Research on the Application of Post-Method Approach to English Reading

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Abstract. As is known, English reading not only occupies all kinds of tests, but it is also an essential way for students to acquire knowledge, to accumulate vocabulary, to familiarize syntactical structure, to obtain new information and to develop students’ critical thinking ability. Therefore, English reading teaching has been gaining increasing attention in foreign language teaching. With the reference of Kumaravadivelu’s post-method theory, this paper adapts post-method approach to college English reading teaching creatively, and establishes a post-method reading framework, aiming to improve teaching efficiency, stimulate students’ reading motivation and cultivate their critical thinking skills.

Introduction

Definition of post-method approach. The notion “post-method condition” was first put forward by Kumaravadivelu. According to Kumaravadivelu (1994) [1], the post-method approach is an attempt at finding an alternative to method rather than finding an alternative method. That means the post-method approach is a concept rather than a concrete teaching method. It actually represents a kind of idea, which offers us a macro guiding principle and ideology instead of concrete models. Kumaravadivelu tries to direct the researchers’ attention from knowledge-based theories of practice (based on the traditional notion of method) to classroom-oriented theories of practice (based on the post-method condition).

Kumaravadivelu’s three parameters of the post-method approach. To set up the paradigm of the post-method approach, Kumaravadivelu (2001) [2] presented a three-dimensional system consisting of the pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility.

The parameter of particularity. This parameter indicates that the sort of techniques teachers use depends on where, when and to whom they are teaching. In other words, it is the situation that determines the “how” of teaching, and the socio-cultural and political issues affect the kind of teaching, or the content of the teaching. Thus, following this parameter, teachers should have a high understanding of a situation. Such a notion is stated by Kumaravadivelu (2003a) [3] as: “any language pedagogy, to be relevant must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in particular socio-cultural milieu.” What the parameter of particularity conveys is that there cannot be one set of pedagogic aims and objectives realizable through one set of pedagogic principles and procedures.

The parameter of practicality. By practicality he means that a method should be applicable in a real situation; otherwise, the practice-theory relationship can’t be approached. Following the parameter of practicality, teachers can be encouraged and enabled to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize. In fact, as Kumaravadivelu (2003a) [3] suggests, teachers who try to derive a theory from their practice can understand and identify the existing problems; and therefore, they can opt for the best way to teach. In other words, the pedagogy of practicality aims for a teacher-generated theory of practice. In addition, teachers with such a perspective are more enlightened and thus more aware of
their own expertise and have an unexplainable sense of what makes good teaching, which is called a sense of plausibility (Prabhu, 1990). [4]

The parameter of possibility. It means that the method should be appropriate socially, culturally, and politically. Kumaravadivelu (2003a) [3] also points out that in some situations because of mismatch in the method and the sociopolitical issues, the students’ resistance has reframed and reinterpreted the textbooks and the way teaching materials are applied in the classroom. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006) [5], “the experiences participants bring to the pedagogic setting are shaped, not just by what they experience in the classroom, but also by a broader social, economic, and political environment in which they grow up. These experiences have the potential to alter classroom aims and activities in ways unintended and unexpected by policy planners and curriculum designers or textbook producers.”

Post-Method Reading Framework

This article applies the post-method macro strategies mentioned above to college English reading teaching creatively, and proposes some specific English reading strategies from the micro level, and tries to establish a new mode of English reading teaching to improve teaching efficiency, stimulate students’ reading motivation and cultivate their critical thinking skills. The new teaching mode is constructed from the following five aspects.

Table 1. Five aspects of the Post- method reading framework.

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Maximizing learning opportunities and minimizing perceptual mismatches. According to the theory of kumaravadivelu, maximizing learning opportunities includes three meanings: 1) Teaching is a process of creating and using learning opportunities. Teacher is someone who not only can create opportunities, but also can use the learning opportunities. 2) The flexibility of teachers' classroom teaching. Teachers should adjust their teaching plan at any time according to the practical teaching process to adapt to students specific learning. 3) Students in the classroom can also create learning opportunities. The so-called perceptual mismatches refer to the deviation between the intention of teachers and the understanding of students to teachers. Applied to English reading teaching, the author holds the opinion that in the classroom, the teacher is no longer a ruler but participants, organizers, stimulator, observer and formative evaluator. With understanding the students' needs, teachers offer students the biggest learning opportunities by asking questions, actively participating in the classroom and putting forward some suggestions so as to cultivate students’ main reading consciousness, promote them to think inititatively, and guide them to read with questions in their minds. As a result, students can improve their reading ability and thinking ability in the continuous cycle of raising questions and answering them, so as to make students change from passive recipients of knowledge to the constructors of knowledge. Meanwhile, students should take the initiative to get familiar with the teaching steps and procedures put forward by teachers with the purpose of minimizing comprehending deviation. As for the existed deviation, students should be encouraged to carefully analyze the reasons, actively work them out, and accurately give the feedback to teachers. In this manner, both teachers and
learners no longer see “teachers simply as teachers, and learners simply as learners, because both are, for good or ill, managers of learning” (Allwright, 1984). [6]

**Activate intuitive heuristics and facilitate negotiated interaction.** Language education should aim at exploring and developing the learners’ potentialities for learning. Thus, in addition to providing basic explanatory input for language structures and meanings, the instructor should also engage the learners in meaningful activities “in such a way as to give free play to those creative principles that humans bring to the process of language learning...[and] create a rich linguistic environment for the intuitive heuristics that the normal human being automatically possesses” (Chomsky 1970).[7] Therefore, according to Kumaravadivelu’s theory, activating intuitive heuristics refers to the design of classroom activities to help learners to have a better construction of linguistic knowledge. Negotiated interaction is defined as all kinds of meaningful interaction between students and teachers. Applied to English reading teaching, the author thinks that in College English intensive reading class, teachers should set up rich and appropriate classroom activities to stimulate students' intuitive exploration and interactions between teachers and students. For example, students can be involved in a number of beneficial activities through personal reading, cooperative learning, interesting scene performance or mini-debate, role conversion activities and so on, through which students can actively participate in the exchange of their understanding of the text, the author’s views and attitudes; they can share feelings, and reflect on their own cognitive activities. In order to achieve the best interaction effect, students must make a well preparation before class to train their thinking ability, comprehension ability, generalization ability and judgment ability. These skills training will help students to interact in class with teachers; eventually it will greatly improve the teaching effect and students' thinking ability.

**Contextualize linguistic input and adhere to the critical reading.** According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), [5] “The responsibility for contextualizing linguistic input lies more with the classroom teacher than with the syllabus designer or the textbook writer. This is because, regardless of what textbooks profess, it is the teacher who can succeed or fail in creating contexts that encourage meaning-making in the classroom.” Such a statement allocates more responsibilities as well as autonomy to the teaching practitioner. So teachers should emphasize the significance of context in reading classroom; meanwhile teachers are better to guide students to collect more background information and raise a couple of questions while reading. Students are required to do critical reading. Critical reading refers to the high level of understanding of the text, as Liu Rude said, critical reading should not only understand the contents of the article, analysis of the structure of the paper, summarizes the theme; instead, more attention should be paid to the judgment, point of view, analysis and evaluation of the verification process, the purpose of writing and tone, in order to clear the main points the author wants to convey and form their own views on some issues. Specifically, before the reading class, initially, teachers can guide students to preview the text autonomously, getting access to the background knowledge related to the topic to contextualize text. Furthermore, through the heuristic questions, teachers inspire students to predict the text which they are going to learn, activate students' knowledge network related to the text, and lead students to give a deep thought on the intention of the writer.

**Enhance cultural awareness and promote independent reading.** According to the theory of Kumaravadivelu, promoting autonomous learning means that paying attention to the personality and potential of students in the teaching process to develop students' learning autonomy. Guiding students to master the personalized learning strategies, they can manage and monitor their foreign language learning. In the reading teaching process, according to the theory of meta-cognition, students can not only recognize process and understand the reading materials, but they can also carry out cognition and regulation of the process and results, so as to improve their initiative and the controllability of learning, creatively probe and solve problems. At the same time, students are proposed to strengthen cross-culture awareness both in and out of class autonomous reading process which can cultivate students’ abilities of discourse analysis, information extraction and aesthetic taste.
Utilize a variety of modes and ensure social association. The social association means that teachers must keep an acute sense of the connection between current foreign language education and the society, politics, economy. Foreign language teaching is not an isolated classroom behavior, and it is rooted in the social environment, so language teaching without social relevance is of no significance. In recent years, more and more reading materials are closely relevant to the modern times, including the news, social hot spots, and global economy and so on. With the development of science and technology and digitization, the English classroom teaching mode has changed. Multi-modalities such as sound, video, image and picture are applied to English reading teaching, which provides great convenience to students’ profound understanding of the materials based on the social, cultural and political background. Before reading class, students can use the Internet to take the initiative to obtain the associated social and cultural background with the article. In the process of classroom learning, students should carefully observe teachers utilizing multi-modal to obtain textual information and non-language information. Asking questions, watching video clips, participating in class discussions through the visual, auditory, tactile and other modal training, can greatly improve students’ critical thinking ability and reading comprehensive ability.

Conclusion

The research finds that the significance of the implementation of post-method reading framework in classroom practice is great. First of all, it has a positive impact on the performances of both the teachers and the students. They have gained additional autonomy by following the framework, thus not only improving teaching efficiency, but also stimulating students’ reading motivation and interests. Furthermore, it can enable students to attain an effective and appropriate reconstruction of the writer’s intended message, and help students to cultivate critical thinking skills. However, despite these positive findings and implications, the current result, due to the limited scope of the research context and the constraint of time, is concluded from students’ favorable feedback, and a certain amount of objective assessments are needed to prove its validity to make it more convincing.

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References