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## The Study on the Application of Learning-Plan Guidance in College English Reading Teaching

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### Abstract

From the moment when Chinese students started to learn English, reading has always been the most important and difficult part. Even when students have entered university, reading still takes a large proportion. In College English reading classes, teachers cannot inspire students' curiosity and consciousness towards reading and thus the whole teaching activity is in vain to improve their reading ability. In recent years, the learning-plan guidance theory which is popular in high schools makes the author see the changes in the class module so that in this thesis it will be applied to College English reading classes. To achieve the aim of this study, the approach of Quasi-experiment is adopted.

**Key words:** Learning-plan guidance; College English reading teaching; Autonomous reading ability; Reading strategies

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### INTRODUCTION

In the early 2000s, the theory of learning-plan guidance originated from the curriculum reform of Chinese middle school, and soon it was widely implemented in primary school and high school teaching. The theory of learning-plan guidance refers to the teaching model that

emphasizes the autonomous learning of students with the learning plan being the carrier of the teaching activity and the teacher being the conductor of guidance and requires the cooperation of the teacher and students to complete the task of teaching, which makes the author find hope in changing currently low-efficient and invalid reading teaching in College English.

### 1. CURRENT SITUATION AND PROBLEMS IN READING TEACHING IN COLLEGE ENGLISH

In China, English has always been a compulsory subject in every middle school and every university, and reading plays an important part in English learning and communication. It does not only offer important and sufficient linguistic input for foreign language learners, but also lays a solid foundation for the learners' further ability in speaking, listening and writing. In many important annually-held countrywide examinations, such as College Entrance Examination, CET Band 4 and Band 6, Masters' and Doctors' Entrance Examination and Public English Testing System (PETS), reading comprehension takes up 40%-50% of the total score.

Nowadays, most of English reading teaching still adopts the traditional teaching model which advocates using the bottom-up model—a kind of passive decoding model, by which readers only need to read word by word and will be easily get access to the literal meaning. This model puts more emphasis on linguistic analysis rather than training the students' reading ability. Those teachers teach reading by merely making students to recognize the basic language symbols, namely from letters to words and phrases, then from phrase to sentences and paragraphs, finally from paragraphs to passages. Actually this pedagogy badly limits students' reading ability. Most of the students merely pay attention to the memorization

of the new words and phrases, ignoring to understand the intended ideas that the writers want to express in the texts. As a result, their reading competence is still weak. In this teaching model, most of classes are teacher-dominated, which results in the negative influence on the students' class performance, making them become passive learners of knowledge. Due to the importance of reading and the present poor situation of reading teaching mentioned above, teachers should reflect on their traditional teaching approaches to English teaching in order to improve the reading capability of the students. Therefore, reading practice guided by the learning plan is reasonably recommended to the students not only because it emphasizes the dominant position of students in the reading process but also it trains them to use proper strategies and skills.

From what has been mentioned above, English reading teaching in college is crucial and cannot be ignored. It even has great influence on the development and progress of other aspects in language acquisition. Both teachers and students expect to receive positive results through class learning. So as to change the currently inefficient and invalid teaching situation, better and more proper teaching approaches must be explored. For reading is regarded as a cognitive and an active process, the class should be shifted to be student-centered, which can make them become dominated and also can arouse their interest in reading materials, thus making reading teaching more successful and fruitful.

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## **2. REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH ON LEARNING-PLAN GUIDANCE**

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### **2.1 The Definition of Learning-Plan Guidance**

Since it appeared in early 2000's, Learning-Plan Guidance has been enjoying more and more prevalence in China and has brought about a revolution to teach. As a new teaching model in the current situation of teaching reform, Learning-Plan Guidance originates from Constructivism, Bruner's Discovery Learning, Vygotsky's Theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Schema Theory.

Based on these four theoretical bases, Chinese scholars have done much research into the theory of learning-plan guidance. According to Ren (2003), educators should do research on what series of activities could enable the students get access to the changes or qualities, and master the knowledge as they are expected to; based on this, educators should also design a complete set of learning plans to help the students move towards the desired changes or qualities. Thus, a learning plan is a study program which is designed for teachers to enable students to achieve certain learning objectives through a series of learning activities.

The theory of learning-plan guidance refers to the teaching model that emphasizes the autonomous learning of students with the learning plan being the carrier of the teaching activity and the teacher being the conductor of guidance and requires the cooperation of the teacher and students to complete the task of teaching. This kind of teaching model, on the one hand, fulfills the requirements for the thinking development of the students, and on the other hand, meets the needs of developing their self-awareness and plays quite a positive and necessary role in their self-development and manifestation of self-worth.

### **2.2 Design of the Learning Plan**

Designing the learning plan is so crucial and elementary that it will determine whether the implementation of the learning plan is successful or not.

According to Shao (2001), she takes the opinion that the learning plan could generally be composed of three sections: the before-class section, the during-class section and the after-class section. The first section is to provide the students with background information, teaching objectives and the key language points. The during-class section of the learning plan is to instruct the students to practice some important reading strategies, such as skimming and scanning. The after-class section is to guide the students to evaluate their own learning process so as to conclude what and how much they have learned.

In order to prepare for designing a practical and successful learning plan, the pre-research on the following five aspects should be done at the first place: Do research on the curriculum requirements in order to set the teaching objectives; do research on the important national exams to confirm the hot spot; study the teaching resources to determine the focus and difficulty; study the law of the knowledge to confirm the connection between detailed knowledge points; do survey on the current level and study strategies of students to get the thinking clue of writing the learning plan. The above step should be followed by setting the learning objectives. The third step is to organize knowledge systems. Teachers should split up the knowledge points to combine and organize them again according to different levels so that it would be more enlightening, oriented and systematic for the students to conduct autonomous learning activities. The last step is to prepare proper and relevant exercise for the students so that they could examine the effect of their autonomous learning process under the guidance of the learning plan.

### **2.3 Implementation of the Learning Plan**

As for the implementation of the learning plan, generally the teacher chooses to distribute it ahead of the class so that the students could preview and learn the text by themselves. Next, during the class time the teacher firstly asks them to discuss the problems they discovered in their

self-learning process and then offers them the solution. Finally, asks the students to conduct self-evolution.

According to Zhang (2010), the implementation of learning plan could be divided into six procedures: Make use of the learning plan to guide the students' self-learning process; organize the students to discuss the problems they found in the previous procedure based on the learning plan; instruct them the key and difficult points so as for them to construct the connection between the existing and newly-acquired knowledge; guide the students to make a conclusion of the content and strategies learned in the class; prepare some classic and relevant exercise; give them some assignments or experimental activities to do after class.

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Under the guidance of Learning-Plan Guidance theory, an experimental study was designed to show that a particular pedagogical practice could bring out a positive outcome under controlled circumstance.

The subjects for this study are 52 non-English sophomores in a natural class majoring in Chinese in Shandong Normal University, among whom 28 are girls while 24 are boys.

#### 3.1 Procedure

The experimental process contains the investigation and analysis on students' autonomous reading ability, objective-setting of this research and the application of this learning-plan guidance to training, teaching, testing, surveying and interviewing the students (see Table 1). In this study, all the contents and procedure were based on the textbook *New College English (Second Edition)—Volume 1*. The textbook is made up of ten units which provide sufficient content and exercises to practice students' comprehensive abilities on English reading.

**Table 1**  
**Plan for Improving Students' Reading Ability by Applying Learning-Plan Guidance**

Item	Arrangements	Time
1	Investigation and analysis on reading ability of subjects	Week 1
2	Setting objectives and making training plan for this semester	Week 2
3	Teaching by combining objectives and learning-plan	Week3-17
4	English reading comprehension test for subjects	Week 19
5	Questionnaires and interview on reading ability of subjects	Week 19
6	The final exam of the semester and score statistics	Week 21

#### 3.1.1 Primary Survey and Analysis

The primary survey and analysis was conducted in the first week of the second semester in 2015-2016 by investigating the score of reading comprehension in the previous final examination and their initiative learning ability.

#### 3.1.2 Setting Objectives of Improving the Students' Reading Ability for the Semester

According to the teaching curriculum and the practical situation, the objectives include:

- Be able to set their objectives of reading on their own;
- Be able to choose proper reading strategy;
- Be able to read independently, comprehend the key words and structure of English text and master the subject of text;
- Be able to formulate new schema according to the text content;
- Be able to supervise the reading strategy;
- Be able to comment the result of their reading.

#### 3.1.3 Training

According to the plan, the author gave training to the students before starting applying learning-plan guidance, which could let the students know the structure of learning plan and the procedure, method and aims about learning-plan guidance.

#### 3.1.4 Writing Learning Plan of the Reading Text

The learning plan should be written according to the teaching objectives, the genres of reading material and practical level of students before the class with one learning plan being prepared for every text. The writing of reading teaching plan shall be agreeable with the learning procedure and serve the process of guide-in, guided-reading, guided-thinking, guided-discussion and doing exercises.

#### 3.1.5 Process of Applying Learning Plan to Teaching

##### (a) Distribution of learning plan

The learning plan distributed ahead of the class should be self-learned by the students before the class so that they can find out problems and solutions by themselves and then the problems will be discussed in class. This move is to develop the students' independent learning ability, to cultivate their habit of previewing the text, to foster the ability of skimming, scanning and summarizing the information and mastering relevant language points, and finally to develop their deep reasoning capabilities based on the content of the text.

##### (b) Emphasize on "guidance"

The implementation of learning-plan guidance should put more emphasis on "guidance" from five aspects: lead-in, guided-reading, guided-discussion, guided-thinking, guided-exercise. Always keep the dominant role of students in mind.

##### (c) Processing of language points

The processing of language knowledge cannot be conducted in isolation. The teacher should let students search for and summarize them in reading. First, vocabulary. Ask students to read the text and find out the

new words and important words. After that, ask them to figure out the collocation of the words so that they could confirm how those words should be used in the right way. Second, phrases. Ask students to search for the key phrases by reading the text again and use them to make sentences. After students find them out, the teacher should encourage them to have a try to make new sentences. Third, sentence patterns. According to the teaching objectives, teachers should let the students scan the text quickly and find the key sentence structures. Fourth, signal words. There are a lot of signal words used in the text which can be very helpful for students to find the connections between the events described by the writer so that it will be much easier for them to clarify the content and structure of the article. Fifth, grammar. The learning of grammar cannot be conducted in isolation either. Just like the learning of words and phrases, it should be done while the students are reading the text. The teacher should require students to scan the text, search for the relevant sentence according to the clues given by the learning plan and finally do some research on its features and use.

### 3.1.6 Evaluating the Effect of the Application of the Learning Plan

The evaluation of the implementing effect can be divided into two steps. One is to evaluate the effect of implementing the learning plan by questionnaires and interviews, which were conducted in the 19<sup>th</sup> week of the term. The other is to carry out two tests, which include a reading comprehension test held in the 18<sup>th</sup> week and the English final-exam held by Shandong Normal University.

## 3.2 Data Collection

The author used 2 methods for data collection: questionnaires and reading-ability tests.

### 3.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaires designed for this experiment mainly concerns about the elements of learning attitude, learning ability and learning strategies. The questions designed

by the author are rooted in the concept of autonomous learning and reading, and also are based on the description of effectiveness of implementing learning-plan guidance by the scholars from home and abroad. The questionnaires are divided into three categories: Questionnaire A is to reflect the reading attitude of students; Questionnaire B is to show the learning ability and reading strategy of students; Questionnaire C is to embody the effect of applying learning-plan guidance to read teaching.

In order to learn about the students' attitude towards reading class, their reading abilities and strategies, the author issued Questionnaire A and Questionnaire B twice. The first time was at the beginning of the semester, so that she could have an accurate understanding of the students' attitude towards reading class, their reading abilities and strategies before she started to implement learning-plan guidance. The other time was in the 19<sup>th</sup> week after the application of learning-plan guidance, which could reflect the changes occurred to students. For the first time, since there were altogether 50 students in the classroom, the author distributed 50 copies of questionnaires and collected 50. Among them, there were two invalid copies because they gave multiple answers, thus, the valid questionnaires are 48 copies. For the second time, she distributed 52 copies of questionnaires and collected 52. There were four invalid questionnaires for four of the students either selected more than one answer or neglected to choose one, thus, the valid questionnaires are also 48 copies.

For Questionnaire C which is used to reflect the effects after learning-plan guidance was implemented, it was conducted only once in the 19<sup>th</sup> week of the semester together with Questionnaire A and B. As for the same reason mentioned in the last paragraph, the author distributed 52 questionnaires, but there are only 48 valid copies.

#### 3.2.1.1 The Result of Questionnaire A

Questionnaire A is used to learn about the learning attitude of students towards the reading class (see Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Questionnaire A on the Survey of Students' Learning Attitude Towards Reading**

No.	Questions	Results	Survey of the 1 <sup>st</sup> week				Survey of the 19 <sup>th</sup> week			
			A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
1	I have interest in reading class, so I am eager to attend it.	13	23	8	4	0	8	33	7	
2	Reading can help me acquire more knowledge.	4	17	19	8	0	0	31	17	
3	Reading class is one of my favorite classes.	4	26	14	4	1	7	30	10	
4	Every time I read a text, I know why I should read it.	6	25	11	6	2	4	32	10	
5	Only when I improve my reading ability could I get more knowledge and become a better person.	11	24	9	4	1	4	32	11	
6	I like to analyze the reason why I get marks or lose marks in reading comprehension.	17	17	11	3	0	4	31	13	
7	Besides the text assigned by the teacher, I also like to conduct extracurricular reading by myself.	14	24	6	4	1	7	23	17	
8	I have my own reading objectives.	10	28	6	4	2	8	26	12	

A, B, C and D in this table refer to four choices of the above 8 questions: A stands for a complete disagreement; B stands for a disagreement; C stands for an agreement; D stands for a complete agreement. The number of students who participated in the questionnaire is respectively 50 and 52. But the number of valid copies is 48. The data shown in this table is the actual number of students who did a valid selection.

From Table 2, the whole questionnaire obviously reflects that the learning attitude of students has changed

a lot. Question No.1 and No.3 show that the number of students who like to attend reading class is up to 40. Besides, Question No.2, No.4, No.7 and No.8 show that students have possessed clear reading objectives and they start to read curricular materials on their own initiative.

### 3.2.1.2 The Result of Questionnaire B

Questionnaire B is a reflection of students' reading ability and strategies, which are composed of 10 questions (see Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**Questionnaire B on the Survey of Students' Reading Ability and Strategies**

No.	Questions	Results	Survey of the 1 <sup>st</sup> week				Survey of the 19 <sup>th</sup> week			
			A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
1	When reading an article, I can quickly grasp the top sentence of every paragraph and the main idea of the article.		15	21	10	2	5	11	19	13
2	I have the habit of previewing the text of every unit.		23	13	11	1	0	6	23	19
3	When encountering new words, I could guess the meaning of them through context.		13	26	7	2	0	4	21	23
4	I often use the skill of skimming and scanning.		22	18	7	1	0	7	15	26
5	Before reading, I predict the content of text from the title, illustration and background knowledge.		29	11	7	1	0	5	22	21
6	When reading a text, I always get the main ideas by skimming firstly and then study the words, phrases, sentences and grammar.		33	13	1	1	0	2	26	20
7	When meeting difficulties, I shall think independently first and then ask classmates and teachers for help.		12	18	14	4	3	8	17	20
8	When reading a text, I can always find out the signal words.		24	16	6	2	0	7	16	25
9	When reading a text, I am clear what reading strategy is being used and adjust it when necessary.		36	8	3	1	6	11	22	9
10	After reading, I shall conclude what and how much I have mastered.		26	14	5	3	4	13	20	11

A, B, C and D in this table refer to four choices of the above 10 questions: A stands for "Never"; B stands for "Seldom"; C stands for "Sometimes"; D stands for "Always".

Table 3 reflects that students just read the text word by word before the experiment. They didn't use such reading skills as skimming, scanning and guessing the word meaning through context, and they just push

themselves to recite words, phrases and sentences without supervising the reading procedure. However, after using the learning plan, their reading strategies improved obviously.

### 3.2.1.3 The Result of Questionnaire C

Questionnaire C has only five questions, which reflect the students' learning attitude and learning effects after using the learning plan (see Table 4).

**Table 4**  
**Questionnaire C on the Survey of the Application of Learning-Plan Guidance**

No.	Questions	Yes	Neutral	No
1	Do you study according to the guidance of learning-plan?	44	3	1
2	Do you think the learning plan is helpful for reading?	37	9	2
3	Do you like to have the learning plan distributed ahead of the class?	39	5	4
4	Do you like to have the learning plan distributed in the class?	10	17	21
5	What's your suggestion towards the learning plan?			

### 3.2.2 English Reading Level Test

There were two tests carried out in this experiment. One was a reading level test carried out in the 18<sup>th</sup> week after the implementation of learning-plan guidance. The other one was the English final exam of Shandong Normal

University conducted at the end of the semester. In order to make a comparison, the author also listed the reading scores collected from the English final exam of the previous semester before the implementation of learning-plan guidance (see Table 5).

**Table 5**  
**Comparison of Results Collected From Three Tests**

No.	A	B	C	No.	A	B	C	No.	A	B	C
1	47	53	67	19	73	93	93	37	47	53	67
2	47	60	93	20	47	73	80	38	80	67	73
3	53	67	87	21	40	67	73	39	73	87	73
4	33	67	87	22	67	53	73	40	73	93	80
5	47	67	67	23	60	87	80	41	67	93	93
6	67	87	80	24	33	67	67	42	53	60	80
7	87	60	100	25	40	67	93	43	47	73	73
8	53	53	60	26	67	93	73	44	40	73	87
9	80	67	87	27	80	87	80	45	33	53	47
10	67	73	73	28	80	73	87	46	47	47	67
11	53	87	73	29	80	67	53	47	33	40	87
12	73	53	67	30	40	80	93	48	73	73	80
13	67	73	67	31	67	87	67	49	60	73	60
14	47	73	87	32	60	67	73	50	87	93	87
15	40	67	73	33	40	67	73	51	53	67	73
16	47	73	100	34	53	80	100	52	60	73	93
17	67	67	80	35	73	80	93	Average	57.82	71.26	78.44
18	73	80	87	36	33	73	73	Passing percentage (%)	50	84.61	96.15

Note. Scores in this table are converted from 30 points of total to 100 points of total.

In this table, A refers to the score collected from the English final exam of the previous semester, and the points of total for reading section are 30. B refers to the score collected from the English reading level test carried out in the 18<sup>th</sup> week and the points of total are also 30. C refers to the final text of this experimental semester and the points of total are 30, too.

## CONCLUSION

Through the research on the application of the learning-plan guidance to College English reading teaching and according to the results of three tests, it is suggested that it is helpful and effective to improve students' autonomous reading ability and learning strategies under the guidance of the learning plan. The findings of this study provide

implications for practical reading teaching of College English.

The experimental teaching shows some positive effects of learning-plan guided teaching in reading class. The following implications can be drawn from such reading teaching in college. Firstly, teachers should try their best to build a student-centered learning atmosphere in reading classes. Secondly, the learning-plan guided class could help the students develop a good reading habit and form many useful reading strategies and techniques. Thirdly, the teaching plan should be well prepared and designed before the class and be distributed at the right timing. Finally, teachers should also encourage students to have more extensive reading after class so as to enlarge their vocabulary and prior existing background knowledge in every field.

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