

Analysis of College English Reading Teaching from the Perspective of Cross-cultural Communication

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Abstract: With the development of globalization and the surging demand for foreign language talents, it is particularly significant to foster intercultural communicative awareness and enhance intercultural communicative competence. Undoubtedly, English reading serves as a crucial part of English learning, and improving the ability of English reading is also one of the important ways to cultivate students' cross-cultural communicative competence. However, both linguistic and non-linguistic differences between Chinese and English create cross-cultural barriers to English reading. Therefore, this paper probes into the training strategies for college English reading ability from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, so as to better train college students' cross-cultural English reading ability and further improve the teaching level of college English reading. All in all, this paper has indicated that teachers should not only introduce some cultural context to learners, but also help build up their cross-cultural awareness in foreign language teaching. Only by combining these two steps mentioned above can the purpose of cross-cultural communication be exactly achieved.

Keywords: intercultural communication, cultural barrier, English reading teaching, cultural differences, cross-cultural awareness

1. Introduction

In the context of intercultural education, the promotion of course reform and the enhancement of students' intercultural communicative competence are critical for developing exceptional talents with international vision and English intercultural communicative competence [1]. As one of the most commonly used ways to acquire knowledge, reading is not only to obtain the necessary information, but also to master the background knowledge of this information. However, cultural differences and diversity will inevitably lead to misunderstanding of information interpretation. Hence, intercultural communicative competence is one of the important factors considered by learners in the process of reading. Based on the sight of intercultural communication, this paper will interpret the meaning of intercultural communication, emphasize the importance of intercultural communication in English reading teaching, and analyze the relationship between intercultural communication and English reading as well as the current situation of English reading teaching. In the meantime, this paper will also point out the obstacles to intercultural communication caused by English reading, and put forward some effective countermeasures to improve English reading ability from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, aiming to help foreign language

learners cultivate their own awareness of cross-cultural communication and strengthen their English reading comprehension [2].

2. The Definition of Intercultural Communication

Generally speaking, cross-cultural communication (intercultural communication) refers to the communication between people from different cultural backgrounds in their daily lives in verbal or non-verbal forms [2]. The combination of verbal communication and non-verbal communication forms a complete human communication system [3]. Besides, many specific aspects, such as people's values, ways of thinking, religious beliefs, family backgrounds, educational experiences, lifestyles, and so on, are included in these cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is when people from different cultural backgrounds comprehensively consider these factors in the process of communication that they can ensure the smooth progress of communication [2].

According to Canale and Swain, intercultural communicative competence is composed of four aspects: grammar, discourse, sociolinguistics and strategy. Grammatical competence refers to the mastery of language forms, including language knowledge and skills, such as phonetics, vocabulary, sentence patterns, and so on [4]. Textual competence is characterized by the ability to combine various components of words and paragraphs to form coherent texts that connect with each other. Social language ability, which refers to the ability to use language properly in different situations, is closely related to cultural ability. Strategic competence is the ability to use a variety of verbal and non-verbal means to solve obstacles in communication in order to complete communicative tasks. All these four aspects mentioned above are interrelated but relatively independent. It goes without saying that language learning is inseparable from cultural acquisition. Not only can intercommunication-oriented English teaching better enable students to understand English and its usage in a specific context, but also contributes to boosting respect for cultural diversity as well as enriching cultural diversity [4].

3. The Relationship between Intercultural Communication and English Reading

With the continuous reform of English teaching objectives, English teaching is not only to teach linguistic knowledge, but also to master the cultural background behind the language, which requires foreign language learners to constantly cultivate their own cultural awareness. In terms of linguistic factors, the differences in cultural background are embodied in vocabulary, syntax, sentence structure and so on, while in non-linguistic factors, they are demonstrated in values, ways of thinking, social customs, and so on. As foreign language learners, if they only master the differences in cultural and linguistic factors, they can't effectively achieve cross-cultural communication. At the same time, it is required that learners should engage with cultural knowledge as much as possible and attempt to understand the values, ways of thinking, and life attitudes of non-native speakers so that the difficulty of English discourse comprehension can be reduced [2].

What's more, language ultimately serves communication, as a result of which attention should be paid to the cultivation of students' cross-cultural communicative competence during the teaching of English reading. More importantly, every article of English reading material, with its rich linguistic knowledge, also encompasses the cultural knowledge of a number of English-speaking countries. Hence, it is greatly crucial to further explore knowledge of cultural background while doing some reading, which is especially meaningful to the development of students' intercultural communicative competence.

3.1. The Importance of Intercultural Communication in English Reading Teaching

With the development of pragmatics, culture has played an increasingly crucial role in language learning. As a carrier of culture, language is the product, the symbol of, and a manifestation of culture. In the meantime, culture is also the environment in which language exists. Moreover, language serves as a mirror of culture and is accordingly restricted by culture [4]. In traditional English reading teaching, both teachers and students believe that mastering knowledge of vocabulary and grammar is the most fundamental way to improve the reading effect [5]. However, quite a few problems are likely to appear in most students' actual reading: they find out the new words and grammar knowledge in the article through reference books but still do not understand after reading the article, which is the direct embodiment of the lack of intercultural knowledge as reading support. In other words, vocabulary and grammar knowledge can be identified and explained through tool books, while cross-cultural knowledge needs to be cultivated imperceptibly for a long time [6].

From the standpoint of cross-cultural education, it is critical that college English teaching evolve with the times, increase relevant cross-cultural content, and constantly improve students' cross-cultural communication abilities. The importance of cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence from the perspective of cross-cultural education is mainly reflected in the following aspects: Firstly, the content of college English teaching is effectively supplemented, which lays a solid foundation for students to better use cross-cultural knowledge for communication. Language is conducive to having a good knowledge of the cultural background, cultural development, and cultural innovation of this region, through which the country's culture can be disseminated in the communication between countries. Moreover, it is by introducing some cross-cultural knowledge and communicative competence into college English teaching that the content of college English learning can be further supplemented, which, meanwhile, can lay a solid foundation for students to make better use of intercultural knowledge for communication.

Secondly, it is of great help to foster students' humanistic core literacy. Nowadays, the fundamental task of quality education in China is to foster virtue through education and help students build core literacy. The content of the humanities contains politics, economy, history, and many other aspects of knowledge. With the core literacy of the humanities, students will be able to better communicate with others [1].

Thirdly, it contributes to enhancing the efficiency of students' English reading. The traditional pattern of college English teaching attaches importance to students' basic knowledge, neglecting the cultivation of students' communicative competence. As a matter of fact, English culture has a profound impact on the comprehension of numerous reading texts in college English reading. According to Hu Wenzhong, language and culture are closely related [7]. It is obvious that human culture can be produced and passed on due to the emergence and development of language. In other words, language and culture are inseparable and interdependent. However, if students only pay attention to the learning of vocabulary and grammar while ignoring cultural knowledge such as English cultural background, political history, philosophy, and art in the process of English reading, they will only know the plain meaning of the words rather than the implicit meaning, thus failing to carry out in-depth English reading. Therefore, focusing on the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence in the process of reading greatly contributes to improving the efficiency of students' English reading [7].

3.2. Analysis of Intercultural Barriers in English Reading

Language is inextricably linked with worldview, mindset, culture, and communication. Different social cultures include many aspects, such as social history, religious beliefs, values, modes of

thinking, and so on. If English readers lack the understanding of western culture, they will find it difficult to really comprehend the implication of the article. Worse still, sometimes they will even misinterpret the meaning of the article. The factors that affect cross-cultural communication include verbal behavior, paralinguistic behavior and non-verbal behavior. Because English reading is an intercultural communication between learners and authors via written materials without a communicative context, cross-cultural barriers in English reading are primarily reflected in language behavior, specifically vocabulary, colloquialism, and discourse [5].

Firstly, vocabulary is the main factor directly reflecting the relationship between culture and language in English reading, while grammar is the second influencing factor [6]. Due to the differences in cultural background, geographical environment, mode of thinking, and traditional customs between China and the West, there are some differences in the inclusiveness, flexibility, associative meaning and cultural connotation of English words and Chinese characters [8]. With the superficial meaning, some English words also have different meanings in different language environments. For example, peacocks are regarded as auspicious symbols in Chinese culture, while peacock means showing off and being proud in English. Students will have difficulty reading if they do not understand the specific meaning of similar words in the source language. In addition to some simple nouns, proper nouns in English reading can also make students puzzled, such as “Uncle Sam” refers to the United States government rather than a person named Uncle Sam [6].

Secondly, created by the people according to their own unique regional culture or historical culture, common sayings (namely, colloquialism) are popular phrases spread among the people, including slang expressions, proverbs and oral idioms. Furthermore, common sayings often show up in some authentic English articles, and misunderstandings will arise if you fail to apprehend the culture behind these sentences. Take a famous Chinese proverb as an example. The English expression of “self-help” is “God helps those who help themselves”. The reason why it is expressed in English is that Chinese people advocate nature and hold an idea of “harmonization of human and nature”, while Westerners believe in Christianity, holding that God is omnipotent. As a result, if Chinese learners lack the cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries, they will not be able to accurately understand the meaning of such idioms when reading English articles, thus affecting the effect of English reading learning [5].

Thirdly, English reading is often presented in the form of text, so learners are supposed to familiarize the cultural background of the whole article when reading English articles. It is well known that there is a big difference in the mode of thinking between Chinese and Westerners [6]. Chinese people usually tend to use spiral thinking, and they generally apply induction when writing articles. Concretely speaking, they first state the factual materials, get closer to the topic gradually, and then clearly put forward their own views at the end of the article. In contrast, Westerners are usually inclined to use straight-line thinking, and they will apply deduction when writing. More specifically, they clearly set out their own views at the beginning of the article, demonstrating the arguments separately in the following part. Apparently, the different text structure caused by this different mode of thinking will make Chinese learners feel confused when reading the article, so that they can’t find the main ideas of the author [5].

Additionally, there is no doubt that English and Chinese belong to two completely different language families, and there are many differences in the cultures behind them. Culture involves a wide range of areas, such as history, politics, economy, customs, thinking, diet, clothing and so on. It is precisely because of cultural diversity and differences that foreign language learners are bound to have all kinds of puzzles in understanding non-native culture, which is one of the obstacles to reading a specific text to a certain extent. In a specific discourse, a variety of proper nouns will inevitably appear, such as the Nazis, St. Petersburg, the Baltic Sea, the Amber Room and so on. Hence, it is not easy to fully comprehend this short passage since these proper nouns and the hidden

cultural background aren't what foreign language learners can individually feel in their daily lives, which requires learners to excavate the cultural knowledge behind it and get familiar with the real historical events behind it, so as to lay a solid foundation for accurate understanding [2].

The purpose of foreign language teaching is to foster students' ability to communicate in a certain range using the language they have learned. In commenting on the seriousness of pragmatic errors, Thomas pointed out that grammatical errors is possible to make people unpleasant or affect communication, but the listener will tolerate them when realizing that the speaker's grammatical ability is weak. However, if a non-native speaker doesn't understand the foreign cultural background and causes pragmatic failure, it may be regarded as malicious by the other side. With the purpose of making communication harmonious, teachers are supposed to realize that cultural differences are high-level obstacles to reading comprehension, and implement cultural infiltration in reading teaching, which is of great help to improve students' cross-cultural communicative competence [9].

4. Analysis of English Reading Teaching and Learning Situation from a Cross-cultural Perspective

There are many texts about Chinese and Western cultures in English reading materials, one of which focuses on the differences in etiquette between China and the West. As one of the components of national culture, etiquette plays an important role in getting familiar with the culture of a country and a nation. What's more, based on understanding each other's customs and taboos, mutual respect is one of the principles that modern etiquette should abide by. Therefore, the differences in etiquette between China and the West should be kept in mind. Meanwhile, it is also necessary to show respect for customs of different cultural backgrounds.

Since college students' scope of English knowledge is relatively narrow, it is of great necessity for them to be fully exposed to Chinese and Western cultures, comprehend the differences in etiquette between China and the West, and strengthen their cultural awareness. Through the study of Chinese and Western etiquette, students will have a certain knowledge of the differences between Chinese and Western etiquette, which will lay a solid foundation for the study of this text [10].

Worryingly, the overall situation of college students' English reading is not optimistic. Traditional English reading mainly highlights the grammatical structure and the translation of each sentence, which leads to an emphasis on the superficial understanding of the sentence. But under ordinary circumstances, the deep meaning of the article can't be clearly grasped without a thorough understanding of the article itself. As a matter of fact, English reading comprehension is a kind of intercultural communication, and culture is the most important factor affecting reading comprehension in second language acquisition.

There are many reasons for students' weak intercultural communicative competence. From an objective point of view, the class hours of college English are limited. Besides, English reading mainly focus on classroom reading teaching, and the scope of reading materials isn't wide enough. Subjectively, some teachers do not place a high value on improving students' intercultural communicative competence, owing to a single and rigid teaching style [11]. Additionally, from the perspective of college students themselves, college students' bad English learning habits indeed have a certain influence, mainly reflected in the following two aspects: Firstly, it is the common learning habit of the majority of college students to learn by rote from textbooks. Worse still, this learning approach is always adhered to whether learning words, sentences or articles, which proves to be futile and inefficient. Especially when college students are reading English articles, they get accustomed to translating word for word, which not only causes obstacles in understanding the content of the article, but also is harmful to improving the reading level of college students. Secondly, most college students lack interest in reading and spend little time on it. Since the content

of College English is various and complicated, students have already struggled when facing the textbooks, let alone reading extra-curricular books (such as foreign magazines, newspapers, foreign classics, etc.). In this case, students will have fewer and fewer reading opportunities, and their reading ability will decline over time [12].

Through a large number of practical surveys on English reading teaching activities, more than 80% of college students with low intercultural sensitivity can only understand the indicative meaning of English words, failing to give a correct and reasonable explanation of the implied meaning of English words. Although they have learned some relevant knowledge of the English language, they still don't become familiar with foreign cultures, and they are unable to flexibly utilize English knowledge or skills in a specific context. Finally, it leads to the failure of intercultural communication [13].

First of all, the teaching of college English reading is influenced by the thought stereotype, which refers to the way of thinking in which the conversation partner is understood and explained in one's own values. In cross-cultural communication, different ways of thinking have a great impact on verbal communication. As for the same thing, the Chinese tend to speak tactfully, while the British and Americans are inclined to be straightforward. Many college students who enter the workplace will find that the corporate culture, style of work, promotion mechanisms and performance evaluation of foreign-funded enterprises are different from the traditional thinking patterns of their own countries. When talking to European and American leaders, the style and focus of the conversation will be dramatically different. In college English classroom teaching, on the premise of imparting language knowledge, there is little discussion on the way of thinking in the context of English culture, which needs to be improved.

Secondly, the relevant curriculum is unreasonable. In addition to English majors, there are no courses in western culture, history, sociology, and other aspects in college English teaching in many colleges and universities, with just some mechanical training courses of listening, speaking, reading and writing offered. Hence, it is difficult for students to have a knowledge of the cultures of other countries, as well as language knowledge and skills related to culture. It seems clear that this situation is far from meeting the needs of people's intercultural communication in the context of modern society.

Thirdly, there has been too much emphasis on the transmission of language knowledge. In the traditional college English class, the main focus is on imparting language knowledge, thus neglecting cross-cultural communication and the use of language. Besides, this learning style, which follows the normal routine of going from phonetic symbols to words and then to sentence structure analysis in the process of learning English, has, to some extent, stifled students' subjective initiative in learning and made English learning out of touch with the use of English. Furthermore, it is easy to cause such a typical phenomenon that students with a rich vocabulary reserve and the whole grammar system fail to express and apply them. Traditional teaching methods, teaching materials and examinations are all oriented towards the mastery of language knowledge rather than the acquisition of communicative skills. Although in recent years, there has been a deepening reform of teaching methods, the application of some new teaching methods, such as listening and speaking method and communicative method, only shifts the focus of teaching from the transmission of language knowledge to the cultivation of language competence. In terms of the training of intercultural communicative competence, these changes are far from enough. Moreover, the improvement of teachers' own abilities and the cultivation of cross-cultural communication awareness are also worthy of attention [4].

5. Enlightenment from the Teaching of English Reading from a Aross-cultural Perspective

There is no doubt that college English education serves as an important part of higher education. Equally, much attention should be paid to the reading ability of college English. Through the study of college English reading, students can not only pass all kinds of exams, but also can communicate with foreign friends confidently and fluently. Language is the tool of human communication, the carrier of national culture and the bridge of national spirit. The development direction of college English should focus on general English and be supplemented by academic English. Besides, teachers in college English teaching classroom can introduce history, politics, customs, diet, geography, philosophy, aesthetics and so on of English-speaking countries to the students, which can help them form a comprehensive understanding of the values, outlook on life and world outlook of English-speaking countries, increase the commonness of Chinese and foreign languages and cultures as well as exchange the cultural traditions of various countries, thus optimizing the way of thinking [14].

Firstly, the introduction of cultural background knowledge and in-depth excavation of the cultural connotation of the reading text are supposed to be implemented. Generally speaking, reading texts is based on a certain cultural background, so readers must be equipped with relevant cultural background knowledge in order to better understand the articles. When conducting cultural introduction, teachers should first concentrate on cultivating students' cultural awareness instead of spoon-feeding to explain the relevant cultural knowledge. Furthermore, teachers are supposed to infiltrate the explanation of cultural knowledge into classroom teaching, provide students with opportunities to explore and encourage students to excavate the cultural connotation behind reading texts. Before a class begins, students can be asked to consult the relevant background knowledge in the reading text. In the process of a class, it is of great significance for teachers to guide the students to supplement and extend the reading materials in the form of group cooperation and inquiry, which serves as an efficient method to dig into the deep connotation of the reading text in the interaction between teachers and students [7]. Secondly, it is suggested that teachers should apply the contrastive approach to compare the cultural differences between China and the West, and show the cultural materials to the students in different forms when presenting the relevant cultural background so that the students' reading effect can be better improved [6].

Secondly, it is crucial to enlarge the vocabulary and excavate the deep cultural meaning of the vocabulary in the reading text. It goes without saying that vocabulary lays a solid foundation for English reading and cross-cultural communication. In vocabulary teaching, what teachers will do is just to ask students to memorize the meaning of words with the help of dictionaries, while students will rigidly memorize the matching Chinese meanings of English words in dictionaries. Obviously, this vocabulary memory mode is to use the relevant background and cultural knowledge of Chinese to comprehend English culture, which will lead to deviation and incomprehension when reading the text [7]. In general, the comparative approach can be used to implement the cultural leading-in of vocabulary, that is, to compare the specific connotations of the same word in Chinese and Western cultures, thus helping students understand and memorize words [6].

Thirdly, the inspection and guidance of extracurricular reading activities should be seriously considered and strengthened, which is another effective way for students to acquire sociocultural knowledge. At present, a translation teaching approach, which mainly depends on the teacher, is adopted in the teaching of English reading in China. However, teachers often can't give a systematic and scientific explanation of the cultural background because of their limited cultural level. In addition, it is the pressure of examinations and enrollment rates that make teachers spend most of their classroom time explaining grammar points and seldom impart cultural background knowledge. Obviously, this translation teaching method, with more emphasis on grammatical

analysis, is merely for students speaking their native language, which has little effect on the learning of the target language. Specifically, teachers get accustomed to starting with articles with lexical explanations, selecting some words or phrases from them, and explaining their meanings and usage with relevant examples. Besides, when it comes to analyzing the text, the strategy teachers often apply is sentence-by-sentence translation. When they encounter special sentence patterns, they are inclined to give a lengthy explanation of the relevant grammatical knowledge. Finally, it is a summary of the whole text, during which the students try to explain it in their own language. At the end of the teaching process, teachers will test the teaching effect by asking students to do exercises. Through this teaching method, although students can better master English knowledge, the actual ability to use English for intercultural communication is still not enough [3]. Under the condition of few class hours and heavy tasks, it is impossible for teachers in college English classrooms to improve students' sensitivity to cultural differences and train sociocultural competence by means of classroom teaching solely. Instead, it is vital to create conditions that lead students to read a large number of extracurricular reading materials, receive audio-visual materials, participate in all kinds of useful extracurricular English activities, and rely on modern teaching techniques. Hence, students' extracurricular study and practice can be effectively supervised, inspected, tested and guided [15]. Before and after the reading class, teachers will have access to the fact that students use the resources of the library or the Internet to study independently, expand their cultural knowledge related to reading texts, thus helping students increase their cultural knowledge reserve. Furthermore, teachers can recommend some meaningful reading materials to students based on their different interests and reading levels, guiding them to accumulate knowledge about social customs as well as social background during the reading process, as a result of which they can improve their reading ability and cross-cultural communication competence [7].

In the interactive classroom, the organization of teaching activities is of great importance, in which the introduction of the text, as the initial part of the whole unit, occupies a crucial position. A successful text introduction can help students better get into the state of learning, and their learning motivation will be fully mobilized and motivated. Teachers are supposed to make full use of various interactive leading-in activities to stimulate students' interest in learning, choose related topics according to the different contents of the articles, and let students carry out activities such as debate, discussion, video appreciation and so on, through which cultural self-confidence can permeate into classroom teaching. With the purpose of enhancing cultural self-confidence, the text explanation should also contain a variety of interactive activities involving relevant topics so that students can actively participate in them and become the main body of the classroom. Additionally, after-school tasks, as a means to detect the achievement of learning goals, provide students with practical context to improve their language application skills and deepen their emotional goals [16].

In addition, students are supposed to strengthen their autonomous learning ability and actively solve the cross-cultural barriers in English reading. As English readers, it is crucial for students to first accurately recognize the intercultural factors in the process of reading and establish their own intercultural consciousness. Aiming to hold a peaceful and tolerant attitude to learn cross-cultural knowledge and improve their reading ability, students need to achieve the following three points: First and foremost, students should have a solid knowledge of language, which is a fundamental condition for effective reading and can directly influence the effect of reading. Therefore, English readers should actively trawl through the basic language knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar, paragraph structure and so on before reading class. Secondly, it is significant for students to establish cross-cultural awareness. In addition to relevant basic language knowledge, readers should also boast strong cross-cultural consciousness and high cross-cultural sensitivity, and realize the existence of cross-cultural phenomena when reading articles. Besides, readers also need to contact, understand and learn cross-cultural knowledge in an objective, rational and peaceful manner.

Thirdly, students are supposed to concentrate on enhancing their autonomous learning ability. With cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity, learners should also heighten their autonomous learning ability to supplement the limited class hours [5].

6. Conclusion

To sum up, language is a form of expression for human beings to communicate, through which people living in different regions exchange ideas and interact with others. Intercultural communicative competence refers to the ability that people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds use their own language to convey information. In college English reading teaching, teachers should focus on the integration of culture and language teaching, enhance cross-cultural communicative competence through reading and help students communicate in English. Only with excellent language skills and intercultural communication skills can college students better adapt to the needs of modern society for talents. At the same time, it is the most effective and direct to analyze the reasons and specific training strategies for college students' poor cross-cultural English reading ability from the perspectives of college students and teachers. Therefore, in the teaching of college English reading, it is of great necessity for college students to overcome their own psychological obstacles and develop good learning habits, while teachers need to change their teaching methods. It is the joint efforts of college students and teachers that can further improve college students' cross-cultural English reading ability and the level of college English reading teaching.

It is undeniable that English reading plays an important part in the process of college English learning, the ultimate goal of which is to achieve intercultural communication. As a result, for learners, the improvement of English reading ability also means the improvement of intercultural communicative competence. In the teaching of English reading, English teachers should pay attention to raising learners' cross-cultural awareness, helping learners establish a correct intercultural attitude, reinforcing their English reading ability, and then beefing up their cross-cultural communicative competence. However, this paper has the limitation that it only analyzes the problems existing in college English reading teaching and the direction of improvement from the perspective of intercultural communication without combining the actual cases and questionnaires for analysis and research. Therefore, the author of this paper will integrate with the actual investigation and related cases in the future to carry out further research.

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