Problems of English Extra-Curriculum Reading in Primary School and Solutions

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ABSTRACT: Extra-curriculum reading is an indispensable part of English course in primary school English learning; however, it hasn’t got its deserved attention due to lack of realization of its significance, inappropriate guidance, and ignorance of schools and family. It would be useful to probe into the causes and offer some strategies so as to draw educators’ attention to extra-curriculum reading.

KEYWORDS: English Extra-curriculum Reading; Primary School; Problems; Solutions

1 INTRODUCTION

As an important part of extra-curriculum knowledge, reading exerts a key function in promoting English learning, for reading can not only supplement English knowledge and stimulating students learning English actively, but also help teachers improve effectiveness of English class. As a pathway of promoting capability of comprehending English language, cultivating a sense of cross-culture, enhancing interest for English learning, extra-curriculum should deserve attentions from schools and family (Wang, 2012). However, it has been always neglected for a long time and there are problems in fostering students’ extra-curriculum reading. In the paper, the author tries to explore the problems and solutions, with the hope of offering some insights in addressing this issue.

2 NECESSITIES OF EXTRA-CURRICULUM READING

2.1 Promoting capability of comprehending English language

Extra-curriculum reading will penetrate through the whole process of English learning, for it is closely related to any part of learning a language. Therefore, reading more from the very beginning of English learning will strengthen the proficiency of English (Liu, 2008). Now that maximizing English input is the pre-condition of promoting English (Bao, 2004), the reading materials, as long as in pace with students’ language level and cognitive development, interest, will significantly promote English learning and offer the basic springboard for language output, for reading can not only enlarge one’s vocabulary, but also help consolidate the grammar items.

2.2 Cultivating a sense of cross-culture

One of the problems of language learning is to accept the foreign language context, while extra-curriculum reading will help students gain some appreciation of the culture of the target language (Wang, 2014). Since English learning can’t be separated from western cultures, there is no reason to reduce reading from language learning. At the same time, inputs of cultural phenomena in class alone can not meet the requirement of penetrating a foreign culture, extra-curriculum reading will function efficiently not only as a way of consolidating but also a way of introducing new information to a learner. So some stories and chants, if any, will attract primary students to be curious about how, why, what the children in other countries learn and play.

2.3 Enhancing interest of English learning

Generally, whether students learn seriously is related to his/her curiosity of this topic; therefore, offering more interesting reading materials according to learners interests is sure to promote English learning. Since many extra-curriculum reading materials are about students’ life puzzles and some new scientific information or new ideas, they will successfully attract students to read. Without doubt, it is a good way to induce students to read though providing
suitable materials. Besides, since interest is a key to English learning, then it is safe to conclude that extra-curriculum reading could widen students’ horizon, practice reading skills, and improve English proficiency as well.

3 PROBLEMS OF EXTRA-CURRICULUM READING

3.1 Lack of emphasis

Outwardly, English course itself currently could not gain its sufficient attention in primary schools; even some schools will distribute the class hours of English to Chinese or Math teachers, let alone to say English extra-curriculum reading. What’s more, people are still stuck with the dispute of whether it is reasonable to open English course at primary school, so it is not strange to see lack of extra-curriculum reading. Inwardly, some teachers think that students cannot read because they just start to learn English, and they do not have enough vocabulary and resources of grammar rules. If teachers hold this belief, there won’t be any reading assignment, or guidance of reading skills, which will cause problems in students’ language sense, reading skills.

3.2 Lack of reading environment

Schools, family, communities now fail to provide a good reading culture and conditions for extra-curriculum English reading in China. What’s more, libraries in school do not offer resources for extra-curriculum reading. At home, parents just care whether students finish their assignments from teachers, no matter whether it is reading or writing, then students will spend time going for training schools and playing, sparing no time for reading. In this way, students are always on the go, without guidance of the importance of reading all the day, plus parents’ ignorance, which would cause lack of reading after school.

3.3 Teachers’ ignorance in and after class

Currently, most English teachers in primary school pay too much attention to vocabulary and sentence patterns instruction, for primary school English reading materials are short and specially adapted such as chants, dialogues or short paragraphs. Teachers think that the purpose of these materials is to help students master some sentence patterns and words, neglecting giving students opportunities to read a complete discourse. The causes above hinder the cultivation of reading competence and the advocated comprehension of discourse by New Curriculum Standards for Primary school English. Besides, when teaching reading texts, teachers always translate words, sentences, without a sense of cultivating students’ reading skills, let alone to say developing the appreciation of foreign cultures and self-development. Teachers always teach to the textbook and limit reading to tedious textbooks, which bores students.

3.4 Lack of reading resources

Ignorance of reading in primary school also affects the provision of reading materials; and some materials are not scientific, systematical, and suitable for children. The materials students can find are always designed for exams and tests. Students could not enjoy the joy of reading and the interesting world presented in books. What’s more, some original edition books are out of reach for common students, and it deprives students’ of opportunities of reading the culture-bound books. As to parents, they mostly do not know English and even if some of them have a basic concept of English, they just care about whether kids get better grades in class and how many mistakes they have made, with no sense of sparing time with children for reading. And last, some families can not afford to buy the expensive books for children.

4 STRATEGIES OF PROMOTING EXTRA-CURRICULUM READING

4.1 Constructing an environment of English reading

Absorbed in an atmosphere is one important pre-condition to encourage primary school students to read actively (Shen, 2013). Since children are in the process of developing a strong will in their life, they are easily affected by the environment; therefore, it is decisive to set up an active reading environment for them, so that they would be impacted and encouraged to read. At school, teachers are supposed to set some reading communities for children, so that they can guide them to sit down and read, helping children have a sense of extra-curriculum reading. At the same time, schools are supposed to introduce more suitable materials according to students’ cognitive development, and then encourage parents to purchase books, satisfying children’s curiosity.

Teachers are responsible for constructing an ideal environment for reading, offering students a pleasant space, more books to choose from. They can buy some English newspapers, buy some original version books, categorize the books according to English level and themes. Besides, putting up some pictures and signs, showing students English songs, introducing culture projects, etc. schools had better organize more English activities, such as contests for
story telling, English recitation, English knowledge, English songs, so as to help students feel and use English all the way.

Parents can try to emphasize extra-curriculum reading to children with encouragement. They can take them to libraries and keep contact with teachers so to bridge the gap of reading in and out of class.

4.2 Valuing the importance of extra-curriculum reading

New Curriculum Standards advocates that traditional teaching mode should be improved, focusing on the main subject role of students and enhancing primary school students’ abilities of self-exploration and learning. Under its guidance, teachers are supposed to jump out of limits, emphasizing extra-curriculum reading and providing students with interesting books to read after class. Teachers can also organize students to do some extra-curriculum readings so to promote efficiency of English learning. Reading activities also call for improvement according to New Curriculum Standards. Teachers have the responsibility of explaining and emphasizing the significance of extra-curriculum reading and give them some guidance, encouraging them to hold a positive belief toward reading after class.

Besides, students themselves also should realize the importance of extra-curriculum reading. Mostly, at the very beginning of English learning, most students fail to recognize the importance of extra-curriculum reading, no wonder they have no awareness of reading actively after class. In the following class, children should be taught to raise the sense of extra-curriculum reading and its significance in the process of English learning under the guidance of teachers.

4.3 Choosing suitable reading materials

Due to the limits of children themselves such as young age, developing cognition, understanding and small ranges of vocabulary, reading materials should meet the actual level of students; teachers can choose those which are a little higher above students’ cognition while closely related to their daily life, and these materials will not only attract students but also widen their horizons. Reading materials are the source of English learning, but not all materials suit all students, so we need to consider its effectiveness to English learning, and here are some suggestions for choosing right materials:

First of all, materials should agree with the learning goals of each module and can extend theme of the part. Topics of the extra-curriculum reading materials are supposed to be related to the textbook, and it would be ideal if the vocabulary, grammar, and sentence patterns of textbook can be covered in that reading material. Thus, this type of supplemented reading can not only help consolidate what students have learned in the textbook but also promote students curiosity. Generally, primary students have a strong desire to know more about mysteries, teachers can recommend some materials according to students’ interests. In this way, teachers could consolidate language points learned in class by using the additional reading resources, which will definitely help students learn better.

Second, materials should meet students’ psychological development and intelligence. When children start to learn English, they are limited in coping with learning problems because of their cognition and the amount of vocabulary. Even though they can think abstractly, they still employ the images and reference in thinking. So, some picture books with lively images, short chants, and passages will satisfy students’ curiosity of reading effectively.

Third, materials should diverse in terms of types. Colorful materials, such as fairy tales, morals, scientific books, poems or any reading versions related to children’s real life could meet the demands of different children, so as to prepare them to learn life experience through reading.

Last, teachers need to guide students to choose the right reading materials. Students will be interested in reading only when the books attract them, and it can promote them to read actively, which will help broaden students’ horizon and their knowledge.

4.4 Cultivating the habit of extra-curriculum reading

Reading after class could help students learn more and gain a better understanding of western culture. But some students just read, without the sense of taking notes, so they will soon forget what they have read. Teachers should encourage them to jog down some beautiful sentences and proverbs, or any bit of information they like, which will help them build a large vocabulary and expressions. This habit can help students learn more effectively and easily in the process of reading. Besides, teachers can organize students to make posters if they are not active in reading; therefore, students are required to write down stories and some interesting knowledge onto the blackboard, and members of that group could have different assignments so that other students can share.

4.5 Cultivating reading skills

Teachers’ guidance is one key section in the process of improve students’ reading competence, because students need a comparatively long time to adjust to English extra-curriculum reading, which is a new
source of language input. As a result, teachers have to take up the responsibility of helping students shape a good habit of reading according to features of the materials, and this kind of guidance can be embodied in two aspects:

On the one hand, teachers need to cultivate reading skills. When students are asked to finish an extra-curriculum reading, we do not mean that they have to read word by word and translate; however, they should be encouraged to preview the article first to get the gist, and find out some clues of the passage, and then they can read again to find the interesting part. If we teach students some reading skills and strategies, they will read easily. There comes another question, which is, primary students like reading aloud, while the best way of extra-curriculum reading is still silent reading. Additionally, New Curriculum Standards stipulates that students should learn to read in sense group, and teacher need to coach. Now that students can get the main idea of the passage, it is also necessary to teach them skills like skimming and scanning.

On the other hand, teachers need to emphasize the correctness of bad reading habits, for example, through some explanations and demonstrations of reading skills, showing students the process of reading. Only through this kind of modeling of reading skills, will teachers be sure whether students have mastered the reading skills. And also, teachers need to contact more with parents and guide them to buy some suitable reading materials so that children can read in an atmosphere of reading.

4.6 Launching more reading activities

Reading can be carried out in different ways to encourage students’ participation and enjoy the happiness of appreciating a passage. Teachers can organize various reading activities to help display students reading outcomes, e.g. introducing their story in free talk time every day, or asking students to write some new words and interesting sentences in the English reading corner. As to the performance in reading activities, teachers and students can sit and discuss about the awards such as “the Best Reader of the Week”, “Reading King of the Class”, encouraging participation. Students can be given a sheet of reading checklists, and they have to fill some items such as “the main characters”, “the problems”, “the solutions”, “features of the character” and so on just to model students how to grasp the main point of reading a book. At the ending of the paper, teachers also should encourage students to write their feelings, the problems in reading, and reading skills used. Guidance of reading plays a key modeling role in cultivating students’ habit of English learning; therefore, teachers are also recommended to combine listening, speaking, reading and writing to cultivate students comprehensive ability, not just giving students the impression that the four skills could be separated.

As to forms of reading activities, teachers need to give students chances of reading alone, but at the same time, they need to discuss and share with each other the joys of reading and, through pair work or group work, they will learn subconsciously from each other.

5 CONCLUSION

English should occupy a relatively important role in the syllabus of primary school, not only for its grammatical points as a foreign language, but also as a way to communicate. Because of the limited class hour, and language input, extra-curriculum reading takes up a great role in providing language cultures and interest in enhancing English learning. It deserves appreciation from family, school or even social communities. All of the units involved with language learning should take up the responsibility of encouraging students to form a healthy sense of reading, a good habit of reading.

REFERENCES