The Use of Schema Theory in the Teaching of Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

As we all know, the ability of reading comprehension always plays a vital role to improve learners’ comprehensive quality of students, thus how to improve learners’ reading ability is increasingly becoming an important part of researcher for English education. According to researching for many years, Schema Theory is considered as a good strategy to solve the problems that are met in the learning procedures, such as lacking of background knowledge and less attractive courses. To improve learners’ reading competence, the author intends to adopt the schema theory in the process of English teaching. Schema theory focuses on the content theory, linguistic theory and formal schema. There are three phrases for the process of reading, and the author would research how to combine the schema theory into these three phrases. And the author draws a conclusion that the schema theory is beneficial to train students’ reading strategies and improves their reading academic score.

Keywords

The Schema Theory, Teaching of Reading Comprehension

1. Introduction

1.1 Formulating the question

The specific aims of English teaching are that learners are expected to equip with language ability, cultural awareness, thinking ability and learning ability after learning English courses. Furthermore, Wang Qiang reported that the teaching of English reading comprehension plays a vital role to improve learners’ key competence, especially language ability, cultural awareness and thinking ability (Wang Qiang, 2017). Most of the English tests in China, the scores of reading comprehension accounts for a large part of all the questions on a whole paper, thus it can be seen that improving reading ability is very important. However, though teachers and students may put a lot of efforts into reading, most of them didn’t attain ideal results on reading.

1.2 Purpose and Significance of the Study

The aim of this paper is to introducing schema theory and how to combine schema theory and reading comprehension. Based on the leaning of schema theory, students can increase confidence to their own culture, and it’s also good for students to develop their reading ability. And using schemas to teaching reading also can make classes more interesting.

Firstly, this study is to research a new model of English reading that combines the schema theory and English reading teaching. Based on the schema theory, teachers would pay more attention on the cultural background of students, so in the process of reading, students will combine their previous background knowledge and life experience with information to activate the schema in mind and lay a good foundation for understanding. Secondly, this study will provide a specific guidance for English reading teaching in the middle school. Last but not least, this pa-
per would provide a reference for the further research in English teaching based on schema theory.

2. Problem identification

2.1 Inappropriate Teaching Method

Nowadays, though researchers pay more attention to create new and effective teaching methods, many teachers, especially old teachers, are accustomed to use traditional teaching methods like bottom-up model or up-down model. And some teachers choose to teach reading directly without supplementing background about the passage to students, so this traditional way makes students lack of enthusiasm to learning reading. Furthermore, some teachers even teach a new passage by translating words by words or sentence by sentence and only ask some questions to guide students or to check if students get the general idea or specific information. These traditional methods may not be suitable for the current social environment and the requirement of New English Curriculum for students.

2.2 Ignoring the teaching of reading strategy

During the process of English teaching, some teachers don’t realize the importance of usage of reading strategies in the process of reading teaching, so that they would ignore training students in reading strategy. Introducing some reading strategies can make students be aware of how to reading an article effectively, for example, they can know that they would read an article phrase by clause rather than word by word. It’s also a good way for students to develop their key competences in the process of English learning.

3. Classifications of Schema

Though different researchers has classified schema into different kinds, there still are three main classifications of schema, content schema, linguistic schema, and formal schema.

3.1 Content Schema

Content schema refers to cultural background knowledge concerning history, culture, economy, customs and previous cultural experiences. It is relevant with life experience, cultural background, topic familiarity and accumulated knowledge. Based on different cultural background, some words have different meanings in Chinese. Zhang Dan reported that an article not only reflects the author’s thoughts and feelings, but also reflects specific cultural backgrounds (Zhang Dan, 2021). Furthermore, Hudson reported that content schema can be activated by pre-reading activities (Hudson, 1982). And Anderson reported that cultural background knowledge plays a positive role in reading comprehension (Anderson, 2000). To sum up, content schema is important to reading comprehension. Students will feel much easier after knowing the background knowledge of the article. It would effectively avoid a phenomenon that students failed to comprehend the articles for the lack of relevant knowledge.

3.2 Linguistic Schema

Linguistic schema may refer to some basic knowledge of language, such as vocabularies, structures, phrases and grammar. All of them are the basic elements of sentences of phrases. If students failed to master them, it would result in the failure of reading comprehension. It’s necessary for students to accumulate more linguistic knowledge, and teachers are expected to instruct students to master more and more linguistic knowledge. Though linguistic knowledge is necessary for students to comprehend reading, teachers can’t exaggerate the role of linguistic schema ignoring the other schema. Traditional teaching may pay more attention on words or phrase. According to many researches, we can find that the teaching effect of traditional teaching method isn’t very good. Though both teacher and students put lots of effort in reading comprehension, students still fail to develop their reading ability. The reason is that traditional teaching method only concentrate on basic elements of language. That is to say, linguistic knowledge is the foundation of reading comprehension but teachers can’t exaggerate the role of it.

3.3 Formal Schema

Formal schema refers to rhetorical structures and organizational forms of reading texts. Carrel and Eisterhold reported that formal schema is made up of two parts: the first part is the coherence of organization; the second part is the rhetorical containing text genre (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1987). In a word, formal schema includes the knowledge of different text as well as the understanding of different text types using the text organization. Reading texts
can be divided into different genres based on different structures like poetry, letter, narration and so on. Students can comprehend the reading text easily if they are familiar with the structure of the reading text. It also can help students to adjust their own reading speed, for example, when students read an expository text, they can get the main idea of each paragraph by reading the first sentence and the last sentence of every paragraph.

4. Problem Solutions

Teachers can activate students’ knowledge or experience about reading article by using schema theory before reading teaching. And then during the reading class, teachers need to help students to build new schema. Finally, after having reading class, teachers are expected to adopt some activities to consolidate knowledge.

4.1 Pre-reading-Activate Schema

In the Pre-reading phrase, English teachers should design different activities in order to activate previous knowledge. Each student has their own experience and knowledge before the class, which is useful to understand reading comprehension. And using some activities can activate students’ previous knowledge, so teachers are expected to consciously build a connection between the new knowledge and the previous knowledge to make that students are ready to acquire new knowledge. And the pre-reading phrases can not only activate previous activities, but also stimulate students’ interests.

For example, before the reading teaching of “A Trip on ‘The True North”, teachers are expected to enrich students’ content schema by airing videos or displaying some pictures about Canada. And then teachers can ask students some questions about the Canada to stimulate the interests of students, such as “where is the capital of Canada? What’s the national flower of Canada? What’s the national animal of Canada?” According to these questions, students are equipped with basic cultural background of this passage, and students also can predict the main story of this passage by analyzing the title.

4.2 While-reading-Enrich Schema

The aim of reading is to process the information of passage and understand the main idea. In the While-reading phrase, teachers need to instruct their students to find linking words and main information of the reading text to form a framework. And then students can detect or predict the information of this passage with the framework. According to the framework, they also can find some parts which they are not familiar with. And teachers are expected to construct students to read this article by some reading strategies, such as skimming and scanning. It’s helpful for students to develop their reading ability and train reading strategies.

For example, teachers can design some questions like “How does the author organize the passage? In what order?”, and the ask students to find the answers of these questions. Students may conclude the travelling route. Teachers also can design some activities that combine scanning and skimming, allowing students to answer the information of Canada.

4.3 Post-reading-Consolidate Schema

The main aim of post-reading activities is to consolidate the schema they’ve learned. During post-reading phrase, students are expected to use linguistic schema, the content schema they have learned in this reading class. There are many activities can be used in the stage of post-reading, such as discussing, retelling and abbreviating. Each one of them enriches students’ new linguistic schema and content schema from different aspects. When students discuss with others, they can combine their own experience with knowledge they’ve learned, this activity can deepen their understanding of this article and enrich students’ linguistic schema. Retelling and abbreviating require that students can clarify the relationship between the crucial idea and supporting information. At the same time, retelling and abbreviating are helpful for them to consolidate the formal schema of the reading context and enrich linguistic schema and content schema to a large extent.

For example, in the phrase of post-reading, teachers can divide students into many groups, then give them a topic “the similarities and differences between China and Canada”. Students should make dialogues with their partner, and they can incorporate their own experience into the dialogues.

5. Conclusion

Reading is an important way for junior high school students to master English knowledge and skills, and it is also
an important part of language input. At the same time, it’s the responsibility of teachers to cultivate students’ interest in reading and help them master effective reading strategies. Students play an important and positive role in reading with schema theory. Therefore, in the process of reading teaching, teachers are expected to rationally use the three theories of schema theory. English reading teaching based on the schema theory can stimulate students’ learning interests by some activities, and this way can improve student’s reading competence. Based on the paper, the author can draw a conclusion that schema theory is a feasible method for English reading teaching. It exerts a positive role in developing student’s reading strategies. And in the process of English teaching, English teachers need to update their teaching methods with the change of student’s cognitive level.

References