

Original Paper

The Application of Online Literature Circle in English Reading Teaching in Chinese Vocational Colleges

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Abstract

Reading teaching plays a crucial role in vocational college English. The ability to read proficiently has a significant impact on students' English performance. For a long time, cultivating students' reading ability is one of the important goals of English teaching. However, students in vocational colleges often struggle with their reading skills, as well as their cognitive abilities, cultural awareness, and learning capabilities. Through the exploration of literary reading, it has been discovered that the reading teaching mode of Literature Circle aligns well with the objectives of English reading teaching in vocational colleges. Based on this, the author conducted an in-depth investigation into the application of the online Literature Circle mode in English reading teaching and its impact on students' reading and learning abilities. This paper outlines the process of integrating the online Literature Circle mode into English reading teaching, and discusses its effects on students' reading and learning abilities. Experimental results have demonstrated that the Literature Circle teaching mode can enhance students' reading skills and learning capabilities. This research further enriches the Literature Circle teaching mode and provides valuable insights for front-line teachers in English reading teaching in vocational colleges.

Keywords

online teaching, Literature Circle, vocational college English reading

1. Introduction

1.1 The Negative Influence of the Traditional Teaching Mode on Reading Literacy

The current state of English reading teaching is unsatisfactory in terms of both quantity and quality

(Wang et al., 2021). Currently, most Chinese vocational colleges still adhere to the traditional teaching mode of English reading, which only focuses on theoretical knowledge and neglects practical application (Mu, 2021). Furthermore, it fails to consider the individual differences and learning characteristics of students. In this traditional model, teachers maintain a dominant position and dedicate a significant amount of time to teaching knowledge points, while ignoring the training of effective strategies and methods. Consequently, students can only read articles based on the explanations provided by teachers, resulting in a lack of comprehensive understanding and limited opportunities for active thinking and practice. This teaching method greatly hinders students' individual comprehension of reading materials, fosters excessive dependence on teachers, and dampens enthusiasm for English reading. Such a situation is detrimental to the development of students' reading literacy, fails to enhance their practical application abilities, and diminishes their interest and motivation. Additionally, in an effort to quickly improve students' reading performance, traditional reading teaching often resorts to monotonous and mechanical drills. The selection of reading materials is typically random and arbitrary. Many articles and reading materials in textbooks are based on abstract concepts and theories, lacking specific examples and application cases. Consequently, students find it challenging to understand and apply the knowledge they have acquired. In the long run, this approach easily leads to a loss of interest in reading, exacerbating the challenges faced in English reading teaching and hindering student development.

1.2 Reading Requirements' High Demand for the Online Environment

The conventional approach to teaching reading is characterized by a slow pace of knowledge acquisition because it is predominately based on the use of printed books and the explanations provided by teachers. The students have to either spend a significant amount of time travelling to the bookshop or the library to look for appropriate books, and then they have to either acquire knowledge by reading and taking notes, or wait for the direction and answers provided by the teachers. In addition, the conventional method of instructing reading can only offer a limited number of instructional materials and reference books, which are unable to satisfy the requirements that students have for a diverse range of reading resources. Internet users have access to a wealth of reading material that is both useful and varied. Reading material that is presented to students in the form of multimedia, photos, videos, and other formats is both more intuitive and vivid, which contributes to an improved learning effect. This enhances both the participation in learning and the effectiveness of that learning. Students can save time and effort by using search engines, electronic books, and other internet resources to swiftly access a significant amount of reading content. Students also need to be able to pick, analyze, and manage a vast variety of reading resources on their own. This places additional demands on students' capacity to engage in independent learning.

Online reading has supplanted reading from paper media as the primary mode of reading. Online teaching has been increasingly prevalent in the field of English education within vocational colleges as a result of the development of technology relating to networks. Educators need to actively study and

implement new teaching models and technology means in order to meet the reading needs of the Internet era. They also need to give more diverse reading materials and learning techniques, as well as foster students' independent learning ability and information literacy. The question of how to utilize the technology of "Internet + education" to help English reading teaching at vocational colleges is one that has to be investigated further. In this context, on the basis of teaching practice, we put forward an online Literature Circle English reading teaching model, design a flow chart, detail the operation steps, and improve the students' English reading interest as well as their reading ability. Our ultimate goal is to solve the problems that exist in the current English reading teaching in vocational colleges.

2. Literature Review

In 1994, the distinguished American scholar Professor Harvey Daniels made the first public suggestion of the idea that would later become known as the Literature Circle. A Literature Circle is a student-led reading discussion group in which all members of the group read the same material, such as short stories, poems, novels, or plays, and write a role sheet according to the role assignments that have been allocated to them. Every member is responsible for independently completing the readings both in and outside of class, and recording them in accordance with the responsibilities that have been allocated to them. The following step involved participants following a practice sheet for reading talks and holding regular group discussions in which everyone was requested to contribute their perspectives. When the group discussion is finished, the members of the group or groups within the group talk to one another about the reading and the conclusions of the discussion. At the end of the Literature Circle, each group will have the opportunity to switch members and re-select the books that they will read for the next cycle of the Literature Circle (Daniels, 1994).

The investigation of the Literature Circle and the relevant educational practice in other countries have both seen a great deal of success. The researchers Blum, Lipsett and Yocom (2002) used the Literature Circle teaching mode in mother tongue instruction, and they discovered that students were able to fully converse with one another while participating in the Literature Circle. Students can thus develop their thinking skills and their capacity to comprehend what they read to a certain degree by using this form of instruction. Anderson (2004) used the Literature Circle in the context of the subject of special education. Shelton-Strong (2012) utilized the Literature Circle when instructing pupils in a second language. She noted that the format sparked students' interest in studying and boosted their sense of self-assurance. In recent years, with the advocacy of student-centered, cooperative learning, and independent learning, the research on Literature Circle in China has gradually increased, and more and more academics have begun to pay attention to the application significance of Literature Circle teaching model in China's teaching. This growth in research on Literature Circle in China can be attributed to the advocacy of student-centered, cooperative learning, and independent learning. Both Liu and Jin (2006) agreed that the Literature Circle reading mode, which was student-centered and can increase students' self-confidence and self-awareness as a result, played a beneficial function in the

Chinese teaching process. Lv (2013) selected students majoring in English as the research objects for his study of the Literature Circle teaching mode. The results of this study showed that the Literature Circle teaching mode not only increased the interest of college students in reading, but it also helped enhance their writing and listening abilities. Xiao and Long (2016) implemented the Literature Circle in the context of collegiate Chinese instruction with the goal of assisting individuals in better comprehending the model from both a theoretical and a practical perspective.

According to the findings of researchers from both inside and outside of China, the Literature Circle not only helps to bolster the primary role that students play in the teaching practice, but it also encourages the growth of students' comprehensive literacy. This paper investigates the use of an online Literature Circle in college English classes and breathes new life into practical English teaching.

3. Method

The author makes an effort to incorporate the instructional method of Literature Circle into English novel reading courses. In addition, the author implements the teaching design of *Escape*, a masterpiece written by Canadian author Alice Munro (1931 -), who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013, in order to investigate how to carry out teaching activities in a way that gives full play to the benefits of the Literature Circle teaching method.

3.1 Text Analysis

The novel *Escape* first appeared in print in 2004, and ever since then, it has garnered a great deal of interest in the literary community. The work is comprised of eight short stories, each of which is set in a Canadian village and introduces readers to the lives of everyday women living there, as well as their private thoughts and feelings. The theme of this collection of eight stories, which appear to be unrelated to one another at first glance, is women's resistance to routine daily existence and their longing for passion. Every one of the female characters is a denial of average people who live in the crevices of everyday life and a rejection of existence in its most boring form. As regular people, they have the desire to live a brilliant life, the want for life to the extent that summer flowers have that thirst, and the optimism that the future will be better. The events depicted in *Escape* are taken from the everyday lives of regular ladies who live in a town with a dark secret and a tragic ending. While Munro gives readers with a calm and objective account of the particulars of everyday life, terrible fate seeps into every nook and cranny of that life. The bewilderment and struggle of women in the basic crisis life that Munro describes is brought out more strongly, and it generates an indescribable melancholy due to the writer's use of a calm and restrained brushwork.

3.2 Research Process

The online Literature Circle teaching mode is broken into five steps: picking reading materials—setting up a Literature Circle—assigning roles and filling in role sheets—independent reading and online group discussion—evaluation and summary. At the completion of the last phase, students can re-form a new Literature Circle, choose new reading materials, and start a new cycle. In the whole process,

students are the focus and the subject of implementation, and teachers play a guiding and auxiliary role. The specific design methodology is as follows:

(1) Picking reading materials

The author instructs English Reading, a required subject for English majors at a vocational college in Zhanjiang, which is located in Guangdong Province. The instruction was scheduled to take place during the first semester of the second year. There were a total of 32 teaching hours and 2 credits spread among the 16 weeks that made up a teaching week. Forty students served as the learning object. In the process of instructing this class, the teacher selected 32 English readings for students to read based on the teaching objectives and course requirements. Next, she took into account the students' current level of English as well as their degree of interest in learning, and she created a comprehensive reading list. The majority of the reading materials were of well-known works from important English-speaking countries or regions, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia. These works, which may be brief or lengthy passages, were included. The Literature Circle method required the students to select one piece to read each week, and then they discussed what they read.

(2) Setting up a Literature Circle

The students were organized and directed by the teacher to form groups and then built up a Literature Circle in those groups. There would be four students in each group. Because some students might not be familiar with the specific steps of Literature Circle, and also because the teacher chose the reading materials for the first time, this means that each reading group selected the same novel and read it in the same manner. This made it easier for the class to have a collective discussion and collect data, and it also eliminated any confusion among the students about how Literature Circle works. To ensure that students have an overall and thorough comprehension of the material, it was important for the whole class to finish the reading assignment for the current week before the beginning of each new class session.

(3) Assigning roles and filling in role sheets

The four students took on the following roles: Discussion Leader, Character Explorer, Literary Person, and Plot Drawer. The teacher could adapt or supplement the part, give play to the varied intelligence of students, and promote their enthusiasm to read in order to ensure that each and every student was able to benefit from the role. The teacher distributed a pre-made role sheet once every member of the group had finished defining their respective roles and duties. In addition, the teacher created the role sheet by basing its contents on the textual content of the assigned reading material as well as the responsibilities of each individual character. Each role sheet contained a description of the obligations associated with the role, as well as the tasks that needed to be done during the phase in which the group discussed the topic. After finishing the reading assigned to them individually, the four members of each group fill out the role sheet.

(4) Independent reading and online group discussion

When students are reading, the teacher urged them to take notes, record terms they didn't understand, great expressions, personal feelings, or article remarks. Additionally, the teacher encouraged students to choose themes freely and offer comments with confidence. Following the completion of their individual role diaries, the members then participated in internal group conversations through the use of online video sent over the chosen network platform. All members had the opportunity to voice their perspectives in group discussions, share the results of their reading. During the process of the discussion, the members of the Literature Circle should pay close attention to the remarks that were being made by the other members of the group, took notes on the significant content, and participated actively in the conversation when it was their chance to do so. The teacher should listen in on the conversations of all of the different student groups and took notes.

Using Munro's *Escape* as an illustration, the teacher delegated the following responsibilities to the four members:

Discussion Leader: the person who was in charge of guiding the conversation within the literary circle; created open-ended questions and did post-discussion analysis; helped the group communicate the content of the text while also maintaining discipline. For instance, other members were led through an analysis of the reasons for women's flight from the three perspectives of the heroine's personal reasons, the heroine's living environment, and female awareness.

The Character Explorer selected grammatically correct sentences and paragraphs. The members of the circle should listen to him or her read aloud, and he or she should also explain why chose the particular sentence or paragraph. For instance, when analyzing the language form and semantic transmission in *Escape* using Halliday's language meta-function theory, it was discovered that Munro's wonderful language art, which appeared to be plain and simple language, actually had hidden waves that reflected the powerful ideology of women's courage to resist under the patriarchal society.

The student working towards the Literary Luminary illustrated the storyline of a story through the use of tables, charts, and graphics. He or she ensured that the story's plot was an exact reflection of the text. Use a table, for instance, to list the many kinds of males that are about the heroines in *Escape*.

Plot Tracer would be able to associate things that were unrelated to the text but were similar to what was in it. Consider both the parallels and the divergences.

After that, the teacher led the communication and sharing among the different groups of students, as well as organized them so that they would concentrate on the most important aspects of the class discussion. This procedure was genuinely intended to summarize and sublimate on the basis of group discussion. It was also intended to guide students to explore the connotation of the book, experience the simplest human emotions described in the article, and feel the immense effect of the beauty of human nature. Students had the opportunity to be exposed to a more diverse understanding and to experience a manner of thinking that was multi-layered and multi-perspective when they participated in inter-group conversations in the classroom.

4. Result

Following the class discussion, the teachers provided students with a concise summary of the entire process of reading activities and a targeted evaluation. Evaluations should steer clear of providing direct comments based on students' scores and instead place an emphasis on students' capacity for self-reflection and progress. In order to summarize the phased learning results of students and provide suggestions, the teacher used a combination of quantitative evaluation and qualitative analysis as the basis for student evaluation. This was accomplished by the teacher listening in on intra-group and inter-group discussions as well as reading the role diary that had been completed by each student. In addition, when carrying out the reading teaching activities associated with the Literature Circle, the teacher should also pay attention to extending students' cultural knowledge and broadening their horizons. One example of this would be boosting the introduction of Munro, the author of *Escape*, as well as expanding her life. After the students had participated in the online Literature Circle discussion, the teacher would conduct an analysis and explanation of the students' lack of comprehension, as well as the most important and challenging points. The teacher would also assist the students in mastering the usage rules of vocabulary, sentences, and grammar, and then allowed the students to further strengthen and consolidate this law through reading. Many students had expressed that the Literature Circle had provided them with a relaxed and unrestricted setting in which to read; as a result, both their enthusiasm for reading and their level of participation in the activity had significantly increased, and they had a deeper and more comprehensive comprehension of the material when communicating with other students.

After the students had completed the reading and discussion of *Escape*, the teacher summarized and evaluated, supplemented information, and extended. This would bring an end to one cycle of Literature Circle, which indicated that another round of Literature Circle activities will likely be started very soon. At the end of the class, the teacher questioned the students to determine whether or not they had any uncertainties regarding the entirety of the Literature Circle reading process, and then she responded to the students' inquiries through either online or live instruction.

The author used the reading test paper, the questionnaire, and the interview outline at the end of the semester in order to test whether or not the Literature Circle teaching mode has an influence on students' reading ability and English learning ability. The data from the questionnaire and the test taken before reading the test paper were gathered before the experiment, and the data from the questionnaire, the test taken after reading the test paper, and the interview were gathered afterwards. The findings indicate that the majority of students are able to embrace the instructional method of Literature Circle and that they benefit much as a result of learning through this mode. When students' scores on English reading tests taken before and after the intervention are compared, it can be shown that the students' reading scores have improved, and their reading ability has also developed as a result of the intervention.

5. Discussion

To begin, students need to have a shift in their mindset on the process of learning English. Students have spent a significant amount of time in classes that utilize conventional teaching strategies, and as a result, they are accustomed to passively absorbing the information that is imparted to them by their instructors. At this point, students need to modify the idea of something in exchange for nothing and take an active part in the activities that take place in the classroom. Students also need to overcome inertia and dependence, engage in proactive problem-solving regarding learning challenges, and not rely on the answers provided by others. In order to make the most of cooperative learning, students need to work on their capacity to cooperate with others, as well as enhance their communication and expression skills.

Second, teachers must abandon the conventional way of thinking about the instructional process. In the conventional method of instructing, the teacher does all of the necessary preparation for the class, both the questions and the answers are already planned out in advance, and the role of the students is limited to simply passively accepting the information. When using this kind of instruction, students frequently find that, after reading an article, they are unable to comprehend its logical structure or the goal of the author. In the online Literature Circle teaching mode, students engage in open conversation in intimate settings and make extensive use of the resources provided by the network in order to obtain the maximum amount of information possible. In addition to simply imparting information, teachers take on the roles of organizers, facilitators, and guides. The role of the teacher is to direct the students towards the desired output and assist them in making necessary adjustments at the appropriate moments, such as when the students are on the verge of veering off course.

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