

Analysis of the Methods for Selecting Children's English Materials

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Abstract: As globalization continues to accelerate and international exchanges become more frequent, English has become an important medium for cross-cultural communication. Reading is an integral part of English learning, especially for children. By reading English materials, they can get access to a rich vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure, which helps to improve their expressive skills. In order to expand children's knowledge, understand the differences between different countries and cultures and develop their open-mindedness and global awareness, this paper aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the selection of children's English materials, using the literature research method to analyse the principles of children's English materials. Firstly, the characteristics of children's English reading are analyzed, and it is found that children have a limited vocabulary, a high reliance on visual elements and different reading levels in English reading. Secondly, the paper classifies children's English materials into 3 genres such as picture books, novels and children's poetry, and summarizes the characteristics of the corresponding genres. Finally, a detailed analysis of the principles of material selection for children's English materials is made using relevant literature, and four principles of material selection for children's English materials are proposed: the principle of moderate difficulty, the principle of attractiveness, the principle of diversity and the principle of cultural relevance.

Keywords: children's English reading, children's English materials, cross-cultural, diversity

1. Introduction

In modern society, English has become one of the sought-after practical skills. For children, English reading is one of the key steps in improving their English expression and comprehension abilities. Therefore, the selection of appropriate English materials for children is crucial to their English reading development. Many scholars have conducted research on the selection of English language books for children. For example, Xiao presented seven principles for selecting reading materials, and emphasized the need to ensure that reading materials are chosen at an appropriate level of difficulty, neither too difficult nor too easy [1]. Furthermore, Ebe studied the cultural relevance scale, which contains eight factors that contribute to the selection of children's English materials, and the study highlighted that teachers should consider the cultural background of their students in their teaching [2]. Besides, Vardell, Hadaway and Young, pointed out that the selection of English materials should take into account content accessibility, language accessibility, visual accessibility, genre accessibility,

cultural accessibility, and accessibility through accuracy and organization [3]. Furthermore, they categorized the topics of reading, and gives representative books of each genre.

The above-mentioned literature show that there is a lack of detailed analysis and research on the principles of selecting children's English materials, and that some of the principles of selecting reading materials are abstract. In this paper, the characteristics of children's English reading and the characteristics of children's English materials are analyzed in order to develop more detailed principles for the selection of children's English materials, so as to ensure that the selection of reading materials for children is accurate.

This study can provide effective guidance for parents and relevant practitioners involved in children's English education to help them better understand the market for children's English materials, select appropriate English materials and improve children's English reading skills and interests.

2. Characteristics of Children's English Reading

2.1. Limited Vocabulary

Firstly, one of the distinctive features of children's English reading is the limited vocabulary. According to Suter, children's vocabulary is proportional to their age, before children start learning English, their native vocabulary is only a few thousand words, which is not nearly enough to cope with the vocabulary needed to read in English [4,5]. A smaller vocabulary means that children encounter more unfamiliar words, which can lead to difficulties in understanding whole sentences or passages. Also, a limited vocabulary can affect children's comprehension in reading, and slow down children's reading, because they may need to stop and consult a dictionary or ask the teacher or parent the meaning of certain words.

2.2. High Reliance on Visual Elements

Children are dependent on visual elements, and they can enhance their interest in reading and comprehension by adding visual elements such as illustrations and pictures. These visual elements can also help children to better understand the content of English texts.

Pictures can be used as comprehension aids to help children more easily understand what is being said in a story or text. Through visual elements, they can make connections with the text and facilitate understanding of vocabulary, sentences and storylines. When encountering words or sentences they do not know, they can rely on the pictures to deduce their meaning, enhancing reading accuracy and fluency. However, over-reliance on visual elements can also have some negative effects. For example, they may lose interest in plain text and have difficulty deriving information from it. This over-reliance may limit the development of their reading skills.

2.3. Different Reading Levels

The differences in children's English reading levels stem from their ages and the different stages of their mother tongue development. Younger children are often in the early stages of mother tongue acquisition and have not yet fully mastered their mother tongue language skills, making it relatively difficult for them to learn English. In contrast, older children have developed a certain foundation in their mother tongue and knowledge of English, and they have a higher level of English reading. Therefore, there are significant differences in English reading level among children of different ages and language background.

Differences in reading levels can have an impact on children's English reading. High level readers have a rich vocabulary and comprehension skills and can comprehend texts quickly, increase their

reading speed and gain insight into the storyline and character relationships. They are familiar with a variety of reading strategies such as prediction, inference and summary to help comprehend and remember what they have read.

2.4. Different Cultural Backgrounds

During children's English reading, children from different countries may focus on different content choices. At the same time, children's English reading is usually linked to local cultural background knowledge. So children in regions where English is not their first language often have trouble understanding books in English. That is, certain stories may be set in the history, traditions, customs, etc. of a particular country or region, which requires readers to have relevant cultural background to better understand and appreciate the content. Moreover, due to differences in cultural values and interests, the themes and storylines covered in children's English materials may vary from country to country. For example, children's English reading in China may focus more on traditional culture and historical stories, while children's English reading in Western countries may focus more on themes such as fantasy stories and friendships.

In short, children tend to have a better understanding of books that better match their own culture.

3. Classification and Characteristics of Children's English Materials

Children's English Materials usually cover different levels of content, from simple picture books to chapter books suitable for middle school students, and are designed to help children improve their English reading skills.

3.1. Picture Books

Picture books are a type of English language book for children with text and illustrations aimed at children between the ages of 3 and 7. Compared to other types of reading materials, picture books focus more on visuals and storylines. By choosing interesting and lively picture books, children can develop an interest in reading. The pictures and colors in picture books can attract their attention and stimulate their curiosity. In addition, the storyline and characters in picture books develop children's reading comprehension skills.

For example, *the Pete the Cat* series of books is a classic picture book that is a household name in the USA, a must-read for almost every child. Firstly, *the Pete the Cat* series stand out for their unique and appealing visuals. The picture books feature sharp and rich illustrations, using bright colors and clean lines to bring characters and scenes to life. This visual presentation appeals to children's eyes and stimulates their curiosity about the story. Children can observe the pictures to understand the storyline and deepen their understanding and memory of English vocabulary and sentences.

Secondly, the storyline of *the Pete the Cat* series is extremely engaging. The main character, Pete, and the other characters in the stories have many wonderful and interesting adventures. These stories often involve real-life situations and issues such as friendship, self-confidence and patience, can convey positive values to children and inspire them to think about and explore important themes in life. Children can learn how to deal with different emotions, solve difficulties and build good relationships with others through their interactions with Pete.

The Pete the Cat series play an important role in children's English reading through their visuals and storyline, allowing children to develop positive values while improving their English.

3.2. Novels

Novels are children's English materials with rich content, covering a variety of topics and styles.

These books are designed to enhance children's interest in reading, broaden their knowledge and develop their thinking skills and creativity. For example, *Harry Potter* is an extremely popular novel by British author J.K. Rowling, which tells the story of the young wizard Harry Potter and his friends at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The *Harry Potter* series of novels successfully promote reading in English for children through a clever blend of various themes and styles. Firstly, this novel explores the core values of friendship, courage and loyalty. The characters in the stories demonstrate how true friendship can help them overcome obstacles and defeat the forces of evil. Secondly, *Harry Potter* incorporates elements of fantasy and magic to create a fantastical and enchanting world. This magical setting allows readers to escape the real world and immerse themselves in a place of imagination and adventure. For children learning English, this creative storyline can stimulate their curiosity and imagination and increase their interest in reading. Besides, *Harry Potter* also covers the themes of growth and self-discovery. The main character, Harry Potter, goes through a journey from loneliness and helplessness to gradually growing into a hero. This journey of growth provides young readers with a story that echoes their own experiences and enhances their understanding of self-identity and development.

3.3. Children's Poems

English poems for children are often presented in a simple, accessible and fun format and are designed to help children learn and understand the English language. Children's English poetry plays an important role in children's English language development, emotional expression and vocabulary expansion. Children's English poetry can help children to improve their language skills through rhyme and repetition. The rhythm and tone of poetry stimulate children's sensitivity to language and develop their listening and pronunciation skills.

In addition, children's English poetry contains a rich and varied vocabulary. Through repeated reading and enjoyment of the poems, children can gradually remember and apply these words, expanding their vocabulary. For example, *the little star* poem creates a sense of smooth rhythm through the fixed number of syllables and the arrangement of repeated word sounds. It also uses rhyme, exemplified by the “-ar” sound, which adds to the poem's sense of rhythm. Also, the repetitive elements in the poem such as “Twinkle, twinkle” and the repetition of phrases make the poem clearer and easier to remember and understand. This poem uses some common and essential basic words such as “star”, “wonder”, “world”, “high” and “sky”, and introduces abstract concepts such as “twinkle”, “diamond” and “wonder”, which can expand children's understanding of the meaning of words and help them to learn more abstract concepts.

4. The Selection Principles of English Materials for Children

4.1. Principle of Moderate Difficulty

In order to ensure that children are reading the right books, it is necessary to choose books that are neither too easy nor too difficult. This will ensure that the books are challenging enough for them without putting too much mental pressure on them.

The principle of moderate difficulty is mentioned in Xiao's study [1]. If the selected reading materials are too easy, children may feel bored and unchallenged, causing them to lose interest in reading, while if the selected reading materials are too difficult, children may feel overwhelmed and frustrated, causing them to give up reading or develop negative emotions. Children's reading abilities are different, identifying children's English levels and classifying reading materials at different levels of difficulty are necessary. Reference can be made to existing graded reading systems, such as the Oxford Reading Tree and Cambridge English Readers, which provide different levels of reading materials for children. Besides, Goodman argued miscue analysis has resulted in fundamental insights

into the reading process [6]. Teachers and parents can use miscue analysis to specifically analyse children's English levels thus match English materials to the appropriate level of difficulty.

4.2. Principle of Diversity

The principle of diversity means that in the selection of reading materials, attention should be paid to the diversity of the text. This includes aspects such as themes, cultural backgrounds and values in order to open up the readers' horizons and enhance comprehension and inclusiveness. Kristin Nuttall has proposed the SAVE (S: Short, A: Attractive, V: Varied, E: Easy) principle to summarize the main criteria for selecting a wide range of reading materials [7]. In practice, it is appropriate to select English materials with diverse topics, different themes and genres, as well as works that reflect different cultural backgrounds and characteristics. Diverse topics include science, history, art, nature, adventure, friendship, and family, while diverse genres cover picture books, comics, poetry, and informational books. Specifically, diverse cultural backgrounds and characters can help children understand and respect other cultures and develop cross-cultural awareness and inclusiveness. Moreover, the principle of diversity is mentioned in Xiao's study [1]. Diversity can also guide children to learn about different values and develop a sense of self-awareness and social responsibility.

4.3. Principle of Attractiveness

The principle of attractiveness refers to the selection of books that are interesting, creative and well readable to stimulate children's interest and enthusiasm for reading. This principle is also mentioned in Xiao's research [1]. This principle holds that "learning is only more effective and enjoyable in an environment that is fun and inspiring." As children lack sustained attention and patience, they need interesting and lively stories to stimulate their interest and curiosity. This can keep children engaged in reading and improve their reading skills and comprehension. As mentioned above, children rely heavily on visual elements. Books that are colourful, illustrated or have a special theme are often more appealing to children than traditional text-only stories. In addition, interesting characters, plots or questions can also capture children's attention and allow them to have a strong emotional response and experience that is enjoyable and rewarding as they read.

4.4. Principle of Cultural Relevance

The principle of cultural relevance refers to the integration of cultural background, prior knowledge and experience with reading material to promote children's understanding and interpretation of English materials. This principle recognizes the unique cultural background of each child and emphasizes the importance of linking content to the cultural knowledge and skills that students possess. Ebe suggested that when students are unable to relate to the text they are reading or lack background knowledge, they generally perform poorly on reading assessments [2]. This implies that the ability to comprehend text needs to be integrated with prior knowledge and experience, and that the absence of appropriate connections and background knowledge can negatively impact on students' reading ability. In addition, the term 'funds of knowledge' refers to these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being [8-10]. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez further pointed out the importance of funds for knowledge in classroom teaching [11]. This means that the teachers should integrate the lesson with the students' funds of knowledge in order to promote their understanding and performance in the classroom. In addition, funds of knowledge play an important role in children's understanding of English materials.

Given that children from different countries have different cultural backgrounds, and these backgrounds are usually reflected in their literature. The knowledge and experience children gain

from their cultural backgrounds will influence their understanding and interpretation of English materials. They may need more background knowledge to understand culture-specific references, metaphors or symbolism. For example, a Greek child reading a story about ancient Greek mythology may have a more in-depth knowledge of mythical places and characters, such as the Temple of Olympia in Athens, Zeus and Apollo. This background helps them to build associations with the story and to better understand the plot and the relationships between the characters in the story.

In conclusion, cultural background can influence children's understanding of language, literature and the world. Educators and parents should respect and acknowledge each child's cultural background, and provide a diversity of English materials to meet the needs of children from different cultural backgrounds.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, the characteristics of children's English reading are analyzed firstly. The study then broadly classifies children's English materials into genres such as picture books, novels and poetry. Finally, the paper suggests four principles that should be followed when selecting methods of reading materials in English for children. These include the principle of moderate difficulty, the principle of variety, the principle of appeal and the principle of cultural relevance. The strategies proposed after the analysis on the method of choosing children's English materials not only help children to improve their reading and comprehension skills, but also help to expand their horizons and perceptions about other countries and cultures. In addition, by reading English materials, children can also gain more enjoyment in learning, as well as facilitating the educational efforts of parents and teachers. However, this paper mainly consists of literature research to conduct analysis, lacking analysis of the current situation of children's English reading and the collection of first-hand data. In the future, it is necessary to conduct fieldwork to understand the current situation of children's English materials.

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