third, guessing the meaning, Ss should make full use of the context to guess the meaning. In this way, SS accumulate amounts of new words, and successfully completing reading comprehension. Forth, extensive reading, which means Ss are aware of increase reading so that in this process words are subconsciously and repetitively memorized, realizing the expansion of vocabulary.

3.1.2 Cultivating the Ability How to Learn English Grammar Smartly

Flexible mastery and application of English grammar play an important role in the reading comprehension for students. In view of the problems caused by unfamiliar with grammar, teachers should highlight the communication function of language in teaching, and help SS to digest grammar so that SS make it the ability to use language correctly. Here are four suggestions. First, teachers should explain grammar carefully and students practice diligently to help knowledge digest fast. That is to say, teachers spend more time and energy on the analysis of typical reading to help students gradually realize the rules of language rather than put more energy on the concept and definition. Second, teachers should help SS get to know about the grammar by comparative analysis. Native language plays an important role in English grammar. Hence, teachers may help students in the differences between two languages through comparing English and Chinese. Thirdly, teachers should focus on induction and deduction. The concept of the new curriculum standard should be adopted, and both the induction and the deduction should be tilted to the induction, so as to better use the communication function of language to achieve the purpose of proficient use of grammar. Fourth, teachers should help Ss review in time to improve efficiency. Teachers help students to review new language phenomena timely, so as to memorize the grammar for a long time and to make the grammatical knowledge systematic and organized.

3.2 Accumulation in Non-visual Information

The British psychologist F.C. Bartlett (1932) defines reading in using the knowledge structure activated from memory to fill in the unexplained details of the article, in order to understand the article. It emphasizes two basic attributes of schema: knowledge and content, that is, schema is equal to knowledge structure in memory. It can be said that the schema we have is the non-visual information we have, that is, the priori knowledge or background knowledge. So, the more non-visual information a reader has, the more schemas he has, and the more ways he grasps, the easier and faster he comprehends the reading . Therefore, an important way to overcome reading problems is to focus on the accumulation of non-visual information.

Specifically, when encountering background knowledge in reading teaching, such as customs, religious beliefs, folk customs or customs, historical events, popular science knowledge, famous person locations, etc., teachers should introduce and explain as much as possible, and help students comprehend by questions, discussion, retelling and notes. In extracurricular reading, teachers should

strengthen guidance and supervision, recommend and encourage students to read newspapers and magazines in various disciplines, subjects, and genres, and let them communicate and learn from each other. In this way, the non-visual information can be digested and expanded through many ways.

3.3 Cultivating Good Reading Habits

It showed that many students still know some reading skills, such as skimming, scanning, etc., but in reading, they are still used to the ways of lip-reading, repeating, looking up dictionary word-by-word frequently. In order to overcome the problems from ineffective reading habits, teachers should cultivate SS in effective reading habits and change their reading strategies.

3.3.1 Overall Reading

The strategy of overall reading requires readers to focus on the overall text rather than individual words. When reading the title of a text or the key words of the text, they immediately call the non-visual information in the mind to predict the content of the text. Then, in the next, they confirm and add the previous prediction by some words, or negate and then predict. Finally they reach a comprehensive understanding to the content of the text. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate the overall reading habits rather than word-by-word reading.

3.3.2 Distinctive Reading

Francis Bacon once said that some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested. It can be seen that different reading need and goals need different reading strategies. With the hope to improve Ss ineffective reading habits, teachers should actively guide students to use the following reading strategies in the process of reading teaching. First, skimming, through reading the title and the first and last sentences, Ss have an impression on the content and structure to know about author's intentions in a short period of time. Second, scanning, it is a process of symbol recognition for obtaining specific information. Ss quickly grasp the central sentence and guess the new words to improve Ss' ability to learn new words. Third, detailed reading, it refers to the comprehensive and careful reading on the basis of an overall impression of the full text. It allows Ss to make sense each paragraph and the details of the article, and come up with problems or perspectives to develop Ss' way of thinking.

3.4 Keep Good Reading Mentation

A good reading mentation is one of the factors that improve reading efficiency. It requires the reader to have both the concentration and persistence.

3.4.1 Cultivating the Reading Concentration

Concentration refers to highly concentrating on reading. It contains clear reading goals and limited reading speed.

The Chinese linguist, Professor Liu Runqing once held the idea that high-efficiency readers will first come up with questions, and the answers to these questions constitute the purpose of reading so as to determine the reading method, skills and speed [6]. Accordingly, teachers should actively prepare class ahead of time, carefully arrange the teaching content, formulate appropriate reading goals, and let the students clearly understand the requirements and content that should be understood. After the teacher lays the foundation for students, the students can focus on these goals, find the answers with questions, and complete the reading in an active, stressful, active and harmonious atmosphere.

Reading speed is one of the criteria for reading efficiency. Cultivating Ss' concentration should also limit the reading speed, that is, students should be required to maintain a certain reading speed on the basis of understanding and have a sense of urgency to effectively maintain the attention and concentration. To this end, teachers can propose corresponding reading requirements according to the teaching objectives, contents and the actual cognitive level of the teaching objects, and establish and limit different reading speeds (70-120 words/minute).

3.4.2 Cultivating the Reading Persistence

In view of the actual situation of students from technological academies, teacher should help Ss keep a good reading state and fully develop their reading emotions and will to ensure the long-lasting reading interests.

Emotion, the center of human psychological mechanism, is a strong internal motivation. Positive reading emotions can motivate and evoke readers' reading motivation, maintain the excitement of the cerebral cortex, and thus maintain the active reading. In reading teaching, visual teaching, situational teaching, communicative teaching and task-based teaching can also be used to stimulate Ss' strong reading interests and motivation, mobilize Ss' reading emotions, and enable Ss to maintain a good, stable reading interest.

Will is the psychological process by which people consciously determine their purpose and dictate their actions to achieve their intended purpose [7]. Those whose will are strong enough can overcome difficulties and problems in the reading process. Due to the weak will and the lack of reading persistence, students from technological academies sharply lose interests, even bore, so that stop reading activities when reading comprehension is more difficult than before. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to the reading purpose, will, persistence to help Ss overcome the psychological barriers.

4. Summary

The ability of English reading comprehension plays an extremely important role in Ss' English learning, and it is also a difficult point for students to improve their English. The problems to reading comprehension are also various. This article only discusses, from the perspective of the visual and non-visual information, ineffective reading habits and subjective factors. And it proposes corresponding strategies, appeals English teachers to help Ss pay attention to two accumulations, the effective reading habits, and a good reading mentation. However, there are still many problems to be solved, such as the relationship between reading strategies and reading ability development, the factors affecting the use of reading strategies, and the cognitive process of reading strategies.

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