
Original Research Article

Analyzing the difficulties and countermeasures of college students in advanced English academic reading

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Abstract: This paper delves into the challenges that college students encounter in advanced English academic reading and proposes corresponding countermeasures. Through literature review, questionnaire surveys, and case studies, it identifies key difficulties such as vocabulary barriers, complex sentence structures, unfamiliar cultural backgrounds, and inadequate reading strategies. Based on these findings, targeted solutions are suggested to enhance students' academic reading abilities and improve their overall English proficiency.

Keywords: advanced English; academic reading; difficulties; countermeasures

1. Introduction

Advanced English academic reading is an essential component of college English education, playing a pivotal role in cultivating students' critical thinking, research capabilities, and cross-cultural communication skills. However, numerous college students face significant difficulties in this area, which not only affects their academic performance but also hinders their future professional development. This paper aims to analyze the specific difficulties students encounter in advanced English academic reading and provide practical countermeasures to overcome these challenges.

2. Literature review

Previous studies have extensively explored the factors influencing college students' English academic reading. Some researchers have pointed out that vocabulary size and proficiency are crucial determinants of reading comprehension (Nation, 2001). A limited vocabulary can lead to difficulties in understanding the meaning of texts, especially when dealing with academic articles that contain specialized terms. Others have emphasized the importance of syntactic knowledge, arguing that complex sentence structures in academic writing can pose a challenge for students who lack sufficient grammatical awareness (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Additionally, cultural background knowledge has been identified as a significant factor affecting reading comprehension, as students may struggle to interpret texts that are embedded in unfamiliar cultural contexts (Byram, 1997).

3. Methodology

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties faced by college students in advanced English academic reading, this study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining questionnaire surveys and case studies. A total of 200 college students from different majors participated in the questionnaire survey, which aimed to collect data on their reading habits, perceived difficulties, and strategies used in academic reading. Subsequently, 10 students were selected for in-depth case studies, involving interviews and text analysis, to further explore the underlying reasons for their reading difficulties.

4. Findings

4.1. Vocabulary barriers

The questionnaire results revealed that a large proportion of students (75%) considered vocabulary as

the most significant obstacle in advanced English academic reading. Many students reported that they often encountered unfamiliar words and phrases, which disrupted their reading flow and comprehension. The case studies further confirmed that students with a limited vocabulary tended to rely heavily on dictionaries, which not only slowed down their reading speed but also prevented them from developing effective reading strategies.

4.2. Complex sentence structures

Another major difficulty identified by the students was the complexity of sentence structures in academic articles. Over 60% of the respondents indicated that they had trouble understanding long and intricate sentences, especially those containing multiple clauses and subordinate structures. The case studies showed that students often struggled to identify the main idea of a sentence and to parse the relationships between different parts, leading to misunderstandings and confusion.

4.3. Unfamiliar cultural backgrounds

Cultural background knowledge also emerged as a critical factor affecting students' academic reading. Many students (55%) admitted that they had difficulty interpreting texts that were based on unfamiliar cultural contexts, such as historical events, social norms, and values. The case studies revealed that students often made incorrect assumptions or misinterpretations due to their lack of cultural awareness, which affected their overall comprehension of the texts.

4.4. Inadequate reading strategies

Finally, the study found that a significant number of students (65%) lacked effective reading strategies for academic articles. Many students reported that they read texts passively, without actively engaging with the content or using appropriate strategies such as skimming, scanning, and inferencing. The case studies showed that students who did not use reading strategies effectively tended to have lower reading comprehension scores and to spend more time on reading tasks.

5. Countermeasures

5.1. Enhancing vocabulary acquisition

To overcome vocabulary barriers, students should adopt a multi-faceted approach to vocabulary learning. This includes using vocabulary learning apps, reading extensively in English, and participating in vocabulary-building activities such as word games and quizzes. Teachers can also play a crucial role by providing vocabulary lists, explaining word formation rules, and encouraging students to use new words in context.

5.2. Improving syntactic awareness

To help students better understand complex sentence structures, teachers should incorporate grammar instruction into their reading classes. This can involve analyzing sentence structures, identifying key grammatical elements, and practicing sentence parsing exercises. Additionally, students can be encouraged to read aloud and to translate sentences to improve their syntactic awareness and comprehension.

5.3. Cultivating cultural awareness

To enhance students' cultural awareness, teachers can introduce cultural background information related to the reading materials, such as historical events, social norms, and values. Students can also be encouraged to watch English-language movies, read English-language newspapers and magazines, and participate in cultural exchange activities to broaden their cultural horizons.

5.4. Developing effective reading strategies

To improve students' reading strategies, teachers should provide explicit instruction on various reading techniques such as skimming, scanning, and inferencing. Students can also be encouraged to practice these strategies through guided reading exercises and to reflect on their reading processes to identify areas for improvement. Additionally, teachers can create a supportive learning environment that encourages students to ask questions, share their ideas, and collaborate with their peers.

6. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the difficulties faced by college students in advanced English academic reading and proposed corresponding countermeasures. The findings suggest that vocabulary barriers, complex sentence structures, unfamiliar cultural backgrounds, and inadequate reading strategies are the main challenges students encounter. To overcome these difficulties, students should adopt a multi-faceted approach to vocabulary learning, improve their syntactic awareness, cultivate cultural awareness, and develop effective reading strategies. Teachers can also play a crucial role by providing explicit instruction, creating a supportive learning environment, and encouraging students to engage actively with the reading materials. By addressing these challenges, college students can enhance their academic reading abilities and improve their overall English proficiency, which will be beneficial for their future academic and professional development.

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