

Experimental Study of Cultivating College Students' English Reading and Writing Ability

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Keywords: College English Teaching. Reading and Writing Ability. Teaching Mode. Input and Output Theory

Abstract. The paper aims to cultivate English reading and writing ability of college students based on the input and output theory through the experimental study. On the basis of cultivation study of college students' English reading and writing ability, we actively explore and establish the teaching mode characterized by the idea that reading guides writing and writing promotes reading. Using quantitative and qualitative research method, we explore this teaching mode's influence on both college students' reading and writing scores and the identity of the students for this kind of teaching mode through comparing the different teaching effects of both comparative classes and controlled-classes, which give some beneficial enlightenment to improve college students' reading and writing ability.

Introduction

In the early 1980s, Krashen proposed "i+1" comprehensible input theory, which had a significant impact on foreign language teaching and learning. The significant role of language input has been determined in the process of language acquisition, however, emphasizing the comprehensible input of language weakened the importance of language output. Soon afterwards, in allusion to Krashen's "Language Input Hypothesis", Swain, a researcher of second language acquisition also proposed the "Language Output Hypothesis". He proposed that only by using the learned language, can they achieve the approximate level of native language, and the language acquisition of output hypothesis is concentrated upon the use of language. In teaching practice, we can find that only emphasizing the language input or output can not achieve good results, instead, we should combine the two tightly to constantly provide learners with language material of comprehensible input while the learners process the information and then output the information, and get feedback in time, thus we can learn a language better.

Domestic English reading researches mainly involve fields of reading process, reading theory, reading instruction, reading assessment, factors that affect reading comprehension, etc., among which researches on specific reading strategy and teaching mode are more. Methods of English reading are various, such as focusing on process, observation, experience method, focusing on contents, free creation, reading prolonging, etc., among which reading prolonging and focusing on process are strongly advocated by the public in the English reading teaching practice. Liu Hailiang, and Liu Yanning (1999) proposed to combine the reading and writing. Chen Liping (2001) proposed to take "model reading" as the best approve for combining reading and writing, so that the description on combination is more targeted and instructive. However, in the current teaching research on college English reading and writing, the focusing on combination of language input and output is still immature, especially the experimental researches on teaching process of reading and writing need to be strengthened. In view of this, based on the input and output theory of second language acquisition, and the teaching mode of "reading guides writing, and writing improves reading" implemented in cultivating students' reading and writing abilities, combining input and output in the English practical teaching, this study targeted to carry out a experimental study on cultivating college student's English reading and writing abilities.

Design before experiment and investigation results

Before the experiment, firstly had an English A level test on four classes' freshmen of 2011 from the Social Management Department of our university before enrollment, and the test results are as follows:

Table 1 Test Results of the Students of the Social Management Department before Experiment

Class	Listening	Grammar	Reading	Translation	Writing	Total Score
A1	8.3	8.8	25.2	11.1	5.4	58.8
A2	7.3	6.0	21.8	10.7	5.2	50.9
A3	8.4	6.8	21.6	10.9	6.8	54.5
A4	8.8	6.7	22.0	10.6	5.5	53.6
Average Score	8.2	7.1	22.6	10.8	5.7	
Item Average Ratio	54.7%	47.2%	64.7%	54.0%	38.1%	

(Item Average Ratio refers to the average ratio of the total items scores)

We can see from the statistics of students' achievements that the average ratio of reading is 64.7%, which is the highest among items, while writing is 38.1%, which is the lowest among items, and much lower than others. Therefore, the students' reading performance is the best while writing is the poorest. Through informal discussions with students and examination paper analysis, we thought that the main reasons for students' poor performance in writing are that students do not understand the methods of practical writing and their language organizational skills are relatively poor. Seen from the overall examination, we can find that there are advantages for students in accepting language input but the language output needs to be strengthened. In addition, the performance in grammar is next to writing, and the average score is the lowest, therefore, students' basic knowledge of grammar needs to be further consolidated and improved.

After that, we set questionnaires of “” on the guidance of Likert's scale. Based on the students' basic conditions, we investigated students' six aspects of learning attitude, study habits, learning objectives, confidence, cognitive learning level, teaching (including both teaching and learning). The Survey results are as follows:

1). Seen from students' learning attitude, we found that 37% students like reading, while 18% like writing. We can see that students much prefer to reading than writing.

2). Seen from study habits, we found that only 8% students have the habit of reading in English every day, while 38% students only complete related after-school reading practice, without completing other English readings. However, in the designed reverse problems, only 14% students expand extracurricular reading in addition to the extracurricular textbook, and 60% students do not read other extracurricular materials. In writing, 52% students rarely write in English. We can learn a fact that the vast majority of students rarely consciously expand extracurricular English reading and writing.

3). Seen from the learning objectives, more than half of the students reading and writing in English just for the examinations, but there are still nearly a third of students are interested in reading, and about one in five students are interested in writing.

4). Seen from the students' degree of confidence, 61% students have confidence in reading, while only 8% have confidence in writing.

5). Seen from the cognitive learning level, 43% students think that their reading level can reach 60 points at least, but only 15% think that their writing can reach 60 points.

6). From teaching and learning. Firstly we can see from students' “learning” that the students mastered some basic reading skills in a certain degree. For example, in the reading process, we often focus on the contextual relationship, but there are still 30% students never pay attention to reading skills, instead, they just read depend on their sense. In terms of the restricting factors of students' reading, 45% students think that some new words and complex grammatical structures are the most direct factors that affected the reading accuracy rate, and 37% students think that they read very slowly. In writing, students think that the biggest difficulties are (in order of sequence): short of

vocabulary - can not write grammatically correct sentence - lack of writing skills – unclear thinking. This result reflected that the student's whole language basis is relatively weak, the vocabulary they mastered is limited, and they can not properly use the basic knowledge of the language. Secondly, we can see from teachers' "teaching" that 52% teachers believe that students prefer listening to the teacher to speaking. In writing, 62% students do not make any preparation before writing, 51% teachers believe that very few students prefer to discuss their writing ideas and frames with other students or teachers before writing, and only 11% students are prone to recheck and modify their written compositions. This shows that students didn't think much about their writing nor had overall arrangements. Meanwhile, teachers didn't pay sufficient attention on writing in their teaching for long time.

Therefore, based on the above investigations, we believe that in language input, making full use of students' advantages in reading can pave the way and accumulate basis for writing. As an important way of language output, teachers and students must pay sufficient attention on writing. Our research group based on the advantage that students' reading ability is better than other language skills, established a experiment research on the teaching mode of "reading guides writing, and writing improves reading", aimed to improve the students' vocabulary and their cognition on complex grammatical structures through reading, expand reading in the process of writing, combine reading with writing and gradually cultivate students' reading and writing abilities.

Design after experiment and investigation results

This research group selected four classes' students of the Social Management Department of 2011 grade as the experimental classes, with 214 students as the experimental samples. The experiment period covers two semesters of October, 2011~July, 2012. during this period, we conducted two formal tests on these four classes successively. Based on their reading and writing performance, feedback after tests, etc., analyzed whether the teaching mode of "reading guides writing, and writing improves reading" affected students' reading and writing performance or not.

During this experiment, the textbook we used is the Integrated Practical English, which is published by Higher Education Press. Two of the classes (A1/A2) adopted traditional teaching mode---separate reading from writing, in which reading mainly instruct language knowledge and writing mainly instruct model writing, and arrange writing task after class. And then the teachers modify their composition, which mainly focus on correcting grammar. Other two classes (A3/A4)' teaching mode was well-designed, which adopted the new teaching mode of "reading guides writing, and writing improves reading". The teaching process was: firstly, arrange texts and ask students to read through the text to understand the main points. Secondly, guide the students to finds the topic sentence of each paragraph, and explain the important language knowledge in paragraphs. Thirdly, analyze the structure of the text and learn its writing skills. Fourthly, based on the key words and the frame structure of the text, guide the students to briefly write out the general idea of the text step by step. Fifthly, according to the theme of the teaching unit, assign writing homework to students. For instance, after the students learned Unit One College—A New Experience, teachers should require the students to write a composition titled with I (dis) like My College according to the structure and style of the model essay.

In this teaching mode of "reading guides writing, and writing improves reading", teachers not only emphasis on the reading strategies, important grammars, key words expression, explanation of writing structure and ideas of essay, but also pay attention to students' writing practice, and make full use of the students' advantages in reading to guide students to write more and increase language output. In particularly, in writing teaching, as for the assigned writing tasks, teachers and students analyze the ideas and writing structures of the text together. Teachers require the students to simulate the model essay to write according to its structure after class, and then evaluate students' works in class, modify in three fields of organization, contents and language, focus on writing frame, correct students' common grammatical mistakes, as well as strengthen the application and expansion the five

kinds of basic English sentence structure. According to statistics, 12 writing assessments were conducted in these two semesters, which evaluated compositions of all students in groups.

The research group had a college English A level test on students in the end of the two semesters respectively. In order to ensure the objectivity of the score, the papers were co-inspected by two teachers and the corresponding average scores were the final reading and writing scores of students. The statistical results are as follows:

Table 2 Comparison of the Tests Scores of the Students from the Social Management Department before and after Experiment

group	Before the experiment test		After the experiment(1)		After the experiment(2)	
	Reading scores	Writing scores	Reading scores	Writing scores	Reading scores	Writing scores
A1/A2 Control Group	23.5	5.3	26.15	8.11	24.25	8.53
A3/A4 Experimental Group	21.6	6.15	25.7	8.36	26.08	9.92

We can see from the comparison of three test's scores that the average difference in reading performance in the control group is 1.7, while that of the experimental group is 4.29, therefore, the improving range of reading performance in experimental group is much greater than that of the control group. Although the control group has a slight drop in the experiment (1) and experiment (2), the improving range of the experimental group is 1.62, which still maintains a rising trend. Perhaps we can safely make a conjecture that the strengthening and practicing on reading strategies in the experimental group is conducive to steadily improve students' reading level, which is necessarily to be proved in the future studies through concrete practice. In addition, the average difference in writing performance in the control group is 3.23 while that of the experimental group is 3.77, therefore, we can see that the improving range of writing performance in experimental group is greater than that of the control group. In the process of inspecting papers, the teachers obviously found that there were significant changes in language application and organization in the experimental group before and after experiment, for instance, the sentences without subject were decreased greatly, instead, students set forth their ideas by separate paragraphs. The idea arrangements were more distinctive than before, however, incoherent ideas were still outstanding.

The feedback of experimental group obtained after experiment shows that, 62% students thought that the teaching mode of “reading guides writing, and writing improves reading” is conducive to learning English. 42% students thought that they can actively participate in relative oral and writing activities. The students that like writing increased from 18% to 24%. 56% students thought that this kind of teaching mode improved their comprehension ability on reading. 38% students thought that this teaching mode improved their writing ability. We can see from the feedback that students prefer to the teaching mode of “reading guides writing, and writing improves reading”.

The improving range of reading and writing performance in the experimental group is much greater than that of the control group, with 4.29 greater in reading and 0.54 greater than that of the control group. In the teaching process, students are able to better apply the vocabulary and phrases learned in the texts in the process of retelling the texts, especially under the guidance of the given information, students are prone to actively participate in class teaching activities, and students' interests and confidence have been improved correspondingly. These factors contribute directly to improving students' reading and writing performance.

Reflection and Inspiration

We can obviously found from the above teaching experiment research that the two kind of teaching modes can improve students' reading and writing performance, but the improving degree is different. In the specific research environment of the research group, we found that the teaching mode

of “reading guides writing, and writing improves reading” produced better teaching efficiency, especially stably improved students’ reading performance. Student writing scores were also improved, but the improvement is not obvious, it may be because that writing is a reflection of long-term comprehensive knowledge and it is difficult to achieve a qualitative leap in the short term. Overall, this also proves the feasibility of the teaching mode of “reading guides writing, and writing improves reading”. In addition, we can discover from the questionnaire after and before the experiment that vast majority of students agree on this teaching model and thought that reading provides effective language input, meanwhile writing provides a valuable opportunity for language output, which examined the use of language to a certain extent.

Throughout the experiment, we also found that the improving degree of oral English in control group and experimental group is different. Affected by various factors, this thesis didn’t discuss that aspect. Besides, in the course of experiment research, as the test subjects are specific, thus the result is only an individual case. Whether the results work on the test objects has yet to be confirmed in the future practice.

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