Research on the Cultivation of Non-English Majors’ English Reading Interest: POA Teaching Mode in the Internet + Era

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Abstract. Reading plays an important role in foreign and second language learning and teaching. It not only provides sufficient and important linguistic input, but also lays a foundation for the further development in listening, speaking and writing. However, there are still many problems in college English reading instruction. It is imperative to find an effective teaching model with Chinese characteristics to change the situation. Based on analyzing the current situation of college English reading instruction and analyzing the impact of “Internet +” on it, explaining POA teaching model and its effect on non-English majors’ reading interest in the Internet + era, this study finds that POA can promote college students’ reading interest in four aspects.

Keywords: Internet+, POA, College English Reading Instruction, Non-English Majors, Reading Interest

1. Introduction
With the rapid development of economic globalization, college English teaching of non-English majors has been widely concerned by educators[1]. How to improve college English teaching and cultivate foreign language talents with international vision and international competitiveness in the new era is a question worthy of consideration.

Reading is not only an important part of college students’ English learning, but also an important embodiment of their English application level[2]. The reading level affects the professional learning and academic vision of college students to a certain extent, determines the quantity and quality of students’ knowledge, and even concerns with the breadth and depth of students’ future professional or vocational development.
However, because teachers, students, parents and the job markets are concerned much about scores, the current school systems pay much attention to excellent control of testing strategies and rely heavily on how well students can perform on a test[3]. Classes are simply transformed into a virtual language setting where students only practice working on exams using the reading strategies they are “taught”[4]. Consequently, a college education is more and more seen as a means for test betterment rather than a means for human betterment. Students can only acquire knowledge of test-taking strategies, but not competent communication skills[5]. Influenced by this, most college students read less and narrowly, their ability to read selectively is poor and they lack interest in reading. Guiding college students to find fun in English reading and motivating their English reading initiative and enthusiasm have a positive significance for increasing their reading and improving the teaching effect of college English reading instruction.

This article attempts to explore the positive effects of POA teaching model on the cultivation of non-English majors’ reading interest in the Internet+ era.

2. The impact of “Internet +” On college english reading class teaching
The rapid development of Internet technology provides a good environment for the reform of college English reading teaching. In the Internet+ era, teachers’ educational concepts and teaching capabilities are constantly updated and continuously improved, which promotes the effective integration between information technology and teaching. Teachers and students can obtain more resources and share them online anywhere and anytime.

However, smart phone and Internet have taken up more and more extracurricular time of college students, leaving many college students little time to read. Limited reading time is hard to guarantee strong reading interest. Students’ low interest in English reading is also due to less attractive classes. In order to accomplish a large number of English reading teaching tasks in a limited time, teacher often adopts text-centred or input-based instruction which emphasizes too much on individual linguistic items and the text itself without providing opportunities for students to use the language for communicative purposes. The teaching strategies focus on the one-way instillation, memory and consolidation of knowledge and the teaching content is still centered on the textbooks and test questions. All these factors contribute to the result that classroom teaching lacks vitality, students’ interest in reading cannot be promoted and they have little desire to read after class.

In view of this, college English teachers should innovate the teaching model to effectively improve the efficiency of reading teaching and guide students to read various texts and articles in literature, science, history and arts both in class and after class so that students can learn how to sketch thoughts to achieve effective communication in the real world through extensive reading. Even in test-oriented class, test preparation should be focused on the content rather than test-taking strategies.

3. POA in college English reading instruction
The production-oriented approach (POA) is a new TEFL theory with Chinese characteristics aiming to overcome the weakness in FLT and to increase the efficiency of college English class. Three phases are included in the teaching procedures: motivating, enabling, and assessing.

Motivating advocates that teaching activities should start with output driven tasks. Students realize their language and knowledge deficits in the process of completing these tasks, so that their learning motivation can be generated and they can have clearer learning objectives. Motivating includes three phases: teacher describing relevant communicative scenarios, students trying out the required productive activity, and teacher explaining learning objectives and productive activities. In college English reading instruction, the output driven tasks can be centred on speaking activities, like group discussion, group or individual presentation, PPT display, teacher-student or student-student oral questions and answers, and writing activities, such as words solitaire, translating and essay writing. These colorful tasks can effectively promote students to read actively by inspiring their reading motivation and activate their related knowledge.

“Reading” is the main task of the enabling phase. Teacher should divide the reading materials into several segments. One segment of input materials is paired with one mini-activity of production so that the delay between input processing and output production is effectively reduced. Teacher should state clearly the productive tasks and learning objectives; students should read the given materials selectively with teacher’s guidance and practice a mini-productive task once they finish their selective learning. Actual teaching can take place with several such cycles.

The assessment phase examines to what extent the learning objectives have been achieved. Two kinds of assessment are adopted: the ongoing diagnostic assessment and the achievement assessment. The ongoing diagnostic assessment occurs at the enabling phase, where the
teacher needs to diagnose from time to time to what extent the students’ selective learning and
mini-productive activity performance meet the requirement, in order that timely remedial
measures can be taken. These activities could be in the form of oral presentations,
compositions, translated texts, public speeches, posters, or debates. The achievement
assessment happens at the end of each unit and the final evaluation at the end of each semester.

Besides, the principles of cultural exchange and key ability cultivation are also emphasized.
These principles stress that English language instruction should aim to produce socially
developed and globally aware citizens. So, classroom teaching should not only aim to make
students realize instrumental objectives, such as developing students’ competence in using
English for communication, but also humanistic objectives, such as cultivating students’
critical thinking skills, autonomous learning abilities, intercultural competence and overall
humanistic qualities.

4. POA teaching model in college English reading instruction in the internet+ era
In the Internet + era, teachers and students can get more resources online. Students can also
preview the reading materials; watch related videos on the APP provided by the textbooks
publishers. Through WeChat, QQ and other instant communication tools, they can post, share
and discuss learning materials anywhere and anytime, and thus complete the pre-class
preparation of the output-driven phase. In this way, class time can be saved for the activities
that can only be practiced in class. Classroom efficiency can be promoted.

In the enabling phase, teacher guides students of different levels to learn selectively, such
as vocabulary and grammar for low-level students, reading skills for middle-level students,
and the ability of hypothesis judgment and analysis for high-level students. Modern
application software such as Questionnaire Star and Rain Classroom can help teachers master
students’ cognitive level, and at the same time properly adjust the focus and strategies of
teaching. A wide variety of supplementary reading materials, like audios, videos and scene
pictures collected on the Internet can ensure the richness and interest of teaching contents.

In the Internet + era, teachers can realize the real-time assessment of students’ learning; the
achievement assessment can be more objective and fair. Teachers post output tasks on the
Internet. Students use mobile phones and other multimedia devices to complete these tasks,
like audio and video recording, PPT production, translation, speech, and then publish and
share through instant communication tools. Teachers and students can use fragmented time to
evaluate these productions and point out the advantages and disadvantages. Students who post
the productions can optimize in time according to different suggestions. At the end of the
semester, the data collected from various platforms is conducive to teachers’ scientific and
reasonable final evaluations of every student.

5. The effect of internet + and POA teaching model on non-English majors’ reading
interest
The target population was 80 first-year university students majoring in education from two different classes of the Education School, Xi’an Siyuan University. After 12 weeks of teaching experiment, they took part in the interview and were required to talk about one issue: “Whether the POA approach has any effect on your English reading interest? If yes, is it positive or negative? If positive, what aspects of interest are greatly affected? And if negative, why?”

The results from the interviews indicate that POA can promote most students’ reading interest in the following aspects: arousing their learning desire (90%); changing their learning concept from exam-oriented learning to interest-oriented learning and from simply learning English to using English (80%); increasing their cross-cultural awareness (65%); promoting their confidence and making them more willing to participate in different classroom activities (75%).

In the motivating phase, students can find their own interests through surfing online in English before class. In classroom learning, they communicate with other students orally or in a written form. The attempt to produce language creates cognitive dissonance that helps them assess where they are and where they need to be, which lead them to find their own purposes in learning. In this way, their desire for knowledge was aroused, and such desire definitely prompts them to learn more efficiently and to find what they want. The input materials seem to them more useful instead of useless or dull and they become more motivated when learning something they like.

In the enabling phase, with the teacher’s phased and targeted guidance of reading, students’ learning motivation changes from examination-oriented to interest-oriented, and the reading purpose changes from learning English to learning in English. Influenced by teacher’s digging deeply into the cultural phenomena in the input materials, students begin to pay more attention to the cultural connotation rather than language itself. As one student shared:

“In the past, I did not dare speak English to foreigners as my spoken English was very poor and I didn’t know what to talk about. After attending the POA classroom for two months, I became interested in American culture and I have a strong desire to testify the authenticity of these contents in the text. I dare
communicate with my foreign teacher, Kaylee, and talk about some of them."

Diversified well-designed tasks in class and after class played a vital role in boosting students’ confidence in dealing with difficulties and challenges and making those more willing to participate in different activities. To fulfill various English tasks, students often had to devote a lot of time and energy to collecting valuable sources, such as reading English novels and magazines, listening to radios and watching TV programs, talking to English speakers whenever possible and writing every day such as emails and journals. When they finished preparing the tasks and presented their productions online or in front of their classmates, they had the gratification of success. Besides, as a result of surfing online in English, they are able to read more quickly than before; sharing their ideas taught them how to communicate with teachers and classmates; their critical thinking and analytical skills are also improved a lot. These rewards prompted them to accept and finish the following challenges and they are more willing to be engaged.

The diversification of language output platform online and the flexibility of preparation time enable students to devise their leaning scheme of professional courses and English courses more scientifically and reasonably. The scientific combination of ongoing diagnostic assessment and achievement assessment enables students to master timely their own progress and the final return. When they see their hard work pays off, their enthusiasm and passion for reading are promoted and they have a strong will to read more both in class and after class.

Although most students held positive views about POA approach, four students (5%) proposed their difficulties in accepting it. The reasons are that POA requires them to be fully engaged in classroom learning as many productive activities are designed, and taking part in these activities poses great challenges to them whose English is really poor. Then, to finish the tasks required by POA, they have to spend a lot of time and energy, but English is not their major, they are already too busy with their professional courses and do not want to spend more time in other courses. Thus, these tasks became burden to them.

6. Conclusion
The study has been made to explore the effectiveness of POA approach on college English reading instruction in the Internet+ era. By analyzing the numerous data collected from the interviews, conclusions can be drawn that POA approach can be applied to college English reading instruction and it does have a positive effect on promoting students’ reading interest. Although most students hold positive attitude toward POA, some students claimed their difficulties in accepting it. These complaints indicate that POA still has room for improvement. The author hopes the findings will be helpful for other researchers to do further studies in this field, which will contribute to promoting current college English reading instruction.

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