Effects of Multi-text Reading Teaching Technique on Students' Chinese Reading Abilities at a Chinese Senior High School

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Abstract

Reading is considered an important skill in language learning. This study aimed to 1) study effects of multi-text reading on students' reading abilities in a Chinese reading course, and 2) explore satisfaction of high school students in a Chinese reading course using multi-text reading teaching technique. The study was conducted at a high school in Zaozhuang, China. There were six classes each of which had 20 students. The sample group was selected using convenience sampling. The class was taught for ten lessons with multi-text reading technique. The research adopted a one group Pre/Post test experimental design. The Pre-test was given before the course began and the Post-test was given at the end of the course. The 20 students who participated in the study were asked to fill out a 15-item questionnaire to show their satisfaction of the lessons. Besides the questionnaire, a structured interview was adopted with six volunteers to collect data about their thoughts and feelings about multi-text reading technique. The findings of the study revealed that the students in the experiment improved their reading skills through multi-text reading teaching (p-value of 0.01). The interview responses pointed out that multi-text reading made them enjoy reading more and that multi-text reading had a number of benefits.

Keywords: multi-text reading; Chinese reading; reading technique

Introduction

Aebersold and Field (1997, p. 8) explained that "the act of reading is not completely understood or easily described." and Rumelhart (1997) described reading as involving the reader, the text and the interaction between the reader and the text but how to teach reading in a situation is not really clear. Therefore, more investigation on how to implement reading technique with multi-text is needed as it can be an alternative technique which can be used to teach reading with greater effectiveness. According to Miller (2002, pp. 69-71), "students in an intensive reading class typically read passages in their textbooks, and the teacher attends to issues of grammar, vocabulary, text organization and meaning that arise from the readings." Miller further discusses another type of reading approach, 'Extensive reading', by explaining that the responsibility for reading improvement is placed on students to monitor their own progress and fluency is focused over accuracy.

This study adopted a mixture of both intensive and extensive approaches through the use of multi-text reading technique as the teacher taught reading in a class getting students to formulate their understanding of the texts through grammar, vocabulary, text organization and the message conveyed by the texts. With multi-text reading teaching technique, students got a chance to select the text they wanted to read themselves from several texts on the same topic selected and provided by the teacher. At the end of each lesson. All the students in the group shared what they had learned from their texts with others with the teacher acting as the facilitator of student learning.

This is in line with Yunbo and Paciente (2024) who conducted a study on how to improve students' Chinese reading and writing skills, and found that students should be changed from passive learners to active learners with a strong claim that language acquisition extended beyond passive reception. They define "Interactive learning methods" as a broad term for a teaching technique with expected interactive activities producing outcomes such as "fostering engagement, collaboration, and a dynamic exploration of the language." Multi-text reading teaching technique, which was used in this study as an intervention, aimed at the same interactive activities which empowered learners to actively participate in the learning process.

In this study, the application of multi-text reading teaching technique to a high school Chinese reading was expected not only to improve students' interest in reading but also improve students' reading skills by making them learn in small groups and sharing their understanding with

others. They would feel freer and more relaxed to choose the texts of their choices to read but they needed to master the elements of intensive reading such as comprehension, vocabulary and grammar (Cui et al, 2016; Wang & Yu, 2017; Zhou, 2019). In other words, students can choose to improve their reading skills by various strategies which are most appropriate to them. In this way, the teachers themselves need to find the best ways to accommodate the students' learning needs.

For teaching reading, multi-text reading is believed to be an effective teaching and learning method which can effectively improve students' reading abilities. According to Robb (2002), multiple texts enable teachers to choose books or reading materials that match students' needs, interests and their reading ability levels. Multi-text reading improves students' application of reading-thinking strategies, builds confidence, and develops the motivation to learn. By using multiple texts, all students have the opportunity to learn new information and make meaningful contributions to discussions. Moreover, varied texts provide multiple perspectives that help students rethink about events and issues that impact everyone and deepen their knowledge of literary genres. Besides, they also learn from their peers in the same class.

This study focused on the effects of multi-text reading to find out whether students could enhance their Chinese reading skills by learning through technique and whether they were satisfied with this teaching method.

Research Objectives

1. To study effects of multi-text reading on students' reading abilities in a Chinese reading course.

2. To explore satisfaction of high school students on using multi-text reading in a Chinese reading course.

Research Questions

1. Can multi-text reading improve student reading abilities in a Chinese reading course?

2. What is the satisfaction of high school students of multi-text reading in a Chinese reading course?

Literature Review

Significance of Reading

Reading is a kind of activity involving readers, authors and texts. "Seeing" is the premise of this activity. "Understanding" is the ultimate goal, and "Understanding" includes not only the understanding of the literal meaning of the text but also the experience of the author's thoughts and feelings (UKEssays, 2018). In this way, readers will learn a lot when they make meaning out of what they have read. In other word, the students' understanding and interpretation of the text they read will vary. According to Pradani (2021), reading is process for a reader to carry out to get messages in the words. Butterfuss, Kim and Kendeou (2020, p.1) point out that reading comprehension requires the construction of a coherent mental \representation of the information in a text. Reading involves three-interrelated elements the reader, the text and the activity, all situated into a broader sociocultural context. In addition, Prabhakaran (2018) points out that the reading skills will benefit the readers because they can use them throughout their lives.

The Concept of Multi-text Reading

The following section introduces multi-text reading and how it can be implemented.

Development of Multi-text Reading

The word "multi-text" was first proposed in the keynote speech of the 7th National Reading Teaching Observation Conference (Zhao, 2022). The term was originated in the teaching of many texts in Jiangsu and Zhejiang. The main idea associated with it is each of the books can be used as the source of "multi-text reading". Shuren Education Research Institute pioneered the industry and constructed the "multi-text reading" theoretical system for the first time in China (Zhao, 2022). Based on the various references on multi-text reading, the term can be used to refer to the technique of helping students to improve their reading skills by reading the texts they prefer, the texts that match their levels and the texts that present information that interest them. Secondly, students in the whole class do not need to read the same text and are required to follow the teacher's explanation in the one-way mode but these texts or books must be on the same issues to study. Discussion among the group members with the teacher as the facilitator can help all students to understand the central ideas posed for the issues.

Definitions of Multi-text Reading

Multi-text reading is a kind of breakthrough reading teaching practice emerging in recent years. The reading volume of students began to increase. Although teachers are still used to teaching single texts, with the promotion of the concept of integrated curriculum, many teachers have also begun to try the reading teaching activities of the multi-texts, with textbooks and extracurricular reading materials, and conducted multi-text reading teaching for the same topics (Zhao et al., 2011).

About the concept of multi-text reading, multi-text reading refers a teaching technique that puts a reading goal at the center. In this way, more articles or texts on the same topic are read by students even in the same class. In the process of reading, teachers and students read the texts, discuss the ideas in each text and share reading content and experience with others. In this way, such a reading process is expected to improve the students' reading skills (Cui et al, 2016). At present, the most commonly adopted technique based on research results is multi-text reading refers to a technique of teaching reading in which teachers and students choose multi texts or articles centered on a topic, with students working in small groups to complete certain tasks under the guidance of teachers (Wang & Yu, 2015).

Application of Multi-Text Reading into the Reading Lessons

How multi-text reading is applied into the lessons? The so-called multi-text reading refers to the process in which teachers and students read various texts on the same topics and students read and collectively construct their understanding of the topic, and finally reach a consensus on the issue. The process is meant to focus on the reading skill practice (Yu, 2015). Currently, multi-text (MT) comprehension has been extensively researched (Cromley. Andrea & Dane, 2021). According to Luo (2015), multi-text reading emphasis is on students reading the same issues presented in various texts to develop their reading skills, which are the outcomes of the reading course.

Talking about the development of this teaching technique in China, Zhao (2011) concludes that the multi-text reading has mainly gone through three stages: the first stage is acceptance of the concept and instructional design by mainland scholars and front-line teachers; the second stage: application and development; mainly in the primary school Chinese reading classroom,

the teaching experience and reflection of the multi-text reading, and the third stage is the transition from the primary school Chinese classroom to the middle school Chinese class. In other words, the primary school and the middle school Chinese teachers have begun to introduce multi-text reading techniques to their own classroom teaching. In conclusion, the literature tends to highlight the definition, principles, and framework of the treatment. Still, the explicit structure and underlying theory seem to be vague. In the same vein, additional previous studies presenting the significant effects of multi text reading will guide readers to understand why the research would like to deepen the effectiveness of the treatment.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted using a one group pre-test/pos-test experimental design and a mixed methods research approach in order to collect both the quantitative data from the Pre/Post Test and a satisfaction questionnaire as well as the qualitative data from the structured interview.

Population and Sample

The study sample was students from one of the 10 classes of senior high school in ZaoZhuang No.1 high School. The sample class included 10 female and 10 male students. This class was randomly selected by number drawing for the study. All the classes had to take one Chinese reading course at the time of the experiment. In this particular situation, the Chinese reading course was taught by the same teacher, with the same teaching content, teaching schedule, class time and homework content.

Research Instruments

The study adopted the lessons with topics such as foods and travel as the intervention instrument, while the Pre/Post Test scores were a major research instrument and the questionnaire and the semi-interview were subsidiary instruments that brought more data both quantitative and qualitative data about how multi-text reading technique functions. Details of the instruments are as follows:

The Lesson Plan

The whole experimental process was divided into three stages: before, after, and after the experiment. Twenty students in the course were divided into five small groups. All the four members of each group read the same passage. Therefore, per each reading task, the teacher would prepare five texts of the same topics for class. All the different passages read by the five groups were 200-300 words in length. Each class lasted 60 minutes.

The teaching process consisted of the following steps:

Step 1--Determining group members, randomly grouping students into groups of four. Reading passages were the same for every one in each small group.

Step 2--Identifying the topic and starting reading. (Each group member read the same text)

Step 3--Starting a group discussion after every one completed his/her reading

Step 4--Working together in trying to establish the meaning derived from the text with group members, summarizing the passage and confirming what was the message of the texts they have read.

Step 5—Each group of four students presented the text they had read to the others and answered the questions that were raised.

Step 6--Wrapping up by the teacher

The Pre/Post Test

The Pre-test and the Post-test were the same paper, given at the beginning of the course and at the end of the course. There were six short reading passages with 5 questions each, in a total of 30 questions. The questions at the end of each text were designed to check the students' general reading comprehension with questions such as "What is the text about?" and other reading enabling skills such as guessing the meaning from context with questions such as "What does this word mean?" and questions asking the details of passage. The original paper used was in Chinese.

The Satisfaction Questionnaire

The questionnaire for this study was adopted to examine the students' views about the multi-text reading technique they had experienced after the experiment. Only 15 questions were in the questionnaire. Each item was measured in the format of a 5-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire had five options with the interpretations suggested by Srisaard (2002: 103) as follows:

4.51-5.00 means "Strongly agree", 3.51-4.50 means "Agree", 2.51-3.50 means "Neither Agree nor Disagree", 1.51-2.50 means "Disagree" and 1.00-1.50 means "Strongly disagree".

The Semi-Structured Interview

Only four prompt questions were used to find out the interviewees' opinions about reading, working in groups and multi-text-reading.

Question 1: Do you prefer working in groups?

Question 2: In your opinion, is your multi-text reading an effective teaching technique?

Question 3: In your opinion, how can multi-text reading teaching technique enhance your reading ability? Please explain.

Question 4: Do you like reading? Why?

Validity

The Lesson Plan, the Pre/Post Test, the Satisfaction Questionnaire and the Interview Questions were submitted to three invited IOC experts to ensure that these instruments matched the objectives of the study. The experts were educators from three different universities who specialized in the field of educational research. It means these instruments should bring the answers to the study. Thus, the instruments had to be valid. Testing the validity of the instruments by Item Objective Congruence (IOC) (Rovinelli and Hambleton, 1977) was adopted. It was found that the validity scores of the four instruments were all above 0.67, which were 0.67, 0.90, 0.93 and 1 respectively.

Data Analysis

Since there were one intervention instrument and three research instruments used in this study, the design for data analysis was:

1. Paired sample t-tests of the test results were conducted to verify whether there was a significant difference between the two tests conducted at different times. One at the beginning of the course and one at the end.

2. All data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed with a computer program for descriptive statistics to find out students' satisfaction about multi-text reading.

3. Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed by thematic analysis, adopting Lichtman's Model of the 3Cs. The interview data were content analyzed into code, category and concept. Interviewing is a technique to collect data in the form of a conversation, generally at an individual level. From each interview, the data were coded. Then, the coded data were categorized. Finally, the concepts emerged from the grouping of the categories.

Results

Analysis of the Pre/Post Test

Results of the test score analysis for the paired sample statistic are shown in Table 4.1 below. The pre-test mean was 11.50 and the post-test mean was 19.05 with a mean difference of 7.55.

As shown in Tables 1 and 2 below, the significance value was 0.01, lower than 0.05 (P <0.05), indicating that the post-test scores of the sample group showed statistically significant increases compared with the pre-test scores.

Table 1

Basic Data of the Pre/Post Test

Tests	Sample Size	Maximum	Minimum	Average Value	Standard Deviation	Median
Pre-test Scores (Full Score = 30)	20	4.00	20.00	11.50	4.84	11.00
Post-test Scores (Full Score = 30)	20	10.00	27.00	19.05	5.12	19.50

Table 2

Results of Paired-t-test Analysis

Tests	Sample Size	Maximum	Minimum	T	P
Pre-test Scores (Full Score = 30)	11.50	4.84			
			-7.55	-9.291	*0.01
Post-test Scores (Full Score = 30)	19.05	5.12			

The Satisfaction Questionnaire

The aim of this study was to investigate students' views of using multi-text during reading. The 15-item questionnaire was divided into three categories: Part A- Personal Information (Q1-Q4), Multi-text Reading in Part B (Q5-Q14), and an Open-ended Question in Part C (Q15). The results are shown below.

Table 3

The Questionnaire Responses

Item	Question	Select	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Part 1: Personal Information				
1	I am	Male	10	50
		Female	10	50
2	Years studying Chinese	5-10	4	20
		10-15	16	80
3	Age	14-15	4	20
		15-16	16	80
4	Grade in Chinese	Three-level	2	10
		Four-level	2	10
		Five-level	2	10
		Six-level	4	20
		Seven-level	5	25
		Eight-level	5	25
Part 2: Experience from Multi-text Reading Lessons				
5	I like learning together in groups.	3.73	1.30	Agree
6	I like the reading materials on various subjects.	3.77	1.17	Agree
7	I like using multi-text reading in a reading course.	3.78	1.28	Agree
8	I feel like the reading class time has passed very quickly.	3.85	1.32	Agree
9	I wish to read the text with my friends.	3.73	1.25	Agree
10	I learn a lot from the class.	3.70	1.21	Agree
11	In the reading class, I am willing to participate in the activities.	3.69	1.35	Agree
12	I can learn a lot of from my friends.	3.71	1.23	Agree
13	I enjoy more of the activities in the class.	3.70	1.28	Agree

Table 3 (Cont.)

The Questionnaire Responses

Item	Question	Select	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Part 2：	*Experience from Multi-text Reading Lessons*			
14	I feel relaxed when I am in class.	3.73	1.22	Agree
Part 3: An Open-ended Question				
15	Can you tell me what you think about the multi-text reading class?	* There were no responses to this question.		

The Semi-structured Interviews

Three major key words emerged from the interview data analysis. They were the importance of reading, benefits of multi-text reading technique and how to learn. The following excerpts were the collected interviewed data.

Benefits of Reading

Interviewed data shown below indicated that the interviewees were aware of the benefits of reading.

"Reading is a very important tool for acquiring knowledge." (Student 4 Small Group 1)

"It is a window to the world." (Student 2 Small Group 5)

"I think there are many benefits to reading, which can improve our reading ability and writing level, can make us more cultured, increase our knowledge, get better results in exams, so as to feel happy." (Student 1, Small Group 1)

"I can read several texts on the same topics." (Student 4, Small Group 3)

No Stress When Working in Groups

The following excerpts of the interviewed data showed that the interviewees felt relaxed and happy when they did the work together in teams, which is their preferred way to study classroom reading.

"They were not stressed when reading in small groups and support the team in trying to understand the texts." (Student 1 Small Group 3)

"Multi-text reading not only provides a lot of knowledge for us to learn, but also provides us with opportunities to communicate with others. In this Internet era, although we can

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obtain a lot of information through the Internet, the face-to-face communication and discussion with people can provide a deeper understanding of the point of view in the book." (Student 2, Small Group 3)

"I think multi-text reading technique can help us release stress. No matter how much pressure you have in study, you encounter countless other problems in relationships, or in daily life, when you are addicted to books, these stress and troubles are gone. Reading books can help us improve our memory, make us focus, and become more focused, and make us think more, rather than blindly judge." (Student 2, Small Group 2)

Significance of Peer Support for Reading Lessons

The following excerpts from the interview tapescripts revealed that peer support is a major factor in students' learning enhancement.

"Through multi-text reading activities, we can communicate with each other and make progress together." (Student 3 Small Group 4)

"Reading together and trying to understand the text together makes time fly and the reading lessons become enjoyable." (Student 5 Small Group 5)

"I don't feel the pressure of having to find the correct answer. We are all responsible for this together." (Student 3 Small Group 2)

Discussion

1. The Students' Reading Performance

The Pre-test and Post-test results in this study indicate that the use of multi-text as a method of learning reading skills can improve students' Chinese reading skills. The results of this study were significant, with 12 students exceeding or equal 18 points in the post-test. The average score of the post-test (19.05 points) was 7.55 points higher than the mean score of the pre-test (15 points). Furthermore, the most significant finding was the significant difference in scores obtained by student number S-14. The student scored 6 in the pre-test and 21 in the post-test, creating a huge difference of 15 points. Thus, the significant improvement in student achievement points indicates that the use of multiple text has a positive impact on students' language reading ability. Obviously, multi-text reading teaching technique has more advantages in terms of there being more texts to explore by the students for reading skill

improvement. According to Kamps et al. (2008), traditional reading cannot improve students' reading skills when the traditional single-article reading teaching is teacher-directed. In supporting multi-text reading, Robb and Ewert (2024) say one advantage of extensive reading is that students may understand the text they read together in different ways but they can reach a consensus among them about the message the text conveys. In a reading class, reading skills are more important than the content. The benefits of multi-text reading teaching technique have been agreed upon by many experts in the field of research into reading (Zhao et al., 2011; Yu, 2015; Jiang, 2016; & Amin, 2019).

In addition, the interview results showed that the majority of the questionnaire respondent agreed that using multi-text in the Chinese language reading class would help to improve their language reading ability. The results of this study proved that the use of multi-text teaching in the Chinese language reading class helps to improve their reading ability (Kamps et al., 2007) when students feel relaxed, working at their own paces with their friends in small groups.

2. Discussion of the students' views

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaire was designed to study students' perception of the use of multi-text in reading sessions. The descriptive statistical analysis collected from the questionnaire was as follows:

All the items were rated at the "Agreed" level, which gives a clear answer that students preferred multi-text reading teaching technique. The results of the descriptive statistical analysis calculated from the questionnaire indicated that students had positive views about the use of multi-text in the reading course. Most importantly, none of the items rated as strongly disagree as strongly evidence that students showed a positive view of the use of multiple texts. Most students also agreed to the regular use of multi-text reading instruction.

For example, Group 1 read a passage entitled "Hamburger". The group discussed whether the food benefited our healthy growth and whether we should eat more of this type of fast food. Another example, Group 2 had a passage with the title "Rice". All the members agreed that rice provided carbohydrate necessary for our growth, and how much rice to eat every day to meet the need of the human body to maintain a good heath. When students learned what they liked and they did not have to worry about mistake making as they read a text with friends, they were

not under pressure. If they did not understand anything, they would ask the friends in the group for support. Affective domain is as important as cognitive domain. Students should feel motivated (Dornyei, 2001). Besides, the students were all aware of the significance of reading to their academic performance.

Their views about the benefits of reading were in line with experts' views as the experts' views (e.g. Kovacs, 2018; Li, 2018; Prabhakaran, 2018; Butterfuss, Kim, & Kendeou, 2020; Pradani, 2021). Peer support is also a significant factor in student learning enhancement (Dornyei, 2001).

3. Suggestions for the Use of the Findings

The findings of the study indicate that students enjoyed learning in groups with their classmates. Besides, they enjoyed reading the texts of their choice, which later they shared with others in the same class. Cognitively, they learned a lot, while they affectively, they felt relaxed and realized reading had several benefits for them. Thus, it is suggested that the teachers who are interested in researching into their reading classes should conduct similar studies with their students in order to improve students' interest in learning, let students enjoy reading, love reading, and gradually improve their reading ability (Taylor & Beach, 1984). However, the findings may not be generalized with teaching reading in large classes. Besides, it is useful in promoting using multiple texts on the same topic in reading class instead of traditionally using a single text.

4. Recommendations for Future Studies

Language teachers are advised to conduct studies on adopting multi-texts as instructional materials to teach reading skills. The use of multi-texts in the way this study adopted is not only the only format to use in a reading class. In fact, multi-modal materials (such as texts, video clips and audio texts) can also be used in a reading class. This area is worth exploring. In addition, this experiment was conducted with a very small class of 20 students. Research into a larger number of students and at different levels are recommended.

Acknowledgements

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