

The Dilemma and Outlet for the Teaching of English Intensive Reading in the New Media Era

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Abstract. In the new media era where impetuous atmosphere and “shallow reading” prevail, the value of traditional English intensive reading was seriously underestimated. It is mainly manifested in the surface structure of the teacher’s explanation, students’ scarce awareness about intensive reading, and the disconnection between practice and the content of the teaching and in intensive reading lectures is disconnected classes. The key to solving the problem is that teachers guide students to pay attention to the accumulation of information, use new media resources to strengthen the effects of reading input, and use the combination of multiple input pathways to improve the traditional and single intensive teaching mode, and cultivate students’ awareness of intensive reading.

1 Introduction

In the new media era, most people (especially young people) pursue browsing and fast-food reading. This “shallow reading” cannot truly penetrate into the hearts of the people, which can only lead to brief memories and lasting impetuosity [1]. With the rapid dissemination of electronic texts and audio-visual materials, reading has shifted from intensive reading to extensive reading, from reading aloud and reciting to silent and fast reading. Nowadays, facing the Internet, readers are more likely to browse and choose, rather than chew and swallow slowly. Nowadays, college students’ mood towards English learning is no longer calm because of the prevalence of “shallow reading”, coupled with the promotion of various English exams such as CET 4 and CET 6, postgraduate entrance examination, TOEFL, IELTS, and so on. Professor Wang Zongyan aptly describes students’ three improper behaviors in learning a foreign language: the first is that they are impatient and always want to achieve immediate success; the second is that they are afraid to work hard and always want to achieve success easily; the third is that they are superstitious about booksellers’ advertising and are not careful to choose high-quality textbooks and reference books that meet their own standards. In this teaching environment, traditional intensive reading courses are fiercely criticized, and are considered monotonous, boring, time-consuming and inefficient, so the curriculum value is seriously underestimated.

The author believes that the problem itself does not lie in the curriculum provision of intensive reading, but rather in the scarce awareness of intensive reading on both sides of the teaching and learning under the circumstance of fickle mood, which results in the consequences of “poor intensive reading”, and the

inability of intensive reading course and the unsuccessful reflection of the due curriculum value. Its main manifestations are: teachers only focus on the explanation of words and grammar, regardless of the in-depth analysis of text content, and only focus on the comparison and discrimination of the surface meaning of words, ignoring the exploration of deeper meaning. In such intensive reading course, English teaching is regarded as a knowledge system, rather than as a comprehensive skill for training, which results in the students’ full concentration on listening and reading instead of practicing and memorizing in class. After class, students have not formed the habit of reading and circulating the same text multiple times, and are not good at analyzing and summarizing the language knowledge and the usage of words, so they have not truly absorbed and internalized language knowledge. In a word, teachers did not achieve “refined teaching” and students did not achieve “refined practice”.

2 The dilemma of English intensive reading teaching

2.1 “Inadequate intensive reading”: The dilemma of traditional English intensive reading teaching

2.1.1 *The lack of using simple terms to explain the profound and the absence of deeper analysis on words*

According to a special survey on vocabulary teaching conducted by Chen Xinren, many English teachers take the following route to explain new words: explanation from foreign language words to synonym definitions to

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examples together with students' additional practice [2]. In exercises, the interpretation of a new word is generally given in Chinese. Teachers only require students to create a sentence that conforms to grammatical rules based on the Chinese interpretation of the word with little consideration given to the contextual or stylistic meaning of the word. This stereotyped explanation does not take into account the generating way of words meaning, and there are less lexical analysis on system and regularity.

2.1.2 The absence of typical example analysis and the failure on cultivating students' sentence awareness

In order to cooperate with the explanation of vocabulary and grammatical structures, it is generally necessary to present example sentences one after another. The demonstration of example sentences is an important part of language teaching, and the example sentences are a blueprint for students' imitation of language practice. Therefore, the selection of example sentences is a very serious matter, which requires consideration of the standardization, appropriateness, length of sentences, and students' acceptance level. However, the fact is that many teachers do not include example sentences in their teaching plans, and even if there are, they are a device for dealing with teaching inspections. Teachers are at their own will and follow their own inclinations in class. The example sentences given by teachers in class are "short but not refined", empty and tedious, and do not have the effect of demonstration at all. If students are only exposed to the dull and shriveled sentences, they are doomed to be unable to speak authentic English or write authentic articles [3].

2.1.3 The lack of appreciative teaching in the text

Currently, the textbooks used in college English courses are written with the participation of experts and professors from key universities, and great efforts have been made in selecting materials for the texts. There are many wonderful paragraphs and classic sentences in the texts, which are good materials for the teaching of intensive reading. Unfortunately, teachers have no time to take into account these good materials in their teaching, and even most of the wonderful fragments are treated as ordinary understanding materials. Intensive reading class has become a pure language practice class. Without the guidance of teachers, students cannot appreciate the rhetorical features of words and the creative skills of articles, let alone the connotation of words and the artistic charm of literature. In this situation, it is naturally difficult for the intensive reading class to exert its due value, so over time, boredom will be bred.

2.1.4 The failure of knowledge points teaching in parallel.

Most college freshmen have such an experience that they are not accustomed to the teaching methods of college English classes. In middle school, teachers need to systematically generalize and summarize relevant knowledge points, while in college, teachers set the rhythm of class teaching on their own, and the teaching range is wide and messy, without connecting and reviewing new and learned knowledge. On the surface, the teachers are eloquent and the classes are wonderful, but in fact the students did not pay attention to that. Students reflect that their two-year college English study has not brought them any gains, and some even claim that their English proficiency has not advanced, but fallen behind. Maybe students' reflections are a bit aggressive, but the problems in the teaching of intensive reading courses should indeed arouse our rethinking.

2.1.5 Excessively Dependence on Current Courseware Resources, Teaching Reference Materials and the Lack of Deeper and Unique Thinking on Teaching Plan Design

The electronic lesson plans and teaching reference books are provided in the supporting college English textbooks, which indeed bring great convenience to teachers' teaching and bring them the joy of sharing high-quality teaching resources. However, if teachers adopt a "fetch-and-use" approach, they will lose the enthusiasm to concentrate on the research of text and the motivation to carefully design teaching plans. Relying solely on the inertia of using electronic teaching plans will result in characterless empty talk in class. It's no wonder that students have come up with a new saying that teachers use multimedia classrooms to be "tightly scripted" and read out the electronic texts.

2.2 Students' "Unfocused reading" and weak awareness of intensive reading

2.2.1 The vocabulary learning separated from textbooks and context

There is a false inclination among students: as long as their vocabulary meets the requirements of CET 4 and CET 6, they can achieve success and everything is fine in English. In intensive reading classes, it often occurs that the teacher talks too much, while the students are reciting words with books such as speeded-up learning on CET 4 vocabulary. Words do require reinforced reciting, but the problem is that they cannot be disconnected from the context of the text. Vocabulary books or dictionaries list too many meanings and usages of words, which are too general and do not conform to the rules of memory. This method of vocabulary learning does not deepen the meaning of words into sentences and texts, which is not conducive to forming a good sense of language and the ability to use language.

2.2.2 Reading without practice, tending to objective questions and ignoring subjective questions

Another situation in college English intensive reading classes is “teachers’ non-stopping talking and students’ silent comprehension”. Students merely read and listen without taking notes, communicating in class, or answering teachers’ questions. A considerable number of students only bring a textbook with them in class, without even a piece of paper or a pen. The same is true for extracurricular learning. According to the author’s survey, about 70% of students are not interested in the text exercises of the intensive reading. The reason is that the exercises designed in textbooks are mostly subjective and require writing. In contrast, they prefer the popular simulated test book on the market, which saves a lot of trouble in writing answers. As a result, there is a disconnection between the teaching content and the exercise materials, and the text content is not consolidated in the cyclic exercise.

2.2.3 Failure to form a scrutinized reading habit

Students’ reading is mainly a “grasping” type of reading aimed at obtaining information and completing corresponding test items. There are four levels of reading comprehension: literal comprehension, reasoning comprehension, evaluative comprehension, and appreciative understanding. Many students’ reading skills still remain at the level of literal understanding. They do not use experience and intuition to seek implicit information in an article through reasoning; they do not evaluate and appreciate the author’s creative style, rhetorical art, and skills in diction and sentences; they do not engage in a “thinking communication” with the author through reading the article to generate emotional resonance.

2.2.4 Relying on reference materials and unwilling to conduct exploratory learning

Now almost every set of textbooks is equipped with learning CDs, tutorial materials, and exercise answers. Various electronic, audio-visual, and online teaching materials have also built an unprecedented information platform for students’ autonomous learning. In the case of excessive reference materials, students are facing the problem of how to choose and use the materials. Some students even replace textbooks with reference books regardless of the priority. They check the reference translation while reading, and have no patience to delve into the text. Instead of completing the exercise before checking the reference answers, they fill in the answers before understanding them. Over time, they have developed the inertia of relying on reference materials, losing the enthusiasm for active thinking and the interest in active exploration.

3 Establishing the concept of intensive reading and cultivating the awareness of intensive reading

Intensive reading courses require teachers to select and teach carefully, and more importantly, they need to teach students by their personal examples and verbal instructions to convey a concept and method of English learning, so that students can understand that learning English in a non-natural language environment requires not only methods and strategies, but also lasting learning enthusiasm and firm beliefs. Patience, confidence, and determination are the psychological foundations for cultivating the awareness of intensive reading. In order to give students a clear understanding of the intensive reading course, vocabulary teaching can be used as a breakthrough point to expand the connotation and depth of intensive reading teaching. At the same time, learning from the experience of reading teaching in native language, students are encouraged to repeatedly understand, ponder, and memorize with an appreciative vision during the process of circular reading, and to revitalize relevant language knowledge [4]. In this way the goal of reinforcing comprehensive language skills can be achieved. More importantly, with the enlightenment of teachers’ “refined-and-brief teaching”, students have imperceptibly cultivated the sense of intensive reading.

3.1 Clarifying the network of words meaning and expanding the depth of vocabulary teaching

In-depth vocabulary teaching should start with clarifying the network of words meaning. There are two types of “relational networks” in vocabulary, namely, “structural networks” and “semantic networks”. In the process of vocabulary teaching by using structural networks, teachers often use word roots and affixes to conduct vocabulary teaching. In intensive reading teaching the particularly important aspect is to help students establish a “semantic net”. Many language researchers have found that excellent students often memorize words on the basis of semantic chains. By flexibly expanding concepts, relevant words in the semantic net are activated and can be used automatically. In other words, the flexibility of a word in the semantic net can automatically “evoke” other related words. For example, if a teacher only tells students that “leave sb. in the dark” means “keep someone in the dark,” students will soon forget it, and it is even less likely for them to establish relevance between the phrase and other words. However, if teacher reminds the students that the meaning of the word is based on an implicit relationship and associates the word with others such as “keep sth. dark”, “a leap in the dark”, etc. The purpose of constructing a semantic net is to enable students to grasp and strengthen the words they have learned by placing them in the relationships with other words. In this way, they will have a certain cognitive depth in vocabulary learning, so that they can

draw inferences from one another and apply them freely in oral communication or written expression.

3.2 Urging students to read circularly and strengthening language skills

Intensive reading is different from comprehensive reading in that it has a clear goal: to enable students to memorize relevant words, idioms, and sentence structures during the process of reading carefully and closely. Many studies have shown that students are difficult to express themselves freely in English. One of the important reasons is that they do not master enough idioms, collocations, and sentence patterns. This is also a mistake in the teaching of intensive reading. The key measure to remedy this mistake is to guide students to systematically peruse a set of textbooks and master the usage of words and fixed collocation in circular reading. It really takes patience and determination to circularly read the same material within a certain intervals. Therefore, teachers should take timely measures from the following aspects to strengthen the supervision, encouragement, and guidance to students:

(1) Emphasizing the teaching function of intensive reading textbooks and the importance of reading a set of textbooks in a cyclic manner. Intensive reading texts are the core materials for language learning, so repeated and careful reading of the same set of textbooks can effectively avoid interference from too many new materials and prevent forgetting too quickly. The practice of putting aside textbooks and piecemeal reading reference books and doing exercise books turns out to be nothing but “drawing water from a bamboo basket”.

(2) Regulating a cycle of reading cycles. The cycle of circular reading is initially one to two weeks, and then gradually decreases as proficiency increases until the reading material is fully mastered.

(3) Combining circular reading with language skill training. Cyclic reading should change the way of “reading”, diversify language input channels, and combine input with output. The effect of circular reading can be achieved through various classroom activities, such as listening, writing, repeating, classroom discussion, self-questioning and self-answering. Combining multiple ways of language input and output can greatly improve the efficiency of students’ intensive reading learning and consolidate teaching results. For example, Huang Yuanbai successfully constructed a new teaching model of “topic discussion, circular reading” by using *College English* (Volume 1) as the textbook [5]. In this teaching model, the narrow reading theory and related research results are used and multiple skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing are integrated into reading teaching. The experimental data from the questionnaire survey indicate that this teaching mode of intensive reading is conducive to improving students’ reading interest and reading speed, as well as fostering their speaking and writing abilities.

(4) Using process-based teaching evaluation methods to monitor students’ learning of intensive reading in real

time. Students’ learning effects can be checked through the mode of classroom communication such as topic discussions and questions, or through the traditional modes such as recitation, and dictation, etc. to urge students to memorize idioms and sentence patterns. Through the method of process evaluation, students can obtain information feedback in time, and develop a sense of identity to intensive reading and refined learning methods on the basis of achievement experience, so that students can form a good habit of intensive reading.

4 Conclusions

With the rapid progress of information technology today, in order to improve teaching effectiveness, college English education must keep pace with the development of the times and use new media for innovation. The application of new media in English teaching is conducive to changing English teaching concepts, building an interesting classroom atmosphere, which has important significance for improving the quality of English teaching in universities. In the use of new media in teaching, it is necessary to make full use of the characteristics and advantages of new media, promote the innovation and development of English, improve the existing problems in previous teaching, expand teaching methods, and improve students’ basic and practical skills in English. Therefore, in English teaching, we should strengthen the use of new media, create a good learning atmosphere, organize English learning groups, carry out practical activities, improve teachers’ level of teaching in new media, and form a systematic teaching model to complete the innovation and practice of English in the new media era.

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