| RESEARCH ARTICLE

How to Help English Teacher-training Students Improve Their Reading Teaching Ability? The Teaching Skills Competition of Normal Undergraduate Students in Guangdong Province as an Example

Luo Wenping

Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing City, Guangdong Province, 526020, China

Corresponding Author: Luo Wenping, **E-mail**: 1993020031@zqu.edu.cn

| **ABSTRACT**

The cultivation of English normal students' reading teaching ability is an important combination of learning ability and teaching skills. Teaching and learning reinforce each other. In conjunction with the Teaching Skills Competition of Normal Undergraduate Students in Guangdong Province, how to scientifically and effectively cultivate English teacher-training students to read covers the whole procedural learning and practice from text reading to reflection and improvement, that are, five steps, namely, text analysis and content condensation, educational philosophy and teaching methods, lesson polishing and reflection, teaching design, and reading teaching recording/teaching competitions. The acquisition of procedural knowledge is the key to the improvement of reading teaching ability.

1. Introduction

Reading teaching for English normal undergraduate students in Chinese colleges and universities occupies a very important position in teacher-training skills, and the success or failure of reading teaching determines the level and quality of students' English reading at the stage of basic education. Admittedly, the improvement of English reading levels is a long-term accumulation process, which is the result of the long-term joint action of explicit learning and implicit learning. How to effectively improve the reading teaching ability of English teachers is the priority. The Teaching Skills Competition of Normal Undergraduate Students in Guangdong Province (English Group) has been held eleven consecutive times since 2013, and the fifth to ninth competitions have assessed the English reading teaching ability of senior high schools and reading for writing from the tenth to eleventh, in which the researcher led the team to participate in the fifth, sixth, eighth, ninth and eleventh competitions. Eleven candidates have won the first, second and third prizes among provincial finalists, including the first prize three times in the fifth, eighth and ninth sessions of the competition.

Synthesizing the literature on English teacher-training students' skills development and the practical experience of The Teaching Skills Competition of Normal Undergraduate Students in Guangdong Province, how to train English teacher-training students scientifically and effectively in reading teaching covers the whole procedural learning and practice from text reading to reflection and improvement, that are, five steps, namely, text analysis and content condensation, educational philosophy and teaching methods, lesson polishing and reflection, teaching design, and reading teaching recording/teaching competitions.

2. Text analysis and content condensation

English reading texts are available in different genres, such as argumentation, exposition, and narrative, and for different age levels, such as high school, middle school, and elementary school students. The level of difficulty of English reading texts increases with the increase of the age level of the students. In other words, the reading teaching materials in senior high school are the most challenging, followed by junior high school and primary school. Schell (1988) points out from the perspective of interaction that the factors affecting reading can be divided into two categories: internal factors and external factors. The so-called internal factors are the factors from the readers themselves, while the external factors are other factors from outside the readers, such as the text.

The reading sample "Friendship in Different Cultures" of the 8th Provincial Competition describes how different cultures recognize friendship. Chinese traditional culture, Russian culture, American culture, Central Asian culture and other proverbs or famous sayings that appreciate friendship, such as "One hundred rubles is not as good as one hundred friends" in Russian. The Chinese proverb "Hard times test friendship", the Western proverb "A friend in need is a friend indeed.", Russian proverb "A friend is known in trouble.", among which Kazakh writer Abba said, "You can tell a good friend from a bad one. Bad friends are like a shadow. On a sunny day, you cannot get rid of them. When it is cloudy, you cannot find them, no matter how much effort you make." The employment of the rhetorical figure of shadow is quite vivid. When the students analyse the text, the simile of shadow needs to be explored in depth, and the quality of thought should be enhanced at this point to help high school students to establish a healthy view of friendship.

3. Educational philosophy and teaching methods

Skill training for English teacher-teaching students can be based on teaching theories such as Constructivism, Humanism, "learning by doing," and Behaviorism, as well as many second language acquisition theories such as Sociocultural theory, Krashen's input theory and usage-based teaching.

The theory of Constructivist holds that knowledge and skills are not simply imparted and instilled into learners in the classroom but are acquired by learners through the construction of meaning based on their own experiences and backgrounds in a certain context, i.e., socio-cultural backgrounds, with the help of others (including teaching and learning partners), utilizing the necessary learning materials, and actively processing external information. Constructivist especially emphasizes learners' autonomous construction, autonomous inquiry and autonomous discovery and requires that such autonomous learning should be combined with context-based cooperative learning and problem-solving-based research learning. [Zhang 2011] Scaffolding instruction and anchored instruction are the teaching methods that have emerged from this teaching philosophy.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Zone of Actual Development (ZAD) in social-cultural theories are also important learning theories guided by Constructivism that emphasize the significance of learner-centered constructive learning. Concept-based instruction (CBI) is also valuable and worth trying in teaching.

The "student-centered" teaching concept based on humanistic theory emphasizes that teaching should start from the standpoint and significance of the learners themselves, stresses the development of the learner's personal potential, personality and self, highlights the dominant position and role of students in the learning process, and teachers are the "promoters" of students' learning. Scaffolding instruction, anchored instruction, concept-based instruction, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), and usage-based instruction all belong to the category of this theory.

"Learning by doing" is the basic viewpoint of Dewey, an American educator, who believes that teachers should promote students to think and learn knowledge through "doing" and let learners rise from perceptual knowledge to rational knowledge through thinking, and finally solve problems by themselves. [Dewey, 2018]

Krashen's "i+1" language input theory is similar to ZPD in socio-cultural theory and the traditional Chinese culture of teaching according to one's aptitude, that is, focusing on understanding the learner's current learning situation, setting reasonable, understandable and operable goals, helping learners to achieve higher goals, and ultimately solving problems on their own.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) are both teaching methods guided by usage-based theories of second language acquisition theory, in which CLT encourages teacher-student communication and student-student peer communication in the English classroom, and TBLT designs learning content as achievable learning tasks, hides the target content with the tasks, and accomplishes the learning objectives while accomplishing the learning tasks.

In recent years, CLT and TBLT have been the teaching methods mostly adopted by contestants in reading teaching in skills competitions. Under the guidance of more educational concepts and second language acquisition theories, Scaffolding Instruction,

Anchored Instruction, Reading Circles, Jigsaw Reading, flipped classrooms, and so on can be used in different classroom teaching and boldly tried.

From the statistics of teaching methods in the finals of the Ninth Competition, 26 contestants, about 2/3 of the contestants used TBLT, the teaching method is relatively single, and some of the 3-4 contestants of the whole school have almost the same teaching method without any innovation. According to this way of thinking, each of the 16 colleges and universities in Guangdong Province offering English teacher training majors needs to select only one contestant because there is no innovation in the same teaching design, so the different teaching methods need to be integrated into reading teaching. Whether it is mature or successful or not, it can bring in-depth thinking to the skill development of English teacher-training students in the whole province.

Book Worms Club Bronze: Stories for Reading Circles (Furr, 2007) says that the goal of reading circles is to require students to read-think-connect-ask-connect, to think as they read, to ask questions, to compare cultures, and to make connections to real-life. The way it works is that a group of students reads the same story, and each person is responsible for one task, reading purposefully and discussing and sharing it with the rest of the group. The reading circle generally consists of six roles: a discussion leader, who is responsible for asking questions about the reading material and organizing discussion among group members; a summarizer, who is responsible for summarizing the reading material; a culture collector, who is responsible for finding and comparing the similarities and differences between the reading materials and Chinese culture; a real life connector, who is responsible for exploring the phenomena related to real life or one's own life from the reading materials; a word master, who is responsible for solving the key and difficult points in the reading material or the words and phrases with important or special meanings, and explaining the reasons; and a passage person, who is responsible for exploring and explaining the passages with important or special meanings or beautifully written passages in the reading material.

In the ninth Guangdong provincial preliminary and final competitions, because of the 10-minute teaching and time constraints, Zhong Xicheng reduced and localized the six roles according to different texts, generally using four roles. One of the roles is an interviewer. This design of teaching activity allows students to interview students and achieves the effect of effective language output, which really implements the student-centered teaching concept.

4. Lesson Polishing and Reflection
According to different texts and self-selected teaching methods, the purpose of countless lesson polishing is to apply teaching methods to reading teaching, to use microlecture teaching and evaluation (self-evaluation, mutual evaluation, teacher guidance) at a fixed frequency, such as once or twice a week, to reflect and improve, to deal with the main teaching tasks and details, and to find out a set of procedural knowledge of micro-teaching.

As it suggests, procedural knowledge is the key to this ability to teach reading. According to Gagne, an American psychologist, procedural knowledge includes two subcategories: mental skills and cognitive strategies [Guo,2004]. Mental skills are the procedural knowledge of using concepts and rules to deal with external affairs, which are mainly used to process external information. Cognitive strategies, also known as strategic knowledge, are procedural knowledge that uses concepts and rules to regulate and control one's own processing activities.

To become a mature English teacher in basic education, a young pre-service English major student needs to acquire procedural knowledge in English teaching, that is, routines, which are full of personal style and scientific teaching routines. Through several weeks to several months of short-term training, polishing lessons and guidance from the teachers, the acquisition of procedural knowledge can be judged by the following criteria:

1) Is the main information of the text handled accurately for different texts?
2) Can the teaching methods be used flexibly?
3) Can a 10-minute microlecture be fully prepared in an hour?
4) Are the key and difficult points of the text handled properly?
5) Does the teaching process at the lecture site have ups and downs?
6) Does it achieve the expected teaching effect?

5. Instructional design
Teaching design is the conception and plan of arranging the elements of teaching in an orderly manner and determining a suitable teaching program according to the requirements of the National New Curriculum Standards (2017 edition) and the characteristics of the teaching objects, which generally includes teaching objectives, teaching key points, teaching methods, teaching steps and time allocation. Through a series of teaching theory learning and teaching practice, pre-service English teaching students should

have a full understanding of the whole teaching concept and teaching process and be able to write teaching designs independently.

The clarity or otherwise of the teaching objectives, the prominence of the teaching key points, the fit of the teaching methods to the textual material, the beginning and end of the teaching steps, and the proper allocation of time are all issues that basically enable the pre-service students to write a teaching design after optimization of the lesson polishing. The common problem is the in-depth understanding and diversification of teaching methods and the realization of the deeper educational concept behind the teaching methods. Knowing what it is and why it is. How to design teaching activities, interactive situations and time arrangements are also noteworthy issues. Appropriate charts, Mind Maps, Thinking Maps, timelines, fish-bone diagrams and so on can be designed to solve specific problems in an abstract way.

6. Reading Teaching Recording and Teaching Competitions

In recent years, the Teaching Skills Competition of Normal Undergraduate Students in Guangdong Province (English Group) requires the submission of English teaching videos to participate in the provincial preliminary selection, so the recording requirements of teaching videos are high, including 2-minute general lecture of the lesson and 10-minute real lecture, and the evaluation is measured from the teaching process, teaching skills, teaching innovation and comprehensive performance.

On-site teaching competition is extremely demanding for the contestants. Solid basic language skills, skilled teaching skills, novel and mature teaching methods, orderly organization of classroom activities and question-and-answer sessions all test the contestants from various schools in Guangdong Province. The idea and quality of one-hour lesson preparation are particularly important. Unfortunately, the final performance of many contestants is no different from the teaching video of the preliminary contest. Because they are too skilled and the pace of classroom processing is too fast, they do not add some appropriate small activities according to the adjustment on the spot.

Taking Zhang Lin, a contestant from Zhaoqing University in the 8th Teaching Skills Competition of Normal Undergraduate Students in Guangdong Province (English Group), as an example, the judges were tired after a day's evaluation when they drew lots to the last few in the final. Zhang Lin's temperament of normal students is very prominent, and the teacher's aura is full, which is closely related to the cultivation of Yanyuan Class in Zhaoqing University. The YanYuan Class of Zhaoqing University is an important benchmark for the construction of new normal schools in Guangdong Province.

Zhang Lin used scaffolding teaching in reading teaching, building scaffolds step by step, guiding students to carry out interactive language output activities, and accomplishing the learning objectives at one level after another. When she communicated with her instructor after the competition, her answer was, "For the whole class, nothing but students are in my eyes". In the whole short 10 minutes, she devoted herself to the "student-centered" teaching activities, which had a strong appeal and got the highest score in the whole competition.

Zhong Xicheng, a contestant from Zhaoqing College, adopted the reading circle teaching method in the 9th Teaching Skills Competition of Normal Undergraduate Students in Guangdong Province (English Group), conquered the judges from various middle schools in Guangdong Province and won the first prize. As the final judge, Chen Xiaojun, the hostess of the Famous Teacher's Studio in Guangdong Province and the teacher of Zhanjiang No.1 Middle School, commented that:

Zhong Xicheng, the No.8 contestant from Zhaoqing University, uses the concept of English learning activities put forward by the New Curriculum Standard to design students' language output activities and establish a link between students' learning and life application. "Suppose you are going to climb the Ruiz; what will you bring to avoid the trouble Leonardo met?" Please design a climbing plan to make sure your journey is safe and sound. The reading teaching activities designed by Zhang Yuwei, the No.24 contestant from South China Normal University, are quite innovative, breaking through the conventional reading comprehension design of most contestants. Students are guided to find out the actions of fishermen to infer the whale's attitudes, and the language output activities of students are "Write a short thanks-giving letter to the fishermen". It tries to achieve the highest level of language output activities. The two students not only showed outstanding personal comprehensive ability but also perceived the importance of the college, the guidance of the tutor and the support of the team in the preparation process [Chen, 2021].

7. Conclusion

Reading teaching for English teacher-teaching students is closely related to their reading ability and reading level. How to change from learning to teaching, select appropriate teaching methods, fully demonstrate the success of the teaching process under the guidance of teaching methods, and can be recognized and appreciated by the first-line senior teachers, bringing innovative ideas. As Chen Xiaojun pointed out in the judges' comments, "The general weakness of the contestants in the Ninth Teaching Skills

Competition is that they are limited to the surface understanding of the text analysis and fail to dig deeper into the text; their reading teaching design is routine, the cultural awareness is weak, and the thinking and implementation of the cultivation of students' thinking quality are lack of." [Chen, 2021], it is a scientific and spiralling self-improvement process for English teacher-teaching students from text analysis, thorough understanding of teaching methods, reflection on lessons, and scientific design to classroom teaching. Teachers' guidance of teaching skills follows the law of procedural knowledge, which can effectively help English normal students improve their reading teaching skills.

Under the guidance of the National New Curriculum Standard (2017 edition) and the construction of new normal schools in Guangdong Province, the acquisition of procedural knowledge in reading teaching for English teacher-teaching students has become a crucial consideration factor in the process of training talents, and the diversification of training modes for English normal students in Guangdong Province has been constantly innovated in the construction of new normal schools in the new era.

About the author: June 1971, female, native of Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province. Han nationality. Research direction: English teaching lecturer, postgraduate, M.A. in English and American literature, M.A. in Education, the person in charge of the first-class undergraduate course "Advanced English" in Guangdong Province, the rewarded excellent instructor of the 5th, 8th and 9th Teaching Skills Competition of Normal Undergraduate Students in Guangdong Province.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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