A Survey on Portfolio Assessment in Junior School English Reading Class

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Abstract. Portfolio assessment plays an important role in junior English reading teaching, particularly, in evaluating students' non-cognitive factors in language learning. With the help of portfolio assessment, teachers can achieve English instructional goals and students can gain their overall development. This paper aims at investigating the effects and roles of portfolio assessment in junior school English reading in China and the result of the survey may provide implications for junior school English teachers.

Introduction

Assessment refers to the collecting of information or evidence of a learner's learning process and achievement over a period of time for the purposes of improving teaching and learning. (Wang, 2004). It is so an essential part of the teaching process that it has always been attached great importance to.

Zhong (2004) thinks that the so-called portfolio in education field is a collection of students' typical work samples aiming at reviewing and evaluating the learning process. In the New English Curriculum Standard for Junior Middle School, portfolio is described as an exhibition of learners' efforts, improvements and achievements during learning process. Students' typical learning products and reflection reports are usually collected into a document folder (Jin & Song, 2003: 235).

A quantitative study is used to collect data on how portfolio assessment may affect the learners' motivations and the use of English reading strategies in the reading class. The survey may help teachers understand the effect of portfolio assessment and reorganize the teaching and assessment in a way both more acceptable to teachers and students.

The Survey

Learning motivation is a strong driving force of incentive to promote students to arrange their learning activities and guide the student to study. Student's learning activity is composed of a variety of different power factors caused by the system as a whole. The commonly used English reading strategies consist of before-reading strategies, during-reading strategies and after-reading strategies.

In the survey, questionnaires are used to understand the students' motivations and the use of English reading strategies in their English class. The survey was carried out in No. 4 Middle School in Jinzho, Liaoning Province, where portfolio assessment has been carried out for more than one year. 95 students of Year 8 were randomly selected as the subjects. They came from two classes: Class Two and Class Three. In each class the students' English proficiency is different which can be inferred from their previous tests and classroom performance. There are five English classes each week for the subjects.

The first questionnaire aims to investigate the learning motivation at the beginning of the survey and at the end of the survey. In order to make the answer convincible, all the students are asked to do the same questionnaire in a fixed time. Furthermore, the questions in the questionnaires are presented in Chinese so that students can understand easily. SPSS 17.0 is used to check the reliability of these questionnaires. As is well known, the cronbach alpha should be in a range from

0.00 to 1.00. If the number tends to be as close as 1.00, it means that the result is more reliable. The commonly accepted point is 0.70.

Table 1. Reliability of Questionnaire I

N of items	30
Alpha	.8037

The coefficient of the questionnaire's cronbach alpha is 0.8037 which is much higher than 0.70. It shows this questionnaire is reliable to test the students' learning motivation.

The second questionnaire aims to investigate the uses of English reading strategy at the end of the survey. There are three parts in this questionnaire. The first part is designed to gather information from the subjects (Item 1-3) about before-reading strategies. The second part (Item 9-12) refers to during-reading strategies. The last part (Item 13-15) is about after-reading strategies. The information collected from this questionnaire is regarded as a main source to answer the third research question.

Results and Discussion of the Questionnaires

(1) Data analysis and discussion of the questionnaire on students' English learning motivation.

Actually, the students' motivation, interest and attitude towards English reading can be influenced by assessment. In order to investigate if the portfolio assessment has effects on English learning motivation, the questionnaire on learning motivation was handed out to the two classes at the beginning and at the end of the survey. The questionnaire includes 30 items and it is based on Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery (Gardner,1985). Each item is recorded scores on five point scale 1,2,3,4,5. The data is analyzed with SPSS17.0. The high score represents the high learning motivation. The following is the results:

Table 2. Paired Samples Statistics of Motivation

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-Class 2&3	84.9006	95	8.72135	2.08614
	Post-Class 2&3	91.0206	95	12.53345	2.40126

From the table above we can find out that the mean of pre-questionnaire is 84.9006 and the mean of post-questionnaire is 91.0206 which is higher than pre- questionnaire.

Table 3. Paired Samples Correlation

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-Class 1&3 ---- Post-Class 1&3	95	.414	0.000

From the table above we can find that the correlation is 0.414. It is high. Sig is 0.000 which is lower 0.05. It implies that there is a correlation between them.

Table 4 Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig (2-tailed)
		Mean	S.D.	S.E. Mean	95％Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-Class 2&3 ---- Post-Class 2&3	-2.1812	7.5082	.7970	-3.8922	-0.5306	-2.713	94	0.009

As is shown in the above table, Sig. is 009<0.05, which means the difference is significant at the 0.05 level. In other words, the positive effectiveness of portfolio assessment on learning motivation is testified by Table 4.

(2) Data analysis and discussion of the questionnaire on students' English reading strategies

The questionnaire on the students' English reading strategies includes 15 items. Each item is recorded on three point scale, i.e. No, Not sure and Yes. Reading strategies refer to strategies used in three stages in English learning, including before-reading strategies, during-reading strategies and after-reading strategies. Here are the results of the questionnaire.
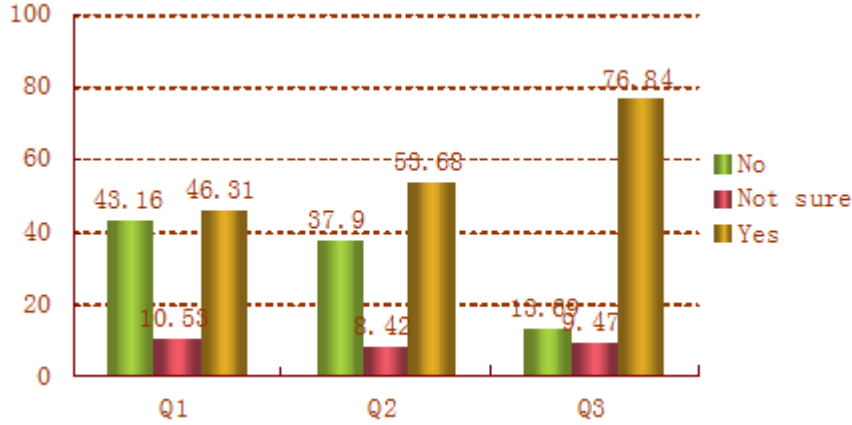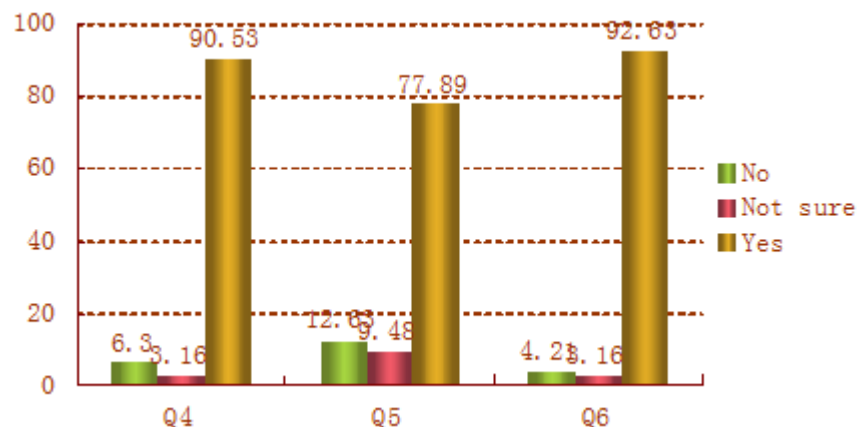

Fig. 1. Before-reading strategies used by students (%)

The figure of Q1 clearly shows us that nearly half of the students think portfolio assessment can help them identify the reading purposes. Meanwhile, 43.6% of the students hold the opposite views. It mainly refers to portfolio assessment has some roles in identifying the reading purposes but not very obvious. The figure of Q2 shows us 53.68% of the students think that they can choose the reading materials better than before. But 37.9% of the students don't hold this view. The figure of Q3 shows us that 76.84% of the students think portfolio assessment can promote them to make reading plan better and only a small portion of the students have the opposite views. It means that the role of portfolio assessment in making reading plan better is obvious. Generally speaking, in before-reading strategies, portfolio assessment can promote the students to make reading plan better but the other strategies can seldom be used.

Fig.2 shows the students' use of during-reading strategies. It includes 9 questions, Question 4 to Question 12. The figure of Q4 shows that 90.53% of the students can guess the meaning of the new words in the passage. Only 6.3% of the students cannot do it. Q5 implies that more than one half of the students can predict the meaning of the passage by the title and background knowledge. Q6 shows us that 92.63% of the students can catch the key words in the passage. Q7 tells that nearly all the students learn to read quickly. Q8 shows us that only 7.37% of the students can use sense groups reading and most students cannot use this strategy. It implies that this strategy is difficult for the students to use it. Q9 shows us that 82.11% of the students can use scanning.Q10 shows us that 78.95% of the students can summarize the main idea. Q11 shows us that 72.63% of the students can identify references. 20% of the students cannot do it.Q12 shows us that 76.84% of the students can use inferring.
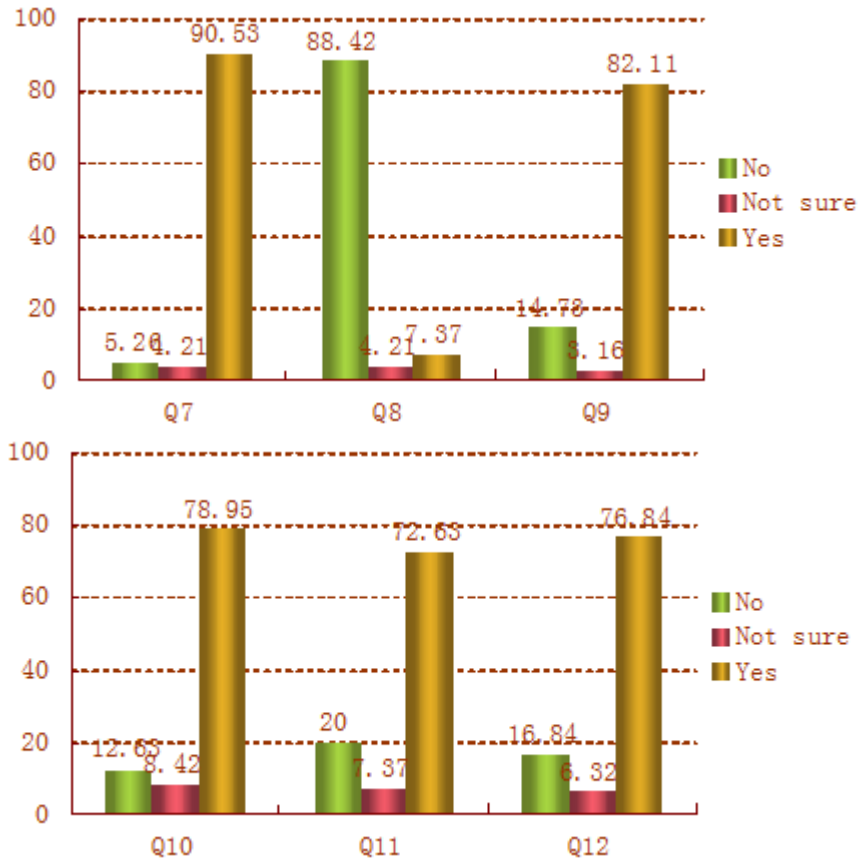
Fig. 2. During-reading strategies used by students(%)

Generally speaking, in during-reading strategies, nearly all the student can use guessing word meaning, key word reading and skimming. Most students can use prediction, scanning, summarizing the main idea, identifying references and inferring. Only a small portion of the students can use sense group reading.
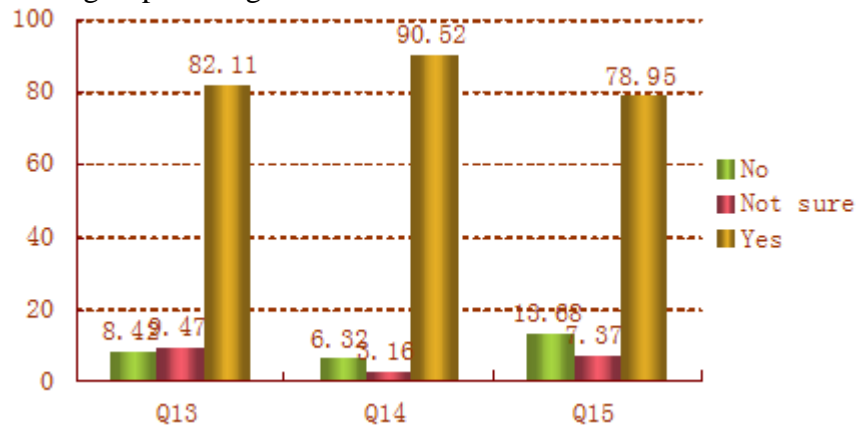

Fig.3. The students' use of after-reading strategies (%)

As can be seen from Figure 4.3, Q13 shows us that 82.11% of the students think they improve the reading speed. Q14 shows us that 90.52% of the students can have a self-assessment. And Q15 shows us that 78.95% of the students can get rid of the bad habits of reading. Self-assessment is used most frequently by the students.

Generally speaking, in after-reading strategies, nearly all the students can use self-assessment. Most students can improve their reading speed and get rid of their bad reading habits by portfolio assessment.

Conclusion

The first finding is about the students' learning motivation. Portfolio assessment can improve learners' motivation in English reading class. Students' feelings, attitudes, interests and behaviors

towards English have changed. Portfolio assessment offers them an opportunity to assess their own learning process and assess their peers as well. By doing these, Students are active in paying more attention to their own English learning, completing their assignments and setting their goals. All these help improve students' learning motivation. The results of the survey show that students' learning motivation is greatly improved.

The second finding is about the use of English reading strategies. Generally speaking, in before-reading strategies, portfolio assessment helps the students make reading plan better and the other strategies are seldom used. In during-reading strategies, nearly all the students use the strategies named guessing word meaning, key word reading and skimming. Most students can use prediction, scanning, summarizing the main idea, identifying references and inferring. Only a small portion of the students tend to use the strategy of sense group reading. In after-reading strategies, nearly all the students can have a self-assessment. Most students can improve their reading speed and get rid of the bad reading habits.

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