

Study on the Role of English Picture Books in Primary School English Education

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Abstract: English is an important tool for international communication. With the accelerated development of globalization, the significance of learning English has been increasingly prominent. It is common for students in China to learn English from primary school, so it is a key stage to lay a foundation for English learning. The traditional way of teaching English in primary school tends to be boring and for a variety of reasons, the teaching result is not that satisfied in this way. This essay explores the influences of involving English picture books in English teaching for primary school through a method of literature review. In the key part of this essay, there are three main parts including the definition of English picture books, the impacts of involving English picture books in primary school English education, and strategies for Applying English Picture Books to English education in primary school. This essay is trying to illustrate that involving English picture books in primary school English education can benefit students in many dimensions and give some suggestions of what educators can do to promote English learning in the future.

Keywords: English education in Chinese primary school, English picture books, reading teaching, literature review, cognitive development

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the traditional way of English teaching still prevails in primary school. The traditional way of teaching English in primary school is always like students learning the words one by one by repeating what teachers have taught until they can memorize the meaning and the pronunciation of the words. This approach to teaching may be due to time limitations to reach all teaching targets made by the school or the lack of capable teachers to take up new ways of teaching.

Whatever the reason is, the teaching result of the traditional way is not that satisfied. And there are many issues in the traditional way of English teaching. Initially, the characteristic of traditional teaching and learning methods is that they focus on writing rather than social communication as the purpose of language learning[1]. Secondly, traditional English education is more likely to be exam-oriented teaching and neglects the essence of language learning. In the traditional English classroom, teachers often take the test as the orientation, overemphasize the explanation and memory of grammar, vocabulary, and translation, and neglect the cultivation of language application ability and communicative ability. This mode of exam-oriented education leads to students often getting high scores, but in actual language communication, they tend to be unable to express their ideas fluently

and accurately. Besides, traditional English education lacks authenticity and practicability. Traditional English teaching materials are often out of touch with real life, and some of the teaching contents lag behind reality. This lack of authenticity and practicality makes students lack interest and motivation in language learning, as a result, it is difficult to achieve good learning results.

Compared to the traditional way of English teaching, if English picture books are introduced into the class, this phenomenon may be changed. Involving English picture books in learning means students will get in touch with contents that are not included in their textbooks but are related to the theme of the units they have been taught. This way of learning can enhance students' interest and enable students to acquire the ability to read English in a more immersive and authentic way. Also, it is difficult for primary school students especially those in Grade One and Grade Two who are in the preoperational stage to pay attention for a long time. Then if English picture books are involved in learning, it can help alleviate the problem to some extent. So this essay will focus on the benefits of involving English picture books in English teaching in primary school.

This essay uses a method of literature review and aims to have a better and deeper illustration of how English picture books benefit primary school students. Furthermore, this essay will give some suggestions and ideas for transforming the traditional English teaching model in primary school into a more interesting and effective way.

2. The definition and selection of English picture books

English picture books are reading resources that combine English with images to help readers especially beginners to have a better understanding. The main elements of English picture books are short texts in English and vivid pictures as auxiliary elements. Both are indispensable and complement with each other, playing an important role in activating students' visual senses [2]. When selecting English picture books, teachers should select books that are suitable for students according to their grades, vocabulary, and teaching contents. It is better if the books selected match their interests. Therefore, the effects of combining English picture books with learning can be maximized.

3. The impacts of involving English picture books in primary school English education

3.1. Effectively activate students' interest in English reading

English is a second language for most students in primary school, and there are many differences between Chinese(their first language) and English like grammar and ways of expression. So under the influence of the native language, there must be some situations like they cannot understand the meaning of the phrases and sentences. As a result, they gradually have no interest in reading and learning English. When reading English picture books, this can be avoided to some extent. If students encounter vocabulary and phrases that cannot be accurately understood, they can combine the illustrations in picture books to imagine and guess, then they can get a probable meaning of the text. With the help of a teacher, they may form the capability of interpreting and gradually analyzing English knowledge.

Besides, English picture books are more colorful and vivid compared to English textbooks.

Integrating English picture books into English classrooms can fully stimulate students' reading enthusiasm and promote the improvement of independent reading and imagination[3].

3.2. Cultivate good reading habits

Education in elementary school is not only a process of learning knowledge, but also a key period to form good study habits. As English is a language subject, so it tightly relates to listening, speaking, reading, and writing. So educators need to try their best to help students form these habits.

English picture book is a good tool to help foster good reading habits. Due to the features of children in this stage, it is really hard for elementary school students to continuously pay attention to certain things due to a lack of self-discipline[4]. The vibrant illustrations and engaging stories captivate children's attention, making them eager to continue to read the book. As they flip through the pages, they learn to recognize words, phrases, and eventually sentences, building a solid foundation for language learning.

Reading English picture books regularly encourages children to develop a regular reading routine. This habit not only improves their language skills but also fosters critical thinking.

By choosing appropriate English picture books for students of different ages, teachers can motivate children to read independently, laying the foundation for lifelong reading. The journey begins with a simple picture book, but the possibilities it generates are endless.

Therefore, integrating picture book resources into primary school English reading teaching can stimulate students' reading enthusiasm, encourage them to actively think and explore reading, summarize their reading experience, and form good reading habits [5].

3.3. Expand their imagination

Picture books often contain attractive plots. These plots are constructed in a virtual world and often break the boundaries of the real world, allowing students to enter a new and fantastic world. By following the development of the plots, mentally build their landscapes, characters, and adventures, fostering their imagination and creativity in the process. Also, the plot is always exciting and meaningful, arousing the curiosity of primary school students. So it can drive them to explore further, think further, and even combine what they have read in books with the real world. Therefore, by engaging with these imaginative stories, students not only enhance their language skills but also develop a sense of wonder and imagination that will benefit them well in life.

Characters in some English picture books are diverse to construct more interesting scenes, These characters may include human beings, animals, and other types of stuff that do not exist in the real world like UFOs and aliens. These characters have diverse images and distinct personality traits, which can broaden the horizon while reading.

4. Strategies for Applying English Picture Books to English education in primary school

4.1. Select appropriate books for students of different ages

To reach a better teaching result, teachers should apply different English picture books to students in different stages. Many factors need to be considered when choosing English picture books, like the English level of students, and their interests [6]. Also, the selection of English picture books should fit children's cognitive development. According to Jean Piaget, a man who contributed a lot in psychology area, there are four stages of children's cognitive development. They are the sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, concrete operational stage, and formal operational stage. For children who are in the preoperational stage, and who are more likely to be in Grades 1 to Grade 3, Some simple English picture books can be recommended. In these books, the words and sentences are all easy to understand, but they share some principles and rules like obeying the traffic rules, and learning how to get along with parents or friends. For instance, *We Found a Hat* is very suitable for children in this stage. The book describes a story in which two turtles come across a hat, and this hat looks great on both of them. But there are two turtles, only one hat. So this is a book theme of sharing. It is said that children in preoperational are more likely to be ego-centrism, so with this book, they may begin to think about sharing and gradually learn how to get along with others. For students in Grades 4-6, who are more likely to be in the concrete operational stage, more challenging English picture books can be provided.

4.2. Integrate English picture books into class

In the English classroom, teachers can integrate picture books into their teaching in a variety of ways. First of all, teachers can use English picture books to guide students to predict the story content and stimulate students' interest in learning by displaying the cover page of picture books. Secondly, teachers can guide the students to look through the pictures in the book and let them guess what the probable plot is. Then teachers can explain and practice vocabulary, grammar and other knowledge points in combination with the content of picture books to help students consolidate what they have learned. In addition, teachers can also organize students to read picture books, role play, draw illustrations and write story sequels to have a better memorization of the plot [7]. According to research done by Americans, positive emotion may have a distinct effect on memory and may lead to enhanced association memory [8]. Language learning is tightly related to memorizing, so with positive emotion, they can remember better, and there will be a better teaching result as well. While activities like role-play can activate students' emotions, so they are more likely to engage in class. Therefore, a better teaching result can be realized.

4.3. Create a good reading environment

School is a main place for students to learn English knowledge and develop their learning ability [9]. Specifically, it can be divided into two aspects: physical environment and emotional environment. First, the physical environment refers to the school's hardware teaching facilities and teachers. The more complete the hardware teaching facilities and the stronger the teachers are, the more effective the improvement of student's English reading ability will be. Second, emotional environment refers to the teaching atmosphere and interaction between teachers and students in primary school English reading classrooms [10].

For the physical environment, if some schools have advanced devices, they can use multimedia teaching resources to offer a richer learning experience [11]. Teachers can use multimedia teaching resources to present the content of English picture books to students in a more vivid way. For example, teachers can use slides to display the illustrations and text content of English picture books, and add elements such as sound effects and animation to enrich the display effect. In addition, teachers can also use the Internet to download video, audio, and other materials related to English picture books for students to watch and listen to.

As for the emotional environment, many strategies can be taken. Initially, teachers can set up a special reading corner in the classroom, placing a variety of appropriate English picture books and related materials for students to borrow and read at any time. These books can be provided by the students themselves or by the school. Secondly, teachers can regularly organize English picture book reading activities, such as reading-sharing meetings and story meetings, so that students can have the opportunity to show their reading achievements. By these activities, it can also stimulate students' activity of reading English picture books to some extent.

It is worth it for teachers to pay attention to cultivating students' reading habits and interests when creating a good reading environment. Teachers can guide students to make reading plans and regularly check students' reading progress and reading notes. At the same time, teachers can also recommend suitable picture books and reading materials according to students' reading notes and feedback, to select more suitable books.

5. Conclusion

In summary, integrating English picture books into primary school English education can benefit students in many ways, including activating students' interest in English reading, Cultivating good reading habits, and stimulating the development of their imagination and creativity. Many measures

can be taken to involve English picture books in primary school English education such as selecting appropriate books for students of different ages, integrating English picture books into class, and creating a good reading environment. But there is no denying that there is still a long way to go to reach the expected outcome. It cannot be changed by a single person, on the contrary, schools, teachers, parents, and students need to work together to let elementary students learn English better through reading English picture books.

There are also some shortcomings in the essay. Researches are not involved so maybe it cannot reach an ideal result as mentioned in part three. Generally speaking, it is not so comprehensive as well for the sake of only a small part of the existing research involved in this essay. In the following research, the feasibility of involving English picture books in primary school English education can be further discussed.

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