

How to Enhance the Teaching of English Reading in High Schools

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Abstract:

As everyone knows, reading is the priority among priorities high schools English learning, it is not only in the test scores, but also has an important effect on the students' listening, speaking, writing, and translation abilities. The teaching of English reading is an important part in high schools. Improving students' reading competence is one of the objectives of English teaching. English reading teaching in high schools has aroused hot discussions among researchers and English educators around the world. Many teaching methods have been proposed and discussed. This paper intends to talk about theories about English reading, the present state of English reading teaching in high schools, problems what exist in English reading teaching, causes of these existing problems, and how to teach English reading in high schools effectively.

Key words: English reading; English reading teaching; theories about English reading; existing problems; causes; effective ways; high schools

1. Introduction

Reading plays an important role in foreign language teaching and learning, for it is one of the most essential ways to acquire foreign language knowledge and skills. For most students, especially for high school students, reading is by far the most important one of the four skills in English language learning. In every year's College Entrance Examination, reading comprehension covers a large proportion of the test paper, the requirement for reading ability increase and the position of reading comprehension is more outstanding. Therefore, how to teach English reading effectively and enhance students' reading ability successfully have become the focuses in English reading teaching in high schools. However, a great deal has been done in this aspect, we are aware that many students, after learning English for years, often end in failure about their comprehension when they are asked to read a passage. Therefore, it is high time that English teachers reevaluated their reading teaching in high schools. Most important of all, it is essential and significant for us to analyze the current situations of English reading teaching in high schools and find out the effectiveness ways of English reading teaching.

2. Theories about English Reading

Reading is one of the main ways to obtain knowledge and information for high school students. ^[6]Also, it is one of the most significant four language skills. As we know, the listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four language skills. ^[3]Reading is helpful for learners to develop their linguistic capacity. ^[5]In a long period, many researches have been carried on the nature of reading process. Until now, it is not easy to define the nature of reading. Reading has different meanings. ^[1]It is traditionally believed that reading comprehension is a bottom-up process in which readers divide reading materials into letters, words, and semantic graphic units. It has shortcomings which overemphasize the meaning in the reading process, neglecting the background knowledge of the text. Later, with the development of psychological linguistics, applied linguistics, and discourse theory, more and more theories about reading comprehension were put forward by some foreign linguists. ^[4]The most important one is Goodman's Investigations of first language comprehension, which characterize reading as a "psychological guessing game", emphasizing the importance of top-down process. ^[2]In his important overview of reading research, Eskey examines what he called "a strong top-down bias" in second language reading pedagogy and neglect of learners' weak linguistic processing skills. Eskey's analysis explains that second language readers are fundamentally distinct from those who read in their first languages and that essential "knowledge of the language of the text" is required before learners can successfully process the second language reading schema.

3. The Present State of English Reading Teaching in High Schools

Because of the College Entrance Examination System, teaching English reading effectively and enhancing students' reading ability successfully have become the focuses of English language teaching in high schools. On the one hand, the traditional reading teaching stressed students' linguistic knowledge excessively, neglecting background knowledge and the structure of the text. Traditional view of English reading teaching regards reading comprehension as a bottom-up process. English reading teaching focuses on interpreting words, sentences, grammar and semantic graphic units. Thus, the text is divided into parts to read rather than to read as a whole, which has little effect on enhancing readers' reading ability. Between our students' actual reading ability and the requirement of the High School English Syllabus, there is a wide gap. On the other hand, some scholars find out that many students in high schools read disjointedly during the process of reading. They cannot link up the meaning of a whole text but each sentence of the article separately. Reading is very difficult for most students. Firstly, key words are mastered well but the details of the reading material are not understood by readers. Secondly, learners only understand some key words but the meaning of the text is still ambiguous. Thirdly, new words are beyond their abilities of understanding so learners cannot finish reading the article and have to give up. By investigating the students who have attended the College Entrance Examination before, students' lack of reading strategies is the main reason for the above problems. Students did not positively and actively understand the background knowledge that was relevant to the contents of the article, or they were short of enough background knowledge to assist them in understanding the whole text.

4. Problems in Current Teaching of English Reading in High Schools and Causes of These Problems

The current English reading teaching fails to enhance students' reading ability and other linguistic capacity, and it also has some other problems. Such as, lack of interaction among students, lack of interaction between teachers and students, students lack interest in learning English reading, teachers cannot help students develop their communicative competence, teachers cannot help students use suitable reading strategies and so on. It is easy for you to find out that the current reading teaching in high schools is not good for enhancing students' reading ability and promoting students' development in an all-round way. What are the causes of these problems? First of all, the current English reading teaching in high schools takes a teacher-centered teaching method. Teachers play the positive and active roles in class. They design the reading teaching depending on their own thoughts and opinions without taking students into consideration carefully. Moreover, some teachers misunderstand the purpose of English reading teaching. What's more, the most important thing which will influence English reading teaching must be the College Entrance Examination System. Influenced by the College Entrance Examination System, the reading teaching gets an opposite result for teachers blindly pursue a faster teaching progress and forget to cultivate students' reading ability.

5. The Effective Ways of English Reading Teaching in High Schools

Reading is a receptive skill and readers receive information from writers. No doubt the importance of English reading teaching in high schools has been widely accepted. How to improve the English reading level of the high school students has been the topic concerned by both researchers and English educators. In a word, it is essential and significant for us to find out the effective ways of English reading teaching in high schools and enhance students' reading ability successfully.

5.1 Cultivating Students' Good Studying Habits of English Reading

Maybe some high school students are average ones with average intelligence. They seldom get good grades, especially in English reading study. They are more interested in various activities and sports than in studying English reading. The fact is that they do not study very hard, so it is very important for English teachers to try their best to help them cultivate their studying habits. English teachers in high schools should teach them to plan their time carefully, find a good place to study, and show them how to read, how to make full use of their class time, how to study regularly and how to face the tests correctly. For example, teachers should show their students how to set an English reading goal correctly.

5.2 Motivating Students' Interest in Learning English Reading

Interest is an important factor to guide someone to their dreams. It is a kind of motivation. It is also one's determination to reach a higher height. Also, as an old saying goes, interest is half of the success. Generally speaking, if students are interested in reading, they will show more active in their English reading learning. However, there are many students who are lack of interest in reading because of the teacher-centered teaching method now. Therefore, motivating students' interest in learning English reading and enhancing students' reading ability should be the important things for teachers in high schools. In order to motivate students' interest in learning English reading, English teachers in high schools should make full use of pre-reading

activities. If the pre-reading activity is well-designed, students can concentrate on the class and learn English well easily. So teachers should choose pre-reading activities which meet lesson objectives best, and they should keep pre-reading activities brief. Teachers should also choose suitable teaching materials. As everyone knows, teaching materials are the basic factors of teaching, the objects of study and the carriers of specific knowledge. So it is necessary and important for teachers to choose suitable teaching materials before class.

5.3 Promoting Interaction in English Reading Class

The ultimate aim of English teaching is to make the students use English in work or in life successfully and freely. Reading class is not only a class which occupies most of the class hours in high schools but also a class to enhance the students' ability of using language. However, teachers in high schools often play the positive and active role in the current teaching process of English reading. The reading class is lack of interaction. Due to the interaction is good for the English teaching and learning, teachers should promote interaction between teachers and students or between students and students in reading class. For example, teachers should use question and answer model to promote interaction between teachers and students or between students and students.

5.4 Teaching Students How to Use Reading Strategies Correctly

Reading strategies are methods being used by readers to improve the efficiency of reading in the reading process. These strategies can not only enhance the students' reading ability but also improve their English learning quality. Both teachers and students should pay attention to reading strategies in order to improve the level of reading comprehension. Under the traditional teaching system, English teachers in high schools pay little attention to cultivate students' reading strategies. Therefore, in student-centered teaching process, some suitable and excellent reading strategies should be used correctly in order to promote students' English reading learning. And English teachers in high schools should be responsible to teach students how to use reading strategies correctly. For example, English teachers in high schools should teach students how to use skimming and scanning skills correctly.

6. Conclusion

English is an important subject for high school students in China. Reading is an extremely useful skill and plays an extraordinarily important role in both second language acquisition and international communication. Reading is both the skill which needs to master and the way by which students understand English thinking and obtain more broad knowledge. The teaching of English reading is supposed to be one of the most important tasks in high schools. Teaching English reading effectively and enhancing students' reading ability successfully have become the focuses in English reading teaching in high schools. However, many English teachers in high schools cannot change their teaching mind. They are afraid to reform, blindly pursue a faster teaching progress, and forget to cultivate students' reading ability. So teachers should analyze the present state of English reading teaching in high schools, find out problems in current teaching of English reading in high schools and causes of these problems. Most important of all, English teachers in high schools should make full use of the effective ways of English reading teaching and try their best to enhance their students' reading ability.

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