

A Study on the Application of Input Theory to Reading Instruction in Vocational College

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Abstract—Mainly based on the theories of reading, Krashen's Input Hypothesis and other theories related to input theory, the author made a research on the influence of different input on reading ability. A teaching experiment was taken by the author to find out whether increasing comprehensible input can improve the reading ability of students in vocational college. The overall analysis shows that increasing the reading input can really improve the students' reading ability.

Index Terms—comprehensible input, reading ability, students in vocational college

Reading, as one of the basic and principle means of language acquisition, especially for English acquisition in China, has received extensive and constant attention by linguists, researchers and teachers of English. Thus, reading ability is the focus of the works to English teachers. The research into second language acquisition has arisen increasing attention since 1970. Just as Vanpattern (1996) pointed out that input is the most important concept in the process of acquiring a second language, a lot of linguists and researchers have attempted researches on input, of which the most valuable theory is Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and we can gain a great deal of enlightenments from it in second language acquisition. This paper is a research on the application of Input Theory to English reading instruction in vocational college.

It is generally acknowledged that the purpose of English teaching is to develop the ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. The view is widely accepted that reading ability is the most important one among the five abilities. By reading, one can increase vocabulary, enrich language knowledge, diversify experience and broaden view sight, moreover, the students' reading ability will make necessary foundation for the further study. So, reading is not only the main English learning purposes but also an effective means of learning English for all the second language learners. It can be said that improving the reading ability of the students is the key to improve English teaching quality. In the vocational English syllabus, we can see clearly that English is a compulsory subject for vocational students, and the teaching objective focus on raising the comprehensive ability in English, students should have the ability of understanding and translating related business information in English. All of this is inseparable from the reading comprehension ability.

With the development of internationalization and commercialization in modern times, students in vocational college are facing much more challenges in the requirement of an integrated ability that includes reading. (Han Baocheng, 2002) But the traditional teaching method in vocational college is not applicable to the new environment. Furthermore, Reading makes a large proportion in Practical English Test for Colleges Level A and Level B which the college students are required to pass. While Reading comprehension is precisely the weak point of many students, teachers in vocational colleges always impact English grammar knowledge instead of cultivate students ability in reading. It's the teacher not the student who centered in class, and the students are always in the passive accepting learning situation. Moreover, the learning materials are rather dull and the difficulty of them are not adapted for students. All of these limit the development of students' English reading ability.

As is known to all, an efficient reader reads fast and gets more information, while a inefficient one reads slowly and gets less information. That's due to the difference of the competence of reading comprehension and reading speed. the reading speed can be increased by the improvement of reading comprehension. Thus it is important for teachers to improve the ability of reading comprehension. As it says "the ability of reading, is actually referring to the ability of reading comprehension." (Hu Chundong & Dai Zhongxin, 1996, P.48)

There are two processes in reading: word recognition and comprehension. The former one refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. Comprehension refers to the process which makes sense of the words, sentences and contexts. Readers understand the written text by making use of vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, background knowledge. So the process of comprehension is basically the connecting of old knowledge to new knowledge. In the process the reader's prior experience and the cues for the writer are used to infer the meaning of the written text. Rumelhart (1977) has a widely accepted view on reading definition: reading comprehension is the result of neither a bottom-up nor top-down process, but rather the product of interaction between two.

Since input plays an important role in language learning, the following questions come next: "What are the standards or high quality input?", "What kind of input is most helpful to the language learner?" Krashen (1982) gave a relatively

clear illustration for the features of optimal input: Comprehensibility, Interestingness and relativity, Non- grammatical sequence and Sufficiency. Actually the quantity of input is the main concern of the optimal Input in this hypothesis, since the big difference between foreign language which is learning in the second language learning environment and in the mother tongue environment lies in the amount of input that is available to the learner. Only given enough input, learners can actively intake the knowledge of language, and then gradually build the capacity of language in order to express their ideas. Much of the input research has verified the effectiveness of comprehensible input in large quantity, just like Krashen has said, “the more comprehensible input, the greater second language proficiency.”, “lack of comprehensible input delays language acquisition.” Krashen (1985)

It has been proved that input has crucial relevance to reading comprehension. But research about how input affect the reading ability of vocational students is rarely little. Students in vocational college have their specialty from other college students, they have lower ability on reading comprehension and lower motivation of learning, so the study on their reading ability and the comprehensible input will be of universal significance for teachers in vocational college. The study on the relationship between the comprehensible input and the improving of reading ability is a fundamental and theoretical research work for teachers, finding out whether comprehensible input can improve reading ability for vocational students will provide scientific basis for making educational policy. Taking into account the special nature of vocational students, the research also aims to find what are the most suitable materials for them, and whether such most suitable materials can improve their reading ability by the greatest extent.

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The study took 70 non-English majors from two classes who all entered Dezhou Vocational College in September, 2009 as the subjects. Class One is the control class and Class Two is the experimental class. Test is an effective method by which teachers usually use as a measure of results of teaching and learning. A pre-test was conducted at the very beginning of the first term in 2010 in order to test whether the reading ability of students participated in the teaching experiment were at the same level. The test lasted an hour and all of the test papers were distributed and recovered by the author. It include 4 reading comprehension. of which 2 were from Practical English Test for Colleges Level A and 2 were from Level B.

TABLE1:
ANALYSIS OF PRETEST SCORES OF THE TWO CLASSES

Group	N	Mean	Sd	df	Mean Difference	t-value	Sig
Class1	35	8.02	2.409	67.443	0.01	0.201	0.989
Class2	35	8.01	2.478				

As is shown in table 4.1 the average score of Class one (8.02) is a little higher than that of Class Two (8.01), The mean difference between Class One and Class Two is 0.01, the t-value is 0.201, the level of significance is 0.989($p>0.05$), The statistics and analysis above indicate that there is no significant difference from the students in the two classes on their reading comprehensible ability. That is, the students in the two classes (one control class and one experimental class) are at the same level in their reading comprehension ability before the experiment.

We know the students in the two classes have the similar English education background. In addition, they were all taught by the author in reading class through the period of experiment.

The students in class two are required to read a passage from the course book for PETS (level 3) everyday from Monday to Friday each week. They are required to read one passage and then do the reading comprehension questions in the passages, The topics of the passages which they read include technology, economics, education, literature, environmental, culture etc. The words in each passage were about 600 to 800, which are a little more than the words in the passages from textbook used in class. New words and expressions in each passage were marked and provided explanations to help the students understand the passage better. To make sure all the students can complete the reading task every day, the teacher checked them in every class. The time for check was about five minutes and was given by the teacher (author) in the form of asking the students to retell the general idea of the passage assigned or asking some questions related to the passage. Most of the students could accomplish the assignment of reading five passages a week. The experiment lasted from February, 2010 to July 2010. At the end of the term, the students in the two classes took a posttest on reading comprehension, the scores of the two classes were collected and then were put into computer and were analyzed by SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), the results are in the following table:

TABLE 2:
ANALYSIS OF POSTTEST SCORES OF THE TWO CLASSES

Group	N	Mean	Sd	df	Mean Difference	t-value	Sig
Class1	35	8.22	2.407	68.721	-1.10	-2.531	0.021
Class2	35	9.03	2.372				

We can learn from the table above that the average score of Class One in the posttest is 8.22, while that of Class Two is 9.03 in the posttest, and their t-value is -1.781 and the level of significance is 0.034 ($p < 0.05$), this indicates that there is significant difference between the two class. It can be said that the reading comprehension ability of students in Class Two (experimental class one) has been improved after the teaching experiment.

It is obvious that the ability of reading comprehension of the experimental class has improved more than that of the control class after being provided additional reading material (input) as the everyday assignment. This results show that the students' reading comprehension ability can be improved by increasing the quantity of reading material. Increasing the amount of reading is indeed helpful to improve the reading ability of students.

Krashen emphasized the importance of the quantity of input repeatedly. Learners can receive lots of language knowledge by a large number of input and then consolidate the knowledge to master it in the end. Lack of reading will hinder the progress of ability of reading comprehension. In teaching practice, teachers should try to increase the amount of reading material to students, maximize the amount of reading, that will improve the reading speed in order to improve students' ability of reading comprehension and then improve English study. Allow for the limitation of time that students can use in English learning, teachers should help students grasp appropriate way of reading, improve their reading speed, encourage them to develop reading habit. Once the reading habit develops, students can use the limited time rationally to read actively.

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She has been teaching college English since she worked in Dezhou Vocational College since 1995, several books written by her have been published in these years, such as *Practical College English* which was published by Nankai University Press. The current research interest for her is Spoken Teaching for vocational students.

Ms Yang is a member of Vocational Education Association of Shandong Province, and she has got an Advanced Certificate of ETTBL. She has been given many awards for excellent teaching by Dezhou Vocational College.