The Cultivation of Chinese College Students' Reading Ability
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Abstract. It is well recognized that students’ reading skills should be promoted. The acquisition of effective reading ability not only has a positive effect on your individual development but even the whole human society. Yet, it has been observed that many college students in China today have a poor reading skill. Based on the results of previous research, this paper introduces current situation for Chinese college students’ reading ability and analyses the existed problem and influence factors as well. The paper is rounded off with suggestions from certain aspects as to what we can do to make college students become autonomous learners and make a further development of the reading culture in China.

Introduction

Individuals can form some socially approved psychological and behavioral patterns by learning social knowledge and obtaining social experience. In this case, the college life is the crucial period for formation of individual socialization, and one of the biggest factors in that is the cultivation of reading. Through extensive reading, college students learn and establish values, behavior patterns and social skills to prepare for to be involved with social affairs. Since 1995, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has celebrated World Reading Day on April 23, which aims to promote the reading activities to the public, especially to teenagers. However, "the 13th National Reading Survey", issued by Chinese Academy of Press and Publication on April 18, 2016, showed that on average, 4.58 paper books were read per capita in 2015, far less than South Korea (18), France (20) and Japan (40). [1] Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the cultivation of Chinese college students’ reading ability.

In this paper, first, the definition, the significance and the trend of individual reading are introduced. Next, the reading situations of Chinese college students are analyzed from three aspects, namely the amount of reading, motivations for reading and approaches to reading. Finally, based on the introduction and specific analyses, some suggestions on the cultivation of Chinese college students’ reading ability will be given, which may be conducive to their autonomous reading.

Basic Concepts of Reading

Definition of Reading

Reading is the process of obtaining information from visual materials. We first turn the visual materials, including texts, pictures, symbols, charts and so on, into sound, and then we
can achieve their further understanding. Anderson (1999) once said “reading is an active fluent process which involves the reader and the reading material in building meaning.” In reading, which is regulated by the readers according to different purposes. Okebukola (2004) stated that reading provides the tools for transmitting ideas to succeeding generations as well as the opportunities of partaking of the wisdom of past generations. Indeed, reading is indispensable for anyone who wants to keep abreast of the current situation or to study a certain period of history. The kind of thinking process can lead us to understand, comprehend, absorb, appreciate, and even to criticize the standpoints of predecessors, Chinese or foreign.

In brief, reading can be divided into four parts. The first is information-based reading. The kind of reading would help readers to have a general idea of the materials, such as reading newspapers, advertising and brochures. The second is literary works reading. When reading some literary works, it would be better to slow down our reading speed and try to taste the hidden connotation carefully. It should be noted that, in addition to the content, there are rhetorical and rhythmic significance in literary works as well. The third is classical works reading, which is used to read philosophy, economics and military works. When having a classical reading, in order to capture the author's real intention completely, the reader take their eyes off the book from time to time and to think the exact words carefully in the book. The last is the narcotic reading, which pursues only pleasure and enjoyment.

Significance of Reading

What we become depends on what we read. The significance of reading is that it builds a spiritual world beyond the embarrassment of mundane life. A person's reading history, in other words, is his spiritual development history. A man's knowledge consists of two parts--direct experience and indirect experience. And yet, the people who have been around the longest also have an indirect experience, hence, what reading gives is indirect experience. Reading expands one's mind. Stop reading means to cut off the communication with the mind, the world, and even an active life. It can be said that reading saves us. On the other hand, as we all know, the college period is the key to the formation of individual socialization, so the importance of reading is even greater for those college students, who are facing the formation of their philosophy of life and notions of morality. A wide range of reading helps students to access to information and knowledge, to expand horizons, to increase the thinking ability, to form a good moral character and sound personality, and to know how to communicate well between individuals and the outside world finally.

The Trend of Individual Reading

No matter you like or do not like it, we have to admit that we have entered a network era. Since the 1940s, in the short 70 years, science and technology has made great progress. In the meanwhile, the rapid growth of knowledge has also reaching a very alarming level. With the development of digital media, such as computers, networks and mobile phones, people's reading time, reading content and reading form have changed greatly. Today, more people tend to use electronic products to read. We can not only read the relevant information from the screen, but also interact with it, and this is the so-called "Reading Screen Era." In addition, the digital libraries, online bookstores and mobile bookstores have already come out one after another. Hence, the future development of reading is gradually moving from the traditional reading to the digital reading. Therefore, the reading has completely changed.
Reading Situations of Chinese College Students

Amount of reading

Nowadays, with the changing development of network and the diversification of leisure recreational activities, college students are no longer satisfied at the monotony of reading life at “ivory tower”. Their reading time is occupied by a variety of recreational activities, such as online games, shopping and tourism. As a result, their reading time is greatly reduced. The lack of reading time has become one of the main reasons for the decreasing reading rate of contemporary college students. According to a recent survey conducted by China Youth Daily, nearly 17% of the students in some certain colleges did not buy any one extra-curricular reading material, and 8% of the students never went to library within one year. [4] As we all know, the reading group in China should be dominated by the young and middle-aged, especially college students. As such a large reading group, college students have insufficient reading quantity, compared with that at the previous period, such reading conditions are worthy of our concern.

Motivations for Reading

At present, in the face of the severe employment situation and fierce employment competition, college students have more and more practical reading purposes. Besides, many employers favor the ones who have passed College English Test 4/6 certificate, or have the certificate of accountant, which virtually increases the pressure of college students. Thus, many students limit their reading scope to the social practical aspects, and present a kind of “Utilitarian tendency” gradually. Facing the pressure from professional learning and employment market, most college students tend to conduct utility learning activities, such as obtaining certificates by using most of their extracurricular time. In addition, they always consider the practicality before reading books, and appear to expect quick results. Recently a group of professionals surveyed at a famous university. They found although many students were reading in the library or self-study room, they mostly were reading the books about CET4/6, and computer grade examination, and the ones who were preparing for postgraduate entrance exams were reciting a lot of coaching books of English and Politics. It makes sense that college students consider exams as reading motivation, but the learning effect under such situation is certainly influenced by learning motivation, which would affects their expansion of knowledge, and even restricts their development of mind.

If college students are forced blindly to learn some related materials for the various exams so as to match the requirements of recruiters, their concept of reading would visually include more impure benefit factor and utility color. We should pay more attention to such “Utilitarian tendency”, and provide students with correct guidance, so that they can have excellent academic performance and acquire other knowledge normally and smoothly as well.

Approaches to Reading

With the advent of the era of information and the popularization of Internet, the emergence of electronic books has begun to challenge the traditional paper books and change college students’ way of reading, which would reduce readers’ dependence on the traditional reading place, library. China Reading Association has recently investigated the reading situation of the students among 16 colleges. According to the results, most college students would spend
81.7% and 51.5% respectively of their spare time in surfing the Internet and reading the paper books, showing that the network has become an important content in the daily lives of most college students.

We admit that network information dissemination do has many advantages, such as universality, sharing and timeliness, which has influenced and facilitated people’s life to some extent. Due to the internet, the retrieval ability and integration ability of human knowledge have greatly improved. However, we should also realize that the internet is a “Double-Edged Sword”, because it not only brings college students “learning revolution”, but also makes them face the problems of how to search materials effectively and how to assess information correctly. If college students lack of agile judgment on information, they would be drowned by junk information quickly.

Suggestions on the Cultivation of College Students’ Reading Ability

The Improvement of Reading Consciousness

We cannot ignore the phenomenon that many college students do not understand the significance of reading for individual value. Fundamentally speaking, reading is not only an expansion of knowledge in class, but also an effective way to promote individuation development and cultivate creative thinking. As a student in higher education, we should realize that if you want to be a future elite, all that need is not only the specialized theoretical knowledge, but also the noble moral sentiment and good comprehensive ability. Hershberg (1996) once said “a concept or the education, skill levels, and problem-solving abilities that will enable an individual to be a productive worker in the global economy of the twenty-first century.” [5] Therefore, we cannot only think about our immediate needs. Instead, we should take the long view and think more about the future.

In the world today, to go with the great changes of the environment to learn, as a student, we cannot rigidly adhere to the knowledge in textbooks. So we need to read a lot of other good books, such as "Man's search for meaning", "Procrastination" and "How to read a book", to broaden our reading and expand our reading skills—the retrieval technique, the ability to access the reference books; the understanding, the comprehension of the article from its content to language; the analysis, the exploration of the article from various aspects and then to identify problems; the induction. The acquisition of these four abilities must be slowly cultivated in the process of reading.

The Guidance of Reading Online

In addition, a survey suggested that as for the undergraduates today, the network has become an important method to obtain new knowledge, which reflects the rapid development of science and technology nowadays. In this case, we should pay more attention to the new ways of reading. We must establish an excellent system and effective oversight mechanism so as to guide college students to form correct view of the information awareness, information concepts and information ethics, and then to master the scientific reading methods and improve their reading ability finally.

Therefore, the deeper analysis of college students’ online reading could be good for improving their reading situation to some extent. In this multicolored digital environment, it is an urgent task for us to combine the reader service and the reader education organically. First of all, the government has the responsibility to further standardize the management of the
network. For one thing, we should strengthen firstly the network legislation to make sure the stability of positions. For another, as we all know, the internet users are the direct victims of the bad online mode, especially the teenagers. So we need to increase publicity efforts to mobilize the majority of them to resist vulgar style. Secondly, the role of the college should not be overlooked either. Through improving and optimizing the library website, focusing on the literature retrieval courses and the reference service, we could help students to strengthen their internet information literacy and to promote the online reading environment eventually. In this way, to make a significant integration and promotion between the traditional reading and the online reading would be much easier.

The Function of Educational Institution

“Dealing with extensive reading, the teacher can encourage the students to choose for themselves what they should read and to do for pleasure and general language improvement.” (Bell, 1998). [6] The college administrators should organize a number of reading community activities, such as reading competitions and reading briefings, which would be helpful to stimulate students’ reading interests and give them more opportunities to read all kinds of books, ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign, and then to help them understand the reading culture better.

College libraries are the second classroom of students, and it is also an important base for students to read freely. Thus, guiding students to establish correct reading concept is an incumbrance social responsibility for college libraries. Today, as college libraries provide integrated reading information services for students, it should also exert its function of intellectual education and strengthen the reading guidance work as well. For example, in order to strengthen the students’ reading skills and cultivate their reading methods, the library should set up some certain introductory classes for the freshman, which can be helpful to develop a good reading habit and master scientific reading methods for them in time. But beyond that, it is also the responsibility for colleges to make full use of its library resources and to maximize its openness functions. By incessant developing the libraries’ bibliographic categories, extending the libraries’ opening hours and improving the libraries’ regulations, it would be conducive to creating a better environment for students to read.

Summary

It was predicted that in the information society, everyone should have at least four abilities: reading ability, independent problem-solving ability, creating ability and foretelling ability. Thus, cultivating and improving reading ability not only has practical importance, but also has far-reaching future significance, especially for college students. It is our responsibility to transfer student's reading interest by using each effective method, organizing reading community activities, setting up some certain introductory classes and so on, and then to raise their reading ability finally. In conclusion, reading ability matters a lot to college students, especially in our country. A higher reading ability produces a long-lasting effect on students’ integrated development in the long run, which deserves much more attention from the society.
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