



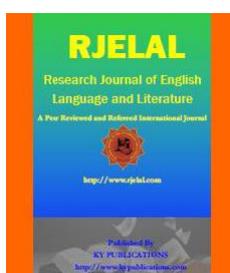
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## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH MAJOR FRESHMEN IN LEARNING INTENSIVE READING AND COUNTERMEASURES

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### ABSTRACT

For English majors, it's very important to learn intensive reading, which is the basic course for them. English Major Freshmen are eager to grasp language which they specialize in and eager to get help from professional teachers, especially from intensive reading teachers. And for teachers, to know and grasp the psychology of freshmen in their English learning is the key to favorably accomplish the first-year teaching. Through the analysis of investigation, this paper explores the psychology of English majors in their first year learning and teaching of intensive reading. According to the goal and task of intensive reading and based on the theory of social constructivism, countermeasures are put forward in the teaching of intensive reading.

**Key Words :** English major freshmen; intensive reading; psychological analysis

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

For freshmen, everything is new to them. Learning content, study methods, teachers' teaching methods, classroom organization and management are very different from those in high school. For those freshmen whose major is English, language acquisition is a very complicated process. Learner's non-intelligence factors such as motivation, attitude, will and interest are the most direct and most important influence for second language acquisition. So for teachers, understanding and mastering freshmen's various psychological characteristics is the key to complete the first-year undergraduate teaching successfully. Based on the research achievements of foreign language education experts and the author's teaching experience for English majors, this paper aims to analyze student's common psychology and put forward the corresponding countermeasures.

### 2 Questionnaire Survey and Analysis

In order to get a reliable understanding of the actual situation of English learning for freshman English majors, the author carried out a "questionnaire survey" half a year after they entered university choosing 2014 English undergraduate class as research objects. Questionnaire involves freshmen English major's learning motivation, interest, expectation, method, self evaluation, etc. 10 undefined term multiple choices. Survey is conducted in secret way and 58 valid questionnaires were received. Recovery rate is one hundred percent.

(1) When asked about English teachers' teaching language in high school, 65.83% of the students who said that English teachers mainly speak in Chinese. Only 4.17% of the students said that English teachers all speak in English. This shows that in high school, English teachers use the traditional teaching method of grammar - translation method. It is teacher-centered and students accept knowledge

passively. Opportunities for students to get all-English or nearly all-English teaching are rare. This makes many English majors meet difficulties on the threshold of major learning.

54.17% of the students said that they had difficulty in listening in English major study.

(2) When asked whether they are interested in English, 71.67% students said that they are interested. Only 4.15% of the students said that they are not interested in this major. This suggests that most students want to learn English well from the bottom of their hearts.

(3) For this question "why did you choose English major", 45.07% of students choose "to find a good job after graduation". 31.18% of students choose "in order to adapt to social development". Both options are instrumental motivation. The purpose is to use English as a tool to find a good career and to improve their social status and qualification. 11.29% of students choose "want to understand native speakers' way of living and culture, promoting China's foreign contact". This choice belongs to integrated motivation. People are primarily interested in English club. The purpose of learning English is to better communicate with native speakers within English community and appreciate English culture and art. Only 5.65% of the students said "I don't know". These reflect that the vast majority of students have clear learning goals.

(4) As to the item of participation in classroom teaching activities, active participants occupy 24.48%. Passive participants account for 64.36%. Those who are afraid or unwilling to participate occupy 11.19%. These data reflect that most students take a passive attitude toward classroom teaching activities. Reasons are found after survey as follows: 49.28% of the students refuse to participate because of being afraid of making mistakes. 24.64% of the students flinch due to nervousness. 10.14% of the students give up participating in classroom activities because they are afraid of being asked by the teacher.

(5) When asked to choose the form of classroom instruction, 90% of the students advocates "less teacher talk, more organization communication and discussion". 5.71% of students want the teacher to ask questions while teaching and individual students

answer them. 4.29% of the students think that teacher teaches and students listen and take notes. This is reassuring concept change, which shows that traditional "cramming education" is no longer popular with most of the students today. Their consciousness of being eager to participate in classroom teaching activities is becoming increasingly intense, but they lack enough attention to interaction.

(6) As to the question about "needing help from professional teachers", the results show that 61.70% of the students hope teachers can "create a relaxing environment". 34.04% of students are eager to ask teachers to correct their mistakes timely. This shows that most students hope to learn the professional knowledge well under the teacher's help and guidance.

### 3 The Goal and Task of Intensive Reading Course

English teaching syllabus of institution of higher education for English majors at fundamental stage formulated by State Education Commission points out that the teaching task and purpose of the English major stage is to pass on basic knowledge of English, conduct a comprehensive and rigorous basic skills training for students, train students' practical ability of using language, favorable study style and correct learning method, cultivate students' logical thinking ability and independent working ability, enrich students' social and cultural knowledge and strengthen students' sensitivity to cultural differences in order to lay a solid foundation for senior grade.

On this basis, from the type of teaching material intensive reading course uses (such as Li-min Yang, *Contemporary College English*, foreign language teaching and research press.) and other college English material, this course fully embodies the above principle. Take *Contemporary College English* as an example, this material includes such kinds of skill training as reading, speaking, writing, listening and translation and provides a certain number of English vocabulary. If teaching and learning are done in the proper way, students should master certain skills as listening, speaking, reading and writing (including writing and translation). They should be able to read general difficult articles, express their thoughts and feelings

in spoken and written English correctly, communicate with others, narrate stories and facts, understand English news and native speaker's conversation with normal speed and do general difficult English-Chinese translation.

#### **4 Theoretical Basis of Social Constructivism**

As one of the main current western academic thoughts, social constructivism received widespread concern and attention. It provides a favorable theoretical support for today's education research and teaching practice. Its basic idea is that knowledge (meaning) comes from social construction. Knowledge is not a kind of objective existence independent from cognitive subject (human being) but active construction in the process of human being knowing the outside world. This construction occurs in the environment of interaction with others, which is the result of social interaction.

The enlightenment of social constructivism to learning, especially to language learning, is deep and profound. First of all, it is trying to change our understanding of the nature of knowledge. Knowledge is learning subjects' (students) active construction on learning object (objective world). We should advocate discovery learning. Learning is not passive acceptance. Learning subjects should actively cognize and create from personal experience and construct a personal meaning.

Secondly, learning inevitably exists in a specific environment, which is done through interaction with others. Language learning is more so, because an important part of language learning is to use the target language to interact. Environment here not only refers to material environment such as classroom environment, but also refers to social culture, education, family, interpersonal relationship and even psychological environment, so we must pay special attention to social interaction's effect on learners' behavior and emotional factors. This is also the connotation of one of the basic theories of social constructivism---humanism connotation.

Thirdly, since learners are subjects of learning, we should shift the emphasis of teaching to students. The purpose of teaching is learning. Teachers should change traditional role of

knowledge transmitter and become mediator (Fuerstein, 1991). We should provide learning opportunities and learning experience for students so as to create learning environment and atmosphere favorable for constructing personal meaning. In this way, we make learners strengthen their sense of autonomy, self-control and self-responsibility and improve their ability of using learning strategies in order to achieve the purpose of active learning. This learning is more effective.

Fourthly, learning should be full of education value. Language learning is even more so. Language not only transfers knowledge, but also constructs meaning and create "reality". In a sense, what kind of choice and construction makes what kind of "reality". "Reality" embodies language user's position. Therefore, language use is creating culture. When we are in the construction of meaning by language, we are creating culture (Xiaoguang Cheng, 2002).

#### **5 Countermeasures in the Teaching of Intensive Reading**

Analyzing the purpose and task of intensive reading course, it is not hard for us to find that intensive reading course is an important basic course and has important link with other courses. It is very important for English majors to learn this basic course. From the results of questionnaire survey, English major freshmen are eager to learn the professional knowledge and get help from professional teachers, because they still have many difficulties in their study. The presence of these difficulties is the result of multiple factors and the main factors are such emotional factors as learner's mood, attitude and learning motivation. Emotional factors are important factors humanism connotation emphasizes. Teachers should become mediators according to Feuerstein (1991). On this basis, using the teaching material "contemporary college English"(li-min Yang, foreign language teaching and research press), the author discusses English major freshmen's learning psychology and countermeasures.

##### **5.1 Motivate Students' Interest of Learning English**

###### **(1) Promotion of Arts and Science**

The trend of recruiting students for the major of English is no longer to recruit students who are

single arts, but to recruit students who are either students of arts or students of science. Even in some universities of science, more students of science are recruited than students of arts for the major of English. Some students of science have misunderstanding towards the major of English, thinking that English belongs to liberal arts and their memory and thinking are not as good as those students of arts. They especially lack of interest in reading material about literature and history, lacking confidence in learning English. 36% of the students of science are in the class that the author taught and 20.33% of the students are adjusted to the major of English. They lack of confidence in particular.

Aimed at the above phenomenon, teachers should correct their misconception as soon as possible and change their learning beliefs. In class, teachers can test students regularly and report the result to students in order to enhance self-confidence of those students of science. Teachers should consciously provide chances for students of science to show themselves, let them exert their own advantages and mobilize the enthusiasm of their class participation in order to arouse their interest in learning. When group work is needed in class, teachers can make students of arts and students of science a group to promote the exchange of knowledge and information, gradually eliminating knowledge difference caused by the separation between liberal arts and science. After class, all kinds of activities can be organized to inspire students' enthusiasm for learning English, such as encyclopedic knowledge contests, English speech contest, drama, etc.

(2) Arousing the enthusiasm of boys, eliminating the problem caused by bigger ratio between male students and female students

There is a universal phenomenon for the major of foreign languages that there is a bigger proportional difference between male students and female students and there are few male students who learn English. In general, women's language learning ability is better than men. The fact makes male students who learn English have wrong concept, especially for those who were good at science in senior high school and were adjusted to the major of English. They lack of interest in learning

English from their entrance to university. They resist or are fed up with English. When the author read foreign language journals, magazines, books or translation of books, the author found that there are more male authors or editors than female authors or editors. The author uses this fact to educate those male students who have wrong concept as to the gender problem in English learning, motivating them to learn English with examples of famous persons.

### **5.2 Taking teaching material as the carrier, making use of emotional factors and encouraging students to study professional knowledge**

In *Contemporary College English*, there are many good chosen materials which are worthy of exploring their connotation. If these material and emotional factors are combined together, twice the result will be yielded with half the effort. For example, when we learn the lesson "Half a Day", the author encouraged students to speak boldly about their own experience of entering university and affirmed their progress, praising them by saying "Well, you did a good job." For those introverted students who are not good at expressing themselves, the author encouraged them to speak English, making them dare to speak by saying "Don't worry, believe yourself, you can." "Don't be nervous," "Relax." etc. Besides, combined with the teaching material, the author communicates with students about how to learn English well by personal experience of learning English. As the author teaches the text *Against All Odds*, combined with Stephen Hawking' example of overcoming impossible difficulties to conduct his own research, the author encouraged students to conquer any difficulties which are nothing compared with Stephen Hawking' difficulty to learn English well. Besides, the author encouraged students to read more healthy, positive books and newspaper to enrich themselves and expand knowledge after class. In this teaching material, the editor also edited many aphorism that promote people to advance bravely, for example, "Every human being is intended to have a character of his own, to be what no others are, and to do what no others can do." (by William Ellery Channing), "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." (by Franklin D.R Roosevelt),

"Everybody is ignorant, only on different subjects" (by Will Rogers). By these aphorism, the author encouraged students to be confident in learning English and work hard until success.

### **5.3 Creating a relaxing classroom environment by taking advantage of emotional factors**

Through the analysis of the questionnaire survey, 54.17% of the students think that their main difficulty in learning English is listening and 61.70% of the students hope the professional teachers can "create a relaxing environment". As we all know, listening process is very complex, the listener must continuously decode the input information. This is a process of continuous amending and perfecting the understanding of the input information (Buck, 1991:1991). The listener not only needs to understand and memorize the input information quickly but also needs to accept new information.

First of all, as a teacher, we must admit and face the existence of anxiety in the second language classroom and its influence on language learning. Many students are fed up with study caused by anxiety and avoid difficulty in study. Therefore, faced with students' not ideal academic performance, we shouldn't blindly blame students' lack of ability or enthusiasm but consider whether anxiety is at work. Secondly, according to Krashen's theory of foreign language teaching (supervisory mode), we should try to create a relaxing and harmonious classroom environment, reduce factors that may cause students' anxiety to a minimum level. Only in this way, language input can be absorbed by brain more effectively. For example, before the author let students to listen to *Going Home*, the author will make students in groups and discuss their personal feeling and experience of going home through discussion. Classroom atmosphere becomes active and students feel relaxed. Based on this, the teacher let students listen to the tape and students will listen to it attentively and feel more relaxed. It is no longer difficult for them. When teaching in the intensive reading class, the author tries to use simple, common words and sentence patterns and speak a little slowly, striving to make all of the students keep up with the schedule. Finally, we can encourage and train students to use emotional strategy

independently to eliminate anxiety, such as the relaxation exercise, self-motivation and communication with friends. This can not only make study more easy and interesting but also improve learning efficiency. Through correct understanding and eliminating anxiety effectively, we can not only create environment favorable for language learning, but also cultivate language learners' real interest and motivation in learning language.

### **6 Conclusion**

It is acknowledged that in certain social organizations (school, community), individuals are seen as ends rather than means and are aware of their being loved and respected, they could be sincerely convinced to accept education. Only individuals are respected and trusted, they can develop healthily. As for teaching and learning, we should establish a harmonious teaching and learning relationship based on emotional education. Through the emotional communication between teachers and students, teaching task can be completed well. In intensive reading teaching for freshmen, the proper use of emotional factors is a good way to stimulate students' enthusiasm and desire to learn so as to achieve the expected requirements and effect of teaching and learning.

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