An Investigation on English Reading Strategies of Chinese College Students

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ABSTRACT: *English reading is not only an effective way for EFL to develop their language sense, accumulate language knowledge and experience, but also it helps develop learners' English skills and learning interest. However, in China, a lot of college students still pay too much attention to the translation of new words and phrases and explanation of grammatical knowledge in College English reading. Many teachers neglect the development of reading strategies, what's more, students' monitoring and accommodation techniques are an acute shortage, which resulted in their partial and separate views and low efficiency in English reading.Therefore, it is of vital importance to study College English reading strategies. Through the investigation of the application of reading strategies among sample college students in Jiangxi province of China, the researcher of this paper employed the methods of quantitative analysis and literature review as a certain amount of qualitative analysis to process the data collected by the investigation, thus, the paper provides some possible suggestions on the teaching of College English reading, so as to help promote the teaching and learning of College English reading in China.*
Keywords: *Reading strategies; Investigation; College English*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Reading is an important means for people to get information and understand the outside world. According to statistics, 85% international theses are published or read out in public in English. In foreign internet, 90% resources are English information (Hu Chundong, etal.1998, 2-3; Zhang Zhengdong, 2001, 4). "Chinese College English Curriculum Teaching Syllabus" puts forward high demands for college students' English level and language ability. Especially for reading, "it requires college students to comprehend English articles of common themes at the reading speed of 70 words per minute; in fast reading of long and not so difficult materials, the learners should reach the reading speed of 100 words per minute; learners should be able to skim and scan, meanwhile, they should be able to read professional English textbooks and journals with the aid of dictionaries, while grasping the gist, understanding main facts and details, comprehend common applicable writing materials in life and work, and grasp effective reading methods ."

However, in China, many teachers still focus on the translation of meaning and explanation of difficult grammatical points in College English teaching of reading . The teacher often neglects the development of reading methods and strategies. So students lack enough monitoring and accommodation techniques which resulted in the phenomenon that they perceive matters partially and separately in English reading. (Cao Zhongxue, 2005)

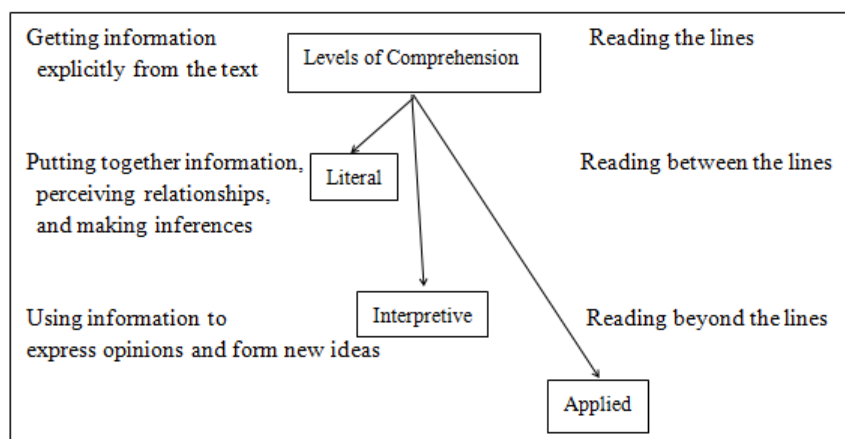Therefore, the study of College English reading strategies has some practical meanings.

The problems posed in this paper are as follows:

1) What is the situation of College students' English learning motivation, attitude and reading conception?

2) What is The application situation of College English reading strategies.

3) Are there any differences between male and female students in using reading strategies?

II.   THEORY BACKGROUND

2.1 Definition of Reading

What is reading? There are different concepts about reading. Readers not only use the knowledge of linguistics, lexicology and semantics to interpret words, but use their background knowledge or schematic knowledge to comprehend the article. Vacca and Vacca (1996) offer the following pictorial definition of reading:

Getting information explicitly from the text | Levels of Comprehension | Reading the lines

Putting together information, perceiving relationships, and making inferences | Literal | Reading between the lines

Using information to express opinions and form new ideas | Interpretive | Reading beyond the lines

Applied

Reading is an individual psycholinguistic process. Goodman's (1967) "reading is the riddle of psycholinguistic, including the interactive process between thought and language" is the most incisive and proper expression about the nature of foreign language reading process. There are three layers of meaning. Firstly, reading is a While reading, reader as individuality starts various physical organs, knowledge structure and skills and utilizes the stimulation formed by all kinds of redundant language phenomenon in the article to seize selectively the most meaningful language symbol, carrying out a series of thinking activities, namely, sampling, predicting, testing and final confirming. Secondly, reading is a language process. In a series of psychological and thinking activities of reading, reader needs to use language as a toll and a bridge. If the reader knows less about the language of the reading material, the reading process can not be smooth; even the reader's mind is very sensitive. For this, Goodman(1967) explained that reader should use three kinds of language knowledge simultaneously in reading process ----- grapho-phonic information, syntactic information and semantic information, which is the three components of language: speech sounds, grammar and vocabulary. Thirdly, the main part of reading is the reader itself. In the process of reading, reader itself plays a vital role. Reader mobilizes all thought and adopts the way of combing bottom-up approach with top-down approach to directly link personal cultural background knowledge with the symbol of the reading article, thus, the information coded by words can be reinterpreted. Therefore, reading is a psychological process and language learning and using process.

2.2 Definition of Reading Strategies
From the above point of view, reading is a rather active process. It includes a process of psycholinguistic perspective in which the reader actively incorporates his or her knowledge with the textual information, recognizing, guessing, inference and evaluating. In this active process, strategies are involved to affect the very process of understanding.
Reading strategies can be defined as plans for solving problems encountered in reading. Reading strategies can be taught to students, and when taught, strategies help improve students performance on tests of comprehension. (Zhu Suhua, 2005)
Nuttal (1996) stated that the term strategy refers to the mental operations involved when readers purposefully approach a text to make sense of what they read. These may be either conscious techniques controlled by the reader or unconscious process applied automatically.
In general terms, reading involves the reader, the text, and the interaction between reader and text. It is the interaction between purpose and manner of reading, the interaction through reading strategies and the interaction through schema (Jo Ann Aebersold & Mary Lee Field, 1997). What constitutes actual reading is the interaction between the text and reader and is also the mental activities that readers employ in order to construct meaning from a text. These activities are generally referred to as reading strategies, sometimes called reading skills (Jo Ann Aebersold & Mary Lee Field, 1997).With the development of research, the content of reading strategies is enriched. It has been developed to stimulate the background knowledge and schemata cognitive strategies and to textual strategies helping comprehend the article completely.

2.3 Classification of Reading Strategies
O'Malley and Chamot (2001) divide learning strategies into three main subcategories according the cognitive theory of processing information: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring the learning task and evaluating how well one has learned. Cognitive strategies deal with more direct manipulation of the learning material itself which include interacting with the material to be learned, manipulating the material mentally or physically, or applying a specific technique to a learning task, such as elaborating, grouping,

inferring and summarization, etc. social/affective strategies contain interacting with another person to assist learning or using affective control to assist a learning task, such as questioning, cooperating and self-talk. Accordingly, college students' learning strategies could be divided into four subcategories: cognitive strategies, monitoring strategies, communicative strategies and material strategies. Cognitive strategies are the steps and ways adopted by students to finish concrete learning task. Monitoring strategies refer to the plan, implementation, rethinking, evaluation and readjusting of learning. Communicative strategies are strategies used by students to get more communicative opportunities, maintain communication and promote communicative effect. Material strategies mean that students make use of various medium rationally and effectively to study.

2.4 Recent correlation studies at home and abroad
From around the 1980s, researchers in second language fields gradually realized the important value of reading strategies and made some relevant experimental studies, one of which was a study of the strategies students used in reading process and the relations between successful or unsuccessful reading and the used strategies (Block1986, Jimeneze, etal, 1995). Results showed that learners with different reading standard in second language used different strategies and that readers with high reading level used more kinds of strategies, what's more, used them more reasonably and effectively (Block, 1992, Jimeneze, etal, 1995). Successful readers have already developed a series of strategies, from which they can choose the best one and use it flexibly in terms of different occasions in order to settle a certain problem (Willams & Burda, 1997; 146).

To counter the researching results of the variation of the strategies which good or poor L2 readers used, researchers have made some intervention studies of strategy training in L2reading fields in recent years. The ideal on which reading strategy training is based is that successful reading would depend on using strategies reasonably and properly. Learners, especially for those who are poor at reading, may improve their reading with some effective strategies, which were used by successful readers through successful training (Carrel, Pharis & Liberto, 1998). They can achieve self-learning by self-controlling reading process consciously. The achievements in scientific research abroad revealed that reading strategy teaching has its feasibility and the strategy training can improve students' reading achievements in examination and the memory of knowledge, etc. (Pearson & Fielding, 1991).

In the middle of 1990s, researchers began to put forward merging strategy training and foreign language teaching into a single whole, and make it become an important component of foreign language course (Cohen, 1998).

Auerbach and Paxton (1997) brought strategy study into college ESL reading classroom, and discovered this kind of combining style teaching had a positive effect on students' English reading strategies, concepts and consciousness and sensation altogether.

Reading strategy studies have already started at home. Wen Qiufang (2004) conducted *An Empirical Study on the English Learning Strategies of Chinese Learners;* Mengyue (2004) made *A Research on the Reading Strategies,* for college students, Liu Jihong (2005) did *A Survey of Non-English Majors' Reading Strategy Use.* Some of the typical researches are about the comparison the differences of the reading strategies good or poor learners used, and the descriptive research which was related to reading achievements. While for college students' reading strategies, the relevant literature is far from enough. This paper tends to compare some researches on reading strategy.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Subjects
The subjects of this study are 120, including 74 female students and 40 male students, ordinary freshmen of Nanchang Normal University in China. They are asked to choose the possible or appropriate answers. The 40 multiple-choice items are designed for information about reader's strategies. After the questionnaires were collected, each of them was examined for the relation between reading strategies and reading scores. And 120 questionnaires and reading tests were collected 114.

3.2 Instruments
The 40 multiple-choice items are designed for information about reader's strategies. The students are asked to read each of the statements carefully and to make a choice that they thought most possible or appropriate for them. Each item has 5 scores, which indicated the frequency of the strategy use for the subjects to assess their strategy use. Scores are assigned to each answer with "1"indicating "never", "2"indicating "seldom", "3" indicating "sometimes", "4"indicating "often" and "5" indicating "always". The questionnaire is written in Chinese to avoid possible misunderstanding. The raw data was processed by means of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) to obtain the mean and standard deviation of each item.

3.3 Analyses on the students' factors in English reading

Shu Dingfang, Zhuang Zhixiang(1996) conducted an investigation on the motivation of Chinese learners' foreign language learning, which reveals that the proportion of tool motivation is higher. There are 59.65% students regarding learning English reading as the tool for finding a good job in the future, 17.54% for the entrance exams for senior school, 12.28% for personal interests, and only 10.53% for further studies abroad.

On learners' attitude, the result of the investigation shows that 56.14% students think their English reading level is general, 26.31% is comparably poor, 7.02% is poor, and only 10.52% is comparably high. Therefore, it is necessary to improve students' English reading level.

Wen Qiufang (1996) pointed out that "English learning strategies contain two subsystems---concept and method. Concept refers to students' cognition of 'how to learn English well', and concept influences learners' choices and application of learning strategies." The investigation discovers that most of the students (91.22%) concern reading is as important as listening, speaking and writing. 6.14% view reading is not as important as listening, speaking and writing. 2.63% thinks reading is more important than listening, speaking and writing. And most of the students have clear thought of purpose of reading, for 61.40% students read for understanding the content and getting information, however, still some students have not clear ideas, for instance, 25.43% students thinks the purpose of English reading is to master new words and phrases, 7.89% to practice pronunciation. For how to improve English reading level effectively, there are 77.19%students aim to master reading skills and methods, 13.15% to remember large quantity of vocabularies, 7.01% to do a lot of reading exercises, and 2.63% to read many articles interested them. And for the cultural background knowledge, 4.38% students' opinion is that it is not important, 39.47% is important, 50% is very important, and 6.14% have no idea.Reading purpose determines reading pattern. If one wants to get information, silent reading is the best pattern. There are only 37.72% students adopting silent reading and 62.28% have bad reading habits (14.91% read with fingers, 11.40%read loudly, and 35.96% always read back). The cause of this phenomenon is that in our country reading aloud and analyzing sentences' patterns and grammar are the main teaching method of English teaching, which also happens in College English reading.

3.4 The application situation of College English reading strategies

Statistics of the scores of all items can see the application situation of College English reading strategies. See table-3-1. According to the method put forward by Oxford(quote from Liu Yichun, 2002), each mean value represents the frequency of the strategy used by students. The specific relationship is as follows:
Mean value from1.0 to1.4 represents "never", from1.5 to2.4 represents "seldom", from 2.5 to 3.4 represents "sometimes", from 3.5 to4.4 represents "often", and from 4.5 to5.0 represents "always".

Table3-1: the score of each item in the investigation

Item	Mean value	Standard deviation	Item	Mean value	Standard deviation	Item	Mean value	Standard deviation	Item	Mean value	Standard deviation
1	3.3421	1.2762	11	2.6491	1.1546	21	2.9561	1.2522	31	3.8267	1.1474
2	3.5614	1.1550	12	3.1491	1.1489	22	3.3772	1.2095	32	3.76	1.1412
3	3.2631	1.3446	13	3.6667	1.2259	23	2.9733	1.5914	33	3.9737	1.2528
4	3.6842	1.1341	14	3.7632	1.1494	24	2.7067	1.1048	34	3.3947	1.2184
5	3.5350	1.1561	15	2.8860	1.2337	25	3.6667	1.330	35	3.2982	1.1767
6	2.6404	1.0933	16	3.0439	1.2311	26	3.76	1.2092	36	3.2982	1.1989
7	2.0789	1.0272	17	3.7193	1.3410	27	3.3333	1.0499	37	4.0263	1.1352
8	3.1404	1.1307	18	2.9035	1.2702	28	3.4533	1.0744	38	2.2982	1.3373
9	3.8509	1.0194	19	3.1930	1.1461	29	3.24	1.1758	39	2.5789	1.3630
10	2.1140	1.2549	20	2.7544	1.1590	30	3.5333	1.1353	40	3.1667	1.4260

The application situation of College English reading strategies is not positive, for the mean value is 2.9930, which represents "sometimes". Among the 40 strategies, there are 25 strategies not used often or never used or seldom used: strategy 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 29, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, in which strategies7, 23, are negative strategies and scored in opposing direction. Therefore, the low mean value (2.0789, 2.9733) indicates that students often used these negative strategies. The strategies' mean value between 3.5 and 4.4 are 2, 4,5,9,13,14, 17, 25, 26, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34. The lowest mean average is strategy10, which means the applied situation of it is negative.Form the total mean value, metacognitive strategy's score is the highest. Next are cognitive strategy and resource strategy. The lowest is emotional strategy. This means the students often used metacognitive strategy and Cognitive strategy in reading. See as follow:

Table3-2 means value of the four strategies

strategy	Mean value	Standard deviation
Cognitive strategy	3.2274	1.3273
Metacognitive strategy	3.3899	1.2573
Emotional strategy	2.6079	1.2383
Resource strategy	3.1057	1.444

3.5 The differences of male and female students in using reading strategies

In order to investigate the gender differences in using reading strategies, the author regards the gender as independent variable and the 40 strategies and the four kinds of strategies as dependent variable. And analyze the dependent variable using independent-sample T test $(0.01<p<0.05)$. See table3-3 and 3-4:

Table3-3: the applied situation of male students and female students of the four categories:

strategy	Male students (39)		Female students (43)		
	Mean value	Standard deviation	Mean value	Standard deviation	T
Cognitive strategy	3.2598	1.3324	3.2622	1.3097	0.9716
Metacognitive strategy	3.3522	1.2795	3.4140	1.2426	0.2774
Emotional strategy	2.6923	1.3427	2.5667	1.1743	0.4687
Resource strategy	3.0897	1.4517	3.12	1.4372	0.8812

Table3-4: the applied situation of male and female students of each item

Item	Male students (39)		Female students (43)		
	Mean value	Standard deviation	Mean value	Standard deviation	T
1	3.4359	1.3549	3.2933	1.2304	0.5755
2	3.4615	1.257	3.6133	.6389	0.5099
3	3.0769	1.3279	3.36	1.3430	0.2904
4	3.6923	1.1581	3.68	1.1214	0.9566
5	3.5128	1.1064	3.5467	1.1809	0.8834
6	2.6667	1.2676	2.6267	.9902	0.8546
7	3.8205	1.1064	3.9733	.9794	0.4555
8	3.1282	1.2021	3.1467	1.0917	0.9348
9	3.8974	1.1939	3.8267	.9147	0.7279
10	1.9487	1.1082	2.2	1.3166	0.3147
11	2.5385	1.1950	2.7067	1.1287	0.4650
12	3.2308	1.2292	3.1067	1.1024	0.5882
13	3.5385	1.1288	3.7333	1.2684	0.4252
14	4.0513	1.0848	3.6133	1.1535	0.0543
15	3.0	1.1983	2.8267	1.2477	0.4811
16	3.1538	1.2098	2.9867	1.2382	0.4959
17	3.3846	1.4432	3.8933	1.2498	0.0554
18	3.15	1.3299	2.8667	1.2364	0.6709
19	2.9744	1.1444	3.2133	1.1465	0.7948
20	3.1538	1.2323	2.8267	1.1120	0.3602
21	2.6154	1.1872	2.9467	1.2847	0.9118
22	2.9744	1.2718	3.4933	1.1590	0.1578
23	3.2307	1.3860	3.0267	1.5914	0.5028
24	2.7179	1.1536	2.7067	1.1048	0.9598
25	3.5385	1.4995	3.6667	1.3230	0.6443
26	3.5385	1.5165	3.76	1.2092	0.4021
27	3.1026	1.2762	3.3333	1.0499	0.2844
28	3.3846	1.0282	3.4243	1.0745	0.7452
29	3.2820	1.2184	3.24	1.1758	0.8596
30	3.4102	1.0794	3.5019	1.1353	0.5810
31	3.7692	1.2499	3.8267	1.1474	0.8079
32	3.7949	.9917	3.76	1.1412	0.8730
33	4.0513	1.2184	3.9333	1.2684	0.6370
34	3.4359	1.0812	3.3733	1.2835	0.7970
35	3.3846	1.2694	3.2533	1.1325	0.5760
36	3.3590	1.2028	3.2667	1.2037	0.6996
37	4.0	1.1698	4.04	1.1248	0.8599
38	2.3590	1.4046	2.2667	1.3098	0.7294
39	2.7179	1.4318	2.5067	1.3303	0.4368
40	3.1026	1.3726	3.2	1.4606	0.7321

From table3-3 it is clear that the divergence of using the four kinds of strategies and each strategies is not notable, that is, the gender does not influence the applied situation of English reading strategies obviously.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

4.1 Changing teaching concept

Reading should be taken to obtain new knowledge, improve cognitive level and strengthen the ability to analyze and solve problems. If the teacher explain and analyze separate vocabulary or structure too much, students

would regard reading as decoding of printed symbols and would take vocabulary structure for the only premise of understanding. With the implementation of "College English Teaching Reform", the role of college teachers has shifted from transmitter of the knowledge to the organizer, guider, promoter and cooperator of teaching process. Students are the body of learning and the host of study. They structure knowledge and monitor learning process by themselves to make personality, potential, and creativity. Students obtain reading strategies from teachers' teaching strategies and class teaching is the main source of the formulation of reading strategies, therefore, teacher should interact with students positively and apply teaching strategies and methods of reading properly in teaching process to train students' reading ability, enlarge their cultural horizon and develop their comprehensive ability to applied language.

4.2 Choosing the reading materials

Choosing of reading material plays an important role in developing and maintaining students' interests of reading. Presently, there are countless English reading material oriented to college students in the market and internet. Extracurricular reading material or supplementary material mainly comes from English original works, teaching materials for the students, professional magazines and newspapers or internet resources. While choosing reading materials, teacher should obey the principles as follows:

(1) Connection principle

Choosing reading material should consider the connection between the material and texts, sentences, grammar and vocabulary teaching as well as students' level of reading, writing, listening and speaking. The material selected should be related to the text and offer background knowledge for the content of teaching material.

(2) Thematic principle

Krashen's "narrow reading" (1981) reveals that readers can relatively understand easily the same topic with accumulation of background knowledge in reading process. And it makes readers master relative vocabulary conveniently and eases the pressure of lacking of vocabulary when reading real material. Therefore, teachers should choose some article with similar topic so that students can familiar with the style of the topic and content schema.

(3) Prescriptive principle

Prescription means that the material should be close to reality, society and students' life and also reflect latest achievements and development in every field as well as the problem concerned by every person. Teachers should choose reading material from latest English newspapers and magazines to stimulate students' interests of reading .

(4) Interesting principle

Interests refer to providing reading material which is suitable to students and familiar to or concerned by students, for instance, Jokes and humorous stories or detective stories to make students enjoy the interests of reading. Moreover, different kinds of materials should be used alternatively to avoid unity of style and theme to meet students' requirement in mentality and bring learning satisfaction of reading.

4.3 Extracurricular reading

Extracurricular reading is the supplementation and extension of reading within class and it is an important component of teaching of reading. Extracurricular reading should go with students' capabilities. Students study by themselves with appropriate guidance by the teacher, who help students formulate reading plan on the level of students' needs, recommend proper reading material and monitor and assess reading process moderately. And teachers can examine vocabulary weekly or hold reading competition irregularly to make students realize their own progress in reading process, then, stimulate students' reading motivation as well as urge students to reflect their own shortcomings to adjust reading strategies in time.

4.4 Designs of reading activities

Teachers should design various activities in reading, such as, investigation, discussion, debating, cooperation, reporting and so on, while guiding students to get, process and use information, communicate with others in English and then cultivate their ability to solve discreet problems.

Teaching example:

Aim: make students get information from advertisement, learn advertisement language and try to design and perform advertisement

Suitable level: freshmen

Teaching procedure:

(1) Teacher collects all kinds of English advertisement of food or cultural and sports goods.

(2) Let students tell which advertisement is the most impressive and why.

(3) Teacher displays some English advertisement and guide students to analyze the characteristics of words and sentences of advertisement language.

(4) Teacher provides some objects and help students design advertisements in group.

(5) Each group shows their advertisement.

This activity can enlighten students' thoughts, cultivate students' ability of observation, imagination, cooperation and creation.

V. CONCLUSION

The teaching of English reading is a strong practice. It requires not only the support of pedagogy and teachers' explosion, but also the examination of plentiful reading practices. This survey provides comparatively informative data of on the evaluation of teaching of reading in College English-----for the author; it is a good start on the teaching research, however, this paper has many limitations because of short time, no enough experience, limitation of the questionnaire and methods used in the research are not mature. The author expects to improve it in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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