

Analysis of the Influence of Cultural Background Knowledge on English Reading in Middle School

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Abstract: Reading plays an important role in second language acquisition. Therefore, the cultivation of reading ability is a very important ability cultivation in middle school English teaching. The author found that in addition to language, knowledge, the background knowledge of the article is also very important, especially for the cultural background knowledge of middle school English teaching. Based on a large number of literature and various literature materials, the author adopts the research method of qualitative research and tries to explore: whether cultural background knowledge affect students' reading comprehension ability or not; the influence of cultural background knowledge on students' reading skills. The significance of this paper is to strengthen teachers' output of cultural background by this paper, so as to improve students' reading comprehension ability and increase their reading comprehension scores.

Keywords: Reading comprehension; Background knowledge; Teaching suggestions

1. Introduction

In recent years, English culture teaching has attracted the attention of foreign language teachers and researchers. As an important part of English teaching, reading teaching penetrates English cultural background knowledge in the teaching process, which can effectively affect students' reading ability. The process of language learning is also a true understanding of the cultural meaning contained in a language and a prerequisite for mastering and mastering a language^[1]. Therefore, in junior middle school English reading comprehension teaching, language teaching and culture teaching should be paid equal attention to, and the two should complement each other and cooperate with each other.

As cultural soft power plays an increasingly prominent role in international competition, cultural exchange and innovation have become an indispensable way to deal with the trend of globalization. Language is the carrier of culture, and culture is the foundation of language formation and development^[2]. Therefore, understanding the culture related to the target language is an indispensable condition for mastering this language.

Why does the reader cannot correctly understand the contents of the article? The former researches point out that there may be three reasons of this problem: first, researchers do not have the schema associated with article, so they do not understand the contents of the article. Second, although readers have the schema about the article, but the clues provided by the author is not enough to activate the reader's schema. Third, readers think that they understand the article. But this is not actually intention of the author want to express. The improvement of reading ability is influenced by language ability, reading strategies, emotional forces, learning motivation and many other factors, among which cultural background knowledge has a more obvious influence on English reading^[3].

2. Reading Teaching in a Middle School in Hechuan

2.1 Research Subject

The author chooses one class of the seventh grade in a middle school in Hechuan as the research subject. There are 40 students in the class. In the final exam, the average score of reading comprehension of the class is 25 points (out of 45 points). And the highest score is 30 and the lowest score is 20.

2.2 Observation of the English Reading Class

The author spends one month in researching, and observed 10 reading lessons, 30 minutes for each lesson.

Through observation, the author found that students' reading comprehension scores would be higher if the teacher introduced cultural background knowledge in advance before teaching the reading comprehension questions than those without cultural background introduction. By asking the students who scored high and low in reading comprehension whether they read foreign books extensively, the author found that the students who read more outside the classroom scored higher in reading comprehension than those who read less outside the classroom.

Therefore, the following conclusions can be drawn: cultural background will affect students' reading comprehension ability, and thus affect students' reading comprehension scores. During the research process, the author found some interesting phenomenon, students know the meaning of each word, but do not know the meaning of the article. For some jokes, humorous articles, although it is to read the content but do not know why funny. According to the author's observation of the students in the teaching class:

Firstly, the reading quantity of the students in the author's class is limited. More than half of the middle school students basically do not read Chinese after class, and a few of them can read extra-curricular books. However, due to their different motives, levels and methods of reading, more than 80% of the students mainly read popular books, and very few of them read serious books or classic works. Some even put some unhealthy reading materials into the "menu" of extracurricular reading. One of the most popular books among students these days, for example, was *The Tomb Raiders*, an eerie horror novel. There is so little extracurricular reading of Chinese that there is even less extracurricular reading of English.

Secondly, students lack interest in reading outside the classroom. The main reason is that they do not realize the significance and function of reading. At the same time, most students complain about the heavy workload and great pressure of exams. For instance, the students in this class that I observed are busy with large and small exams all day, and have no intention, ability or time to take into account extracurricular reading. Instead of spending a lot of time reading extra books, it is better to do some practice exercises and focus on the test score in front of you. Below this kind of state of mind extra-curricular reading, contained quite strong recreational composition, sketch, humor, cartoon book became the student main extra-curricular reading material. These extra-curricular reading materials have neither humanistic spirit nor influence and shape of the spiritual world.

Thirdly, the similarity of reading materials will also affect students' understanding of reading materials. When the cultural background of several reading materials presented at the same time is more similar, students will have a deeper understanding of these articles, and the reading comprehension score will be higher. In the observation, the author also found that in several similar cultures presented at the same time, the later the students worked on the essay, the higher the score. It also reflects the expansion of cultural background knowledge, which is conducive to students' grasp of reading comprehension and improve students' reading comprehension scores. For example, in the fifth reading class, the teacher did not present the cultural background in advance, but directly presented three reading comprehension questions about NBA stars, and asked students to directly complete three exercises. In this process, the author observed that the athletic boys in the class generally scored higher, while the female students scored worse than the male students. In addition, we can see a trend from the score of each reading comprehension of the female students, that is, the score of the first essay is lower than the second one, and the second one is lower than the third one.

Through this period of observation, the author found that students' reading comprehension scores would be higher if the teacher introduced cultural background knowledge in advance before teaching the reading comprehension questions than those without cultural background introduction. The reading comprehension scores of students who read more outside the classroom were higher than those who read less outside the classroom. Therefore, the following conclusions can be drawn: cultural background will affect students' reading comprehension ability, and thus affect students' reading comprehension scores.

3. Analysis of the Reading Class through Observation

3.1 The Importance of Culture Background Knowledge for Reading Skills

Through the one-month observation, the author found that students often appear the following situation, the author found that students often appear the following situation in English reading: if the content of an article is familiar, students can understand it easily. Conversely, if the content of an article is unfamiliar, students cannot understand it easily.

First, readers do not have the schema associated with the article, so they do not understand the contents of the article^[4]. The author believes that if student do not have the cultural background knowledge related to the reading material, it will be difficult for them to understand the content of the text, let alone the accuracy. Second, although readers have the schema about the article, but the clues provided by the author is not enough to activate the reader's schema.

After observation, the author found that the teachers only talked about the culture background before presenting the reading materials, and the students still did not have a thorough grasping of the reading materials, and their reading comprehension scores did not increase significantly. On the contrary, if teachers use PPT and other combination of pictures and texts to introduce cultural background knowledge and deeply stimulate students' existing schema, students will have a deeper understanding of the reading materials, and their scores are significantly higher than those of the former schema stimulation.

Third, readers think they understand the text. But this is not the author's intention. Through observation, the author found that although the students had mastered the cultural background knowledge and understood the meaning of all the words in the article, their scores were still very low. This is mainly because although students grasp the general idea of the article, they ignore the author's emotional attitude. This also reflects that students have a strong subjective consciousness when doing the questions, but ignore the meaning and emotion of the questions.

3.2 The Cultural Background Knowledge on Students' Reading Skills

When observing the teacher's teaching, the author observed that the teacher presented the cultural background knowledge before the reading material, and the students would read the reading comprehension material more easily and score higher, and vice versa. Teachers presenting cultural background knowledge in the form of PPT will be better than directly narrating the form of cultural background knowledge. The amount of extracurricular reading of students will also have an impact on reading comprehension, especially the reading of books from different countries. The more extracurricular reading students do, the better their reading comprehension ability will be and the higher their scoring rate will be. All in all, If the content of an article is familiar, students can understand it easily. On the contrary, the Content is unfamiliar, students have some troubles to understand.

4. Conclusion

Hu Wenzhong points out that language is a form of culture^[1]. In a word, language teaching and culture teaching are closely linked. Language is the carrier of culture, and culture is the factor that promotes the formation of some language phenomena. The continuous development of culture promotes the continuous renewal of language. Culture can be divided into political culture, social culture, ideological culture and other types, and the shadow of different types of culture can be seen in a specific language. Without culture, language becomes a castle in the air.

This paper studies the influence of cultural background knowledge on English reading through cultural tests and questionnaires. Research shows that cultural background knowledge has an important influence on English reading. The lack of background knowledge directly leads to reading disorders. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the teaching of cultural background knowledge and cultivate students' intercultural communication ability. Help students understand and master English culture knowledge. This will help students to understand and grasp the language itself, thus improving students' reading ability.

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