

# The Use of Mind Mapping in the Teaching of Middle School Reading Comprehension

**Zheng Dan**

School of Foreign Language,  
China West Normal University,  
No.1 Shi Da Road, Nanchong, 637009,  
Sichuan, China  
E-mail: [348939599@qq.com](mailto:348939599@qq.com)

## **Abstract**

*Reading is a means of communication, of sharing information and ideas. Reading is part of our daily life. For EFL students at middle school, reading is significant to their English language learning. However, the current situation of middle school English reading teaching is not promising. The traditional method fails to improve students' reading skills and passage comprehend ability. Mind mapping is a diagram, a graphic organizer that helps students visualize what they're reading and detect connections between individual pieces of information. (Buzan, 1976) Mind mapping helps students structure and order their thinking by creating a visual representation of concepts and their understanding (Callahan, 1990). So, teachers should encourage students to use this technique in reading comprehension so as to make students comprehend reading comprehension easier.*

**Keywords** : mind mapping; reading comprehension; middle school teaching

## **Introduction**

As one of the four basic language skills in English learning, the importance of reading cannot be neglected. Reading comprehension is of great importance for junior and senior school students, because both in Middle School Entrance Examination and in College Entrance Examination, the score of reading comprehension accounts for the largest proportion of the test. Reading is a significant and effective way for EFL learners to gain information and knowledge, to broaden learners' horizons, to stimulate learning interests, during which process, students practice and develop their ability of analyzing, thinking and judgment. However, in current junior middle school reading class, students are reluctant to learn reading comprehension. Goodman(1988) noted that traditional opinions regards reading as a passive (bottom-up) decoding process. Thus, it is believed that "meaning is embodied in the text and the reader can extract the meaning from the print if he understands it letter by letter and word by word". Thus, in reading class, teachers always focus on the analysis of words and phrases. Admittedly, it can help students memorize new words or phrases, which lays a solid foundation for students' reading and learning English. However, this model makes students being much confined to the learning of the details. In most cases, middle school teachers still use traditional teaching method to teach students' reading comprehension. Consequently, the achievement is far from satisfied. How to improve students' reading comprehension has become a headache for teachers. In recent years, more and more attention has been put on the training of reading strategy, researchers and teachers try to improve students' reading comprehension through reading strategy training. Mind mapping is one of the most successful technics, hence it is necessary to combine mind mapping with reading comprehension to improve learner's reading comprehension.

### **1.2The Significance of the Study**

There is an increasing emphasis on English reading comprehension with the demand of comprehensively developed talents. According to the New English Curriculum Standard (2011), which not only requires students to become independent and effective learners but also needs students to master some learning strategy in order to analyze and synthesize the reading material better. A good mastery of learning strategies is highly advocated, because efficient readers can take full use of all kinds of learning strategy to understand the reading material better. Mind mapping is a visual form of note taking that offers an overview of a topic and its complex information, allowing students to comprehend, create new ideas and build connections. Through the use of colors, images and words, mind mapping encourages students to begin with a central idea and expand outward to more in-depth sub-topics. Mind mapping provides a clear overview of a topic. It enables students to see the bigger picture, find connections and detect hierarchies between individual pieces of information.

## **2. Problem identification**

### **2.1 Separate reading from comprehension**

Reading and comprehension are closely related to each other. Separate reading from comprehension, that is why there are lot of problems confronting with reading comprehension. Many English learners find it difficult to understand the reading material, and they get stuck with some problems, such as unfamiliar words, fail to understand the context.

### **2.2 Fail to use flexible method to teach reading comprehension**

Xiaoguang Zhao and Lei Zhu(2012) reported that traditional teaching method is teacher-centered which makes students passive learners of the whole teaching process. The traditional way of teaching views reading as a bottom-up process; that is to say, the language hinder is the first thing students need to solve in the process of reading, so teachers need to help students solve it. It pays much attention to words and expressions that they are explained in great details before reading. But, the whole passage speaks more than single word or expression. Pay much attention to the parts tends to be an obstacle to the understanding of the whole passage. In addition, this way of teaching bores students and cannot get them fully involved, let alone the development of their reading skills and comprehend ability. As a result, effective reading, independent thinking, and independent problem-solving abilities cannot be achieved.

### **2.3 Ignore the cultivation of learners' reading skills.**

On the one hand, students' reading ability only stays on the understanding of the literal meaning of reading materials, so that they cannot comprehend deep information given by the author. On the other hand, students lack critical reading skills, they can only interpret the text in their own way but ignore the author's intention. Fail to meet the teaching requirements of cultivating the students' ability to use the comprehensive language.

## **3 Use mind mapping in reading comprehension**

### **3.1 teach students to use mind mapping to take notes**

It is well known that taking notes while reading is one of the most efficient ways to improve reading comprehension. Traditional linear notes, however, are probably not the most effective way for this. This note-taking process is a little bit monotonous and it encourages students to write whole sentences, which is totally unnecessary and time-consuming. Compared with linear notes, mind maps offer learners ample benefits that can help them in comprehending and retaining the information that they read. According to Wang Yang (2012), mind mapping can make students better understand and remember the text. It can help learners focus on key words, the core concept and the hierarchical structure, highlight the main content of the article; besides, mind mapping helps to stimulate the students' reading motivation, use visual graphics

rendering the main clues, reading materials can fully start students imagination; use mind mapping can develop the students' ability of information organization, the process of understanding context and structure of the article, constantly adding their own thinking and opinions, make students information organization ability get exercised, thus improve their reading ability.

### **3.2 use mind mapping to improve students' reading comprehension**

Mind mapping uses concise words, pictures, color, associations and other visual aids to convey the essence of an idea or information.(Abdul,2015) By constant use of mind mapping, learners learn to 'fill in the gaps' and increase their cognitive skills. Mind map thus is a complementary tool that helps their thinking, comprehending and recalling skills. First, set questions or tasks to guide students to turn the text into mind map. Enable students to have a general idea about the key words, the basic structure of the article, the main characters, the theme so as to help students construct the mind map. Then give the students enough time and encourage them to further analyze and comprehend the text and recite the text based on the mind map of the text. That is to say, first we shall have a general understanding of the structure of the text, including the logical relationship between paragraphs, plots, and sentences, and then we are able to memorize the sentences accurately. Finally, teachers use this mind map to guide students to carry out imitating writing activities, complete the process of knowledge input and output, finally help students to internalize knowledge and use knowledge.

### **4. Conclusion**

Traditional teaching method fails to improve students' reading comprehension ability. As an English teacher, one should adopt effective techniques to improve students reading comprehension ability. Mind map provides students with a simple but effective way of learning, which can improve the efficiency of reading. It conforms to the law of students' cognition and memory thus help students comprehend the reading material easier.

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