

The Role of Recitation in the Process of English Learning for College Students of Science and Engineering

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Abstract

Recitation--the traditional teaching method should be taken seriously again in English teaching. This is a survey report on the role of recitation in the English learning of College Students of Science and Engineering. The research questions are: (1) Do you think recitation is useful to improve English? (2) What recitation materials do you prefer to focus on, words, sentences, or articles? (3) Have you been required to do the job of recitation? (4) What is the source of their recitation materials? (5) What is the result of the last final English exam? According to the results of the survey, we come to the following conclusions: (1) College students of Science and Engineering believe that recitation plays a positive role in improving their English level. (2) College students of Science and Engineering think that recitation should be based on the textbook while adding some extra-curricular materials to expand the scope of knowledge. (3) Recitation is a matter within students' duties, but teachers should regularly check the students' recitation, which will promote their learning.

Key words: Recitation; English learning; Questionnaire survey

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1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, the communicative approach is pretty popular in English teaching in China. However, it is not entirely suitable for foreign language teaching in China, and it can't help to achieve obvious teaching effects, especially for college students of Science and Engineering. In classroom, it is impossible to do a large amount of communicative activities by means of limited input. If students are forced to communicate without enough input, a large amount of irregular outputs will be produced. Moreover, the acquisition of English in high school is relatively poor. The English grades achieved in the college entrance exam are lower than those of other majors. If communicative approach is adopted, it will inevitably affect college English learning. Therefore, it is a rather good strategy for this group of college students to adopt the traditional recitation language learning method. Professor Chen Lin (1999) pointed out that in the absence of a linguistic environment, foreign languages can not be "acquired" and can only be "learned". In accordance with Professor Zhang Weiyu (2002), in retrospect, his English proficiency is largely due to the pastorate learning and there is no shortcut in English learning. Professor Hu Wenzhong (1989) also said that teenagers should give full play to the advantages of their memory and recite more dialogues and texts to learn a foreign language well. Some teaching researchers oppose recitation, while he thought foreign languages should be recited more frequently. Nowadays, computer-based multimedia teaching method is widely used in College English learning and teaching processes, which is exerting a revolutionary influence on College English teaching. But under the conditions of multimedia teaching, is it necessary to carry out the traditional reciting method? Through some experimental data, this paper reveals the role of recitation in the English learning process of college Science and Engineering students, aiming at providing some theoretical basis for modern college English teaching.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

According to applied linguist Krashen's (1987), language acquisition is accomplished through language input, and the main focus of teaching should be on providing students with the best language input. Recitation input is in conformity with Krashen's theory of language input. Students can enhance their understanding of grammatical knowledge, learn to express their ideas in native English, get rid of the negative influence of their mother tongue, and finally improve their writing ability and standardize their language output through recitation input.

Input is used to refer to the reservoir of knowledge that is prepared for L2 learners or second language learners by native speakers of another (stick Ellis, 1994) in two languages. According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics Dictionary: "input means (language learning) the language learners hear or receive from him or her to learn." (Longman, 1991), learners can form a system of rules for target language through which the input of language is restored in the mind of the building. "Comprehensible input is the input language, including the ability to slightly beyond the learner's language projects the current language." (Longman, 1991) comprehensible input is a kind of different understanding from the input. Comprehensible input means that the speaker, not the obedient, the control of the intelligibility. Although the focus of investment is on understanding the listener and to what extent he or she understands. In other words, comprehensible input control is provided by the government of its people, and to understand the input from the audience decide.

Input hypothesis is Krashen's second language acquisition theory core. It aims to explain how we acquire language and learn how to progress in the acquisition. Krashen provides us with "only one way to acquire human language, understand the information or by receiving 'comprehensible input' -" (Krashen, 1982). This means that the language acquisition is trying to understand what other people talking about. Students should focus on content rather than form. If the learners hear a piece of meaningful speech, trying to understand the acquisition will occur. If the learner focuses on language form, and then the acquisition will fail. Krashen provides us with a learning of how to make a progress in the acquisition of such a model: "We understand the progress along the natural order through the input contains the next stage in our structure is beyond our ability to structure the current level bits." (Krashen, 1985) assume that the current level is "I", the next stage should be "I 1" (beyond the current level of the first stage bit). Learners can understand the language of help, including additional language, information, knowledge of the world, and previously acquired language skills unacquired syntax.

Recitation input can improve English learners' sense of language. Bialystok (1978), a Canadian linguist,

classifies foreign language learners' linguistic knowledge into explicit linguistic knowledge and implicit linguistic knowledge. Explicit language knowledge refers to all the language knowledge of the target language in the learner's consciousness, including phonetics, grammar and vocabulary, which exists in the learner's consciousness and can be clearly expressed. Implicit linguistic knowledge refers to the internalized linguistic knowledge, existing in the learner's subconscious level, which means that learners may not be able to express it clearly. But using language without thinking is a common sense of language. The implication of the linguist Bialystok's theoretical model of second language learning is that "the more implicit language knowledge a person has, the higher his proficiency in using the target language" (Ma Guanghui, 1997).

Recitation input strengthens the accumulation and consolidation of students' linguistic knowledge, thus transforming explicit linguistic knowledge into implicit linguistic knowledge (Cao Yilu, 1999). Students' sense of language is also formed, which is bound to promote their language acquisition.

3. QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

3.1 Research Problems

This survey attempts to make art students answer the following five questions: (1) Do you think recitation is useful for improving English? (2) What recitation materials do you prefer to focus on, words, sentences, or articles? (3) Have you been required to do the job of recitation by your teachers? (4) Where did your recitation materials come? (5) What is the English result of the last final exam?

3.2 Research Object

The following is the number and distribution of participants of the survey.

Table 1
Number and Distribution of Respondents

International trade		Chemistry		Civil engineering	
38		41		39	
Second grade	First grade	Second grade	First grade	Second grade	First grade
23	15	18	23	25	14

All the subjects were from grade one or two in our university, and 118 students participated in the survey. It can be seen from the figures in the chart above, the distribution of students taking part in the survey is more reasonable. The objects were more representative. Therefore, the results of the survey should basically meet the needs of the research, that is, to understand the correlation between recitation and English learning.

3.3 Research Tools and Methods

The survey tool is a questionnaire consisting of 5 small questions (see Appendix). The questionnaire was conducted by the author in class. A total of 118 questionnaires were collected, all of which were valid questionnaires.

3.4 Results

Our main purpose is to give insight into the general situation of the correlation between English recitation and English achievement of College Science and Engineering students, and we made the analysis of the results obtained without focusing on specific distinctions between grades. We get the following results through collation of the collected data:

3.4.1 Do you think recitation is useful for improving English?

Among the students who received the questionnaire, the percentages of very useful and useful are 100%, 100%, 92.31% respectively. Therefore, Science and Engineering students support the role of recitation for language learning. The concrete results are as Table 2.

3.4.2 What recitation materials do you prefer to focus on, words, sentences, or articles?

Among those who received the survey, they had different attitudes towards the recitation. The students majoring International trade preferred to recite word (65.79%), followed by sentences (26.32%) and articles (7.89%). The students majoring chemistry preferred to recite articles (48.78%) more frequently, followed by words (29.27%) and sentences (21.95%). Those majoring Civil engineering preferred to recite words (48.72%), sentences (33.33%) and articles (17.95%). In general, students majoring in chemistry are more interested in reciting sentences and articles, while students majoring International trade are more interested in reciting words. The concrete results are as Table 3.

3.4.3 Have you been required to do the job of recitation by your teachers?

Whether the teacher require the students to recite the learning materials will differ due to their majors. The proportion of regular recitation check for the students of chemistry was the highest (65.85%), while the proportion for the students of Civil engineering and International trade were 36.84% and 23.08%, respectively. Among the data required by teachers to recite, but not check regularly, the proportion of the three majors was 71.79% (International trade), 52.63% (Civil engineering) and 34.15% (chemistry). But generally speaking, most of the teachers require students to recite English, and the teachers who teach students majoring in chemistry can check the recitation more often. The concrete results are as Table 4.

Table 2
Whether recitation is useful to improve English

	Very useful	Useful	Useless	Not at all useful	In total
International trade	20	18	0	0	38
Percentage	52.63%	47.37%	0%	0%	100%
chemistry	23	18	0	0	41
Percentage	56.10%	43.90%	0%	0%	100%
Civil engineering	20	16	3	0	39
Percentage	51.28%	41.03%	7.69%	0%	100%

Table 3
What recitation materials do you prefer to focus on, words, sentences, or articles?

	Words	Sentences	Articles	In total
International trade	25	10	3	38
Percentage	65.79%	26.32%	7.89%	100%
chemistry	12	9	20	41
Percentage	29.27%	21.95%	48.78%	100%
Civil engineering	19	13	7	39
Percentage	48.72%	33.33%	17.95%	100%

Table 4
Whether to require memorization and check the memorization

	Require recitation without periodic inspection	Require recitation and regular inspection	No requirement for recitation nor periodic examination	In total
International trade	28	9	1	38
Percentage	73.68%	23.68%	2.63%	100%
chemistry	14	27	0	41
Percentage	34.15%	65.85%	0%	100%
Civil engineering	20	14	5	39
Percentage	51.28%	35.90%	12.82%	100%

3.4.4 What is the source of their recitation materials?

According to the survey of recitation materials, nearly half of the students in the three majors believed that recitation should be based on texts and supplemented by extracurricular materials, the proportions of which were 47.36% (International trade), 46.13% (Civil engineering) and 41.41% (chemistry). It can be seen that students are not only satisfied with the content of the text to learn and recite, but also eager to learn extracurricular knowledge to broaden their academic scope.

Table 5
Source of recitation materials

	Text mainly	Extracurricular supplement	Supplemented by extracurricular activities, and texts are the main ones	Extracurricular activities, supplemented by texts	In total
International trade	15	3	16	4	38
Percentage	39.47%	7.89%	42.11%	10.53%	100%
chemistry	14	3	19	5	41
Percentage	34.15%	7.26%	46.39%	12.20%	100%
Civil engineering	16	2	19	2	39
Percentage	41.03%	5.13%	48.72%	5.13%	100%

3.4.5 What is the result of the last final English exam?

Among the students surveyed, 46.34% (majoring in chemistry), 12.82% (majoring in Civil engineering) and 7.89% (majoring in International trade) had excellent scores (≥ 80). It can be seen that the number of outstanding students majoring in fashion design is much higher than the other two majors, nearly half of the total number. The concrete results are as Table 6.

Table 6
English result of last final exam

	≤ 59	60-69	70-79	≥ 80	In total
International trade	1	19	15	3	38
Percentage	2.63%	50%	39.47%	7.89%	100%
chemistry	2	6	14	19	41
Percentage	4.88%	14.63%	34.15%	46.34%	100%
Civil engineering	0	12	22	5	39
Percentage	0%	30.77%	56.41%	12.82%	100%

3.5 Discussion

In accordance with the research results, we attempt to analyze and explain the results as follows.

3.5.1 Function of recitation

The survey results showed that: chemistry students hold a positive attitude towards the role of recitation, but they hold different views on the types of recitation. Most majoring in International trade and civil engineering only like to recite vocabulary, but ignore the recitation of sentences and articles and other materials. In the final English examination, the students majoring in chemistry are significantly better than those of other majors. Therefore, we can make a conjecture that reciting textual materials such as articles and sentences is more conducive to improving English performance than just reciting vocabulary.

3.5.2 The source of material for recitation

The results of the questionnaire survey showed that most civil engineering students believe that recitation should be based on text content and to which, some extracurricular materials should be added. This reflects that students want to increase their extracurricular knowledge and broaden their scope of knowledge while learning the text well.

3.5.3 Recitation requirements and inspection

According to the survey data, English teachers who teach chemistry students can require them to recite English, but some teachers do not do enough to check students' recitation regularly.

Fundamentally, students' learning English depends on their attitudes towards learning English, that is, internal factors. Internal factors are decisive factors, but external factors also contribute to internal factors, which require teachers to supervise and guide students and give play to the external role of teachers in students' learning. For example, the teachers who teach those majoring in chemistry are more likely to check their students' recitation, so their English scores are significantly better than those of the other major students. Teachers should check students' recitation regularly and guide them so that students can boost their consciousness to learn English well.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above data, we can draw the following conclusions and suggestions:

Function of recitation: Chemistry students believe English recitation has a positive effect on their English proficiency. Students' interests and initiative in English recitation are generally high. At the same time, their attitudes towards English recitation are relatively positive. Although students are not focusing on the traditional way of reciting English, students' efforts in recitation has been extremely improved when the teachers' accounts are recommended to them. Through making a survey in students, they also draw up a lot of advice to boost interest in English recitation. A large number of students have affirmed the positive effect of recitation on English learning.

The source of material for recitation: Chemistry students believe that recitation should be based on text content and some extracurricular materials should be added. So teachers should select passages that are closely related to the content of the text. Meanwhile, extracurricular materials that are suitable for students to memorize should be selected for students and this is the responsibility for the teachers. Through conducting a survey with students, it is found that the memory of words and phrases, the

comprehension of English and the achievement of English have been promoted by reciting. More than half of the students confirmed that recitation method is very beneficial for English learning. However, students' understanding and usage of recited content materials are not very good.

Recitation requirements and inspection: Students are the main participants in the recitation and English recitation is done by students themselves finally. But teachers should urge them to recite and give some guidance. Recitation should be based on sentences and articles and text memory will better promote students' English proficiency. He Jianing (2006) pointed out that if one recites the vocabulary in isolation, he would get little since it actually equates every foreign language word with a native language word and isolates it from the language and context. (GUI Shi Chun, 1988) A large amount of students don't form a good habit of reciting fantastic English sentences and paragraphs. They do not select and summarize the recited materials, which leads to that they are easy to forget the recited knowledge. Some students recite in a short time and frequency, they do not transform short-term memory into long-term memory; maybe these are reasons why students' learning efforts are not very good. Both parents and teachers give great supports for students' English recitation. The good external environment is beneficial for students to recite English.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

- (1) Do you think recitation is useful for improving English?
(A) Very useful (B) Useful (C) Useless (D) Not at all useful
- (2) What recitation materials do you prefer to focus on, words, sentences, or articles?
(A) Word (B) Sentence (C) Article
- (3) Have you been required to do the job of recitation by your teachers?
(A) Require recitation without periodic inspection
(B) Require recitation and regular inspection
(C) No requirement for recitation nor periodic examination
- (4) What is the source of their recitation materials?
(A) Text mainly
(B) Extracurricular supplement
(C) Supplemented by extracurricular activities and texts are the main ones
(D) Extracurricular activities, supplemented by texts
- (5) What is the result of the last final English exam?_