

Effectiveness of Read-Aloud in Pre-Service English Teachers' Teaching Competency Training

Chaoying Zhou

Foreign Language Department, Yuncheng University, Yuncheng 044400, Shanxi, China

ABSTRACT. *Pre-service English-language teachers' cultivation is significant, but pre-service teacher education does not receive enough attention as in-service teacher education in research field. This paper studies the effectiveness of read-aloud in pre-service English teachers' teaching competency training. The empirical results show that read-aloud teaching and learning is effective in pre-service English teachers' teaching competency training. Students' language usage ability, teaching manners and analytical ability can be improved during the training.*

KEYWORDS: *pre-service English teacher, teaching competency, read-aloud, effectiveness*

1. Introduction

Pre-service teachers are college students involved in a school-based practicum and under the supervision of experienced teachers (Kagan, D. M. 1992). Pre-service English teachers are college students major in educational English; their preparation is a complex process requiring kinds of knowledge and skills. In China, pre-service English teachers are treated as important preparatory talents for foreign language education. But their teaching competency are considered insufficient (Zhao, 2010). Nowadays they are facing extra challenges as the reform of Teacher's Qualification Certificate in China permits students of other majors to obtain English Teachers' Qualification Certificate. Thus the cultivation of high-qualified pre-service English teachers become crucial. For the research field, researches pay more attention on in-service teachers' education rather than pre-service teachers' education. This paper focuses on in-service teachers' teaching competency development.

Read-aloud practice has been proved effective in language learning and teaching by some studies, but does it useful in pre-service language teachers' cultivation? This study tries to explore the effectiveness of read-aloud in pre-service English-language teacher's teaching competency training.

2. Literature Review

This part reviews relevant literature on pre-service English-language teachers' teaching competency and read-aloud teaching.

2.1 Pre-service English Teachers' Teaching Competence

"Teaching competency is an integrated set of personal characteristics, knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed for effective performance in various teaching contexts; teaching competencies are integrated and should be viewed as a whole repertoire a teacher has at his or her disposal" (Dineke, 2004). Teaching competencies consists of classroom organization and management; clear explanation and vivid description; tasks assigning and inspection; effective interaction with students through questioning and exploration, answering and response, praising and criticizing (Shulman, 1987).

English teaching competency has not only the generality of teaching competency for all subjects, but also some of its own traits. English teaching competency includes the competencies of explaining, demonstrating, enlightening, guiding students to practice, correcting, organizing, and mobilizing students to actively participate in learning (Zhu, 2008). Pre-service English-language teachers' teaching competency is a more complex concept. In this paper the author takes the framework by Zhao Fengyun (2010): Pre-service English-language teachers' teaching competency contains performance of language, capability of teaching design, capability of classroom implementation, capability of evaluation and capability of innovation. Language competence includes language use ability, communicative ability, explanatory ability and writing ability. Teaching design capability includes the ability to recognize students, to determine teaching objectives, to analyze and process textbooks, to formulate teaching strategies, to select teaching media and to design teaching plans. Classroom implementation is all the measures and technical means adopted by teachers to stimulate learning motivation and carry out effective teaching according to students' needs. Teaching evaluation capability includes students' learning evaluation ability, curriculum evaluation ability and self-teaching evaluation ability. Teaching innovation capability includes language innovation ability, teaching activity creation ability and teaching research ability (Zhao, 2010). Zhao's framework is comprehensive and easy to measure.

2.2 Read-aloud Practice

Read-aloud literally is the act of reading aloud to others. It is a language art activity that expresses literary works clearly and emotionally. It is characterized by literary and artistic features, and can be complemented by appropriate expressions and movements to perform fascinating performances for audiences (quoted from a secondary source Gu, 2010). English read-aloud practice is the emotional reading of English poetry, prose, speeches and other literary works.

For the present research in China, the research on Chinese read-aloud practice is relatively mature. Books on Chinese read-aloud practice involves theoretical exploration and practical guidance. For instance, ancient poetry reading, guidance on read-aloud grading certificate gaining, guidance on read performance competition, etc. Academic journal research involves the analysis of read-aloud art, read-aloud training research, read-aloud in broadcasting and hosting professional training, read-aloud practice in Chinese teaching. Compared with the study of Chinese read-aloud practice, the study of English read-aloud practice is relatively less. Most of the existing studies focus on the effect and practice of read-aloud in foreign language teaching, for example, the combination of read-aloud with phonetics, spoken and reading courses. Hu (2009) has proved that recitation input has a positive impact on college English listening skills through empirical research. Lu (2001) analyzes the effect of reading aloud on the improvement of listening and speaking ability. Yue and Kong (2018) studies read-aloud teaching strategies in college English teaching classroom. Gu (2000) explores the application of read-aloud teaching method in English and American literature classes. Zhou (2018) uses situational reproduction and demonstration training in bilingual read-aloud class for bilingual broadcasting and hosting majors.

Nevertheless, few studies explore the effects of read-aloud practice in teacher training, let alone English teacher training, which is what this paper concerns.

3. Research Design

The purpose of this research is to study whether read-aloud training can improve the teaching competency of pre-service English-language teachers. The subjects of this study are 71 students in two classes of junior English educational majors in an undergraduate university, including 36 in Class One and 35 in Class Two, with 10 boys and 61 girls altogether aging from 19 to 21 years old. The research methods adopted are experimental method, observation method and interview method. The research process is presented below.

3.1 Teaching experiment

The two classes are randomly sorted into experimental group and control group by the author: Class One is experimental group and Class Two is control group. Students from the two classes have similar university entrance scores; they also perform similarly in professional foundation course “Advanced English” of the last final exam before teaching experiment. Teacher allocation for all courses of the two classes is nearly the same.

Teaching experiment is carried out in the course “Teachers’ Language Art”. The course lasts two hours per week. As the teacher of the two classes, the author adopts the same syllabus during teaching. The only difference is to supplement 20 minutes of read-aloud training every week for experimental Class One under the condition of

completing basic syllabus. The author adjusted the teaching schedule a little for Class One. The experiment lasts 16 weeks.

Read-aloud training is designed as follows. (1) Teaching content. There are eight texts chosen as training materials, one Chinese poem, six English poems and one English speech. The materials are featured by various themes, rich connotation, and rhythmic beauty of language. Students learn each text from three aspects: a. text analysis (including structure, rhetoric and theme), b. reading analysis (including pause, stress, rhythm, etc.) and c. read-aloud practice. (2) Teaching methods. Two teaching methods are adopted: one is online learning and the other is classroom learning. Online learning involves text analysis and reading analysis; classroom learning is mainly for read-aloud practice. Online class groups and Wechat applet are used as online learning means. Teacher sends weekly reading texts and analysis materials to online class groups in advance, requiring students to learn by themselves, take notes and annotate them. According to the content, teacher also assigns homework finished by card-punching applet; students are required to send photos of notes, reading audio or video to the card-punching applet in order to ensure self-study effect. Both teacher and students can check and know homework finishing situation once entering the applet. Students can also skim other students' homework, which could motivate them to do better. Statement is made at the beginning of the term that the card-punching frequency and quality are included in the course's final assessment. Classroom learning focuses on read-aloud performance and read-aloud video appreciation. Individuals or groups of students perform on the stage voluntarily or randomly. Group competition is organized for some reading texts. Group members design their own performance and even select background music. Teacher comments on students' manners, pronunciation, pause, emotion, etc. Students are also encouraged to comment on each other. For certain texts, famous reading performance videos are appreciated.

3.2 Observation and interview

In the first and last week of the teaching term, students from the two classes are asked for submitting an English teaching plan and a simulated teaching video respectively. The teaching plan is required to be based on PEP version of English textbook unanimously, while the chapters and teaching objects are selected by students themselves. Students conduct a simulated 20-minute teaching according to the teaching plan, and the whole teaching process is recorded forming a video. Teacher informs students that teaching plans and videos are the main parts for the final assessment of the course in order to encourage students to take the assignments seriously. The author then evaluates and scores students' teaching competency according to the teaching plans and stimulated teaching videos. Students' integrated performance, including language performance, teaching design capability, classroom implementation capability, innovation capability are evaluated during scoring. After scoring, the scores are put into the statistical software SPSS for processing.

At the end of the experiment, students in the experimental group are randomly selected for interviews to know their feelings of read-aloud learning and suggestions for future read-aloud teaching.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Teaching Competency Comparison between Pre-test and Post-test

Students hand in their teaching plan and simulated teaching video in the first and last teaching week. Their performance in the first week are converted as pre-test scores, performance in the last week are converted as post-scores. The results of the two tests for experimental group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Comparison between two tests for experimental group

Group	Test	N	Mean	Maximum	Minimum	Std. Deviation
Experimental group	Pre-test	36	72.56	92	51	9.76
	Post-test	36	79.56	95	58	8.98

Table 1 shows the mean score of pre-test for experimental group is 72.56, while the mean score of post-test is 79.6. Standard deviation (SD) of pre-test is 9.76; SD of post-test is 8.98. Contrasted with pre-test, scores of post-test for experimental group students improve by 7 points. In order to know whether they have made significant progress by statistics criterion, paired-samples T test is further conducted for experimental group. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2 Paired Samples Test for experimental group

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test – Post-test	-7.00000	1.41421	.23570	-7.47850	-6.52150	-29.698	35	.000

From Table 2 we can see the P value for paired samples test for experimental group is 0.000, much lower than 0.05; it means after the experiment, the experimental group made a remarkable progress on teaching competency.

Similarly, the descriptive analysis and paired samples test for control group is conducted. Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis, table 4 shows the paired samples test result.

Table 3 Comparison between two tests for control group

Group	Test	N	Mean	Maximum	Minimum	Std. Deviation
Control group	Pre-test	35	73.11	54	93	9.27
	Post-test	35	75.20	56	94	9.14

Table 4 Paired Samples Test for control group

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test – Post-test	-2.08571	0.88688	.14991	-2.39037	-1.78106	-13.913	34	.000

We can see that the mean score of pre-test and post-test for control group is respectively 73.11 and 75.20. Standard deviation (SD) of pre-test is 9.27; SD of post-test is 9.14. Students from control group have gained about 2.09 points compared with pre-test. Paired-samples T test shows the P value is 0.000, much lower than 0.05, so significant progress is also made by control group.

4.2 Teaching Competency Comparison between Experimental Group and Control Group

In order to know the differences between experimental group and control group, independent-samples T test is conducted between the two groups. Table 5 shows the result of independent-samples T test between two groups for pre-test.

Table 5 Independent Samples Test for pre-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Pre-test	Equal variances assumed	.066	.798	-.247	69	.805	-.55873	2.25930	-5.06592	3.94845
	Equal variances not assumed			-.247	68.964	.805	-.55873	2.25764	-5.06265	3.94519

The p value of the independent samples test between the two groups for pre-test is 0.805, which is higher than 0.05; and zero is included in the upper and lower limits of 95% confidence interval. It means although the mean score of control group on pre-test is higher than experimental group, there are no significant difference between experimental group and control group on pre-test.

Table 6 Independent Samples Test for post-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Post-test	Equal variances assumed	.007	.931	2.025	69	.047	4.35556	2.15042	.06559	8.64552
	Equal variances not assumed			2.025	68.859	.047	4.35556	2.15093	.06440	8.64671

Similarly, independent samples T test is also operated for post-test, and the results are presented in table 6. The P value is 0.047, lower than 0.05, and zero is not included in upper and lower limits of 95% confidence interval. So after the experiment, significant differences exist between experimental group and control group. Students in experimental group performs better than control group in teaching competency. In other words, the experiment is effective in improving students' teaching competency.

4.3 Observation results

The observation is based on students' teaching plans, simulated teaching videos and read-aloud performance in classroom. (1) Most of students' teaching plans are logical in structure and complete in content. Their teaching plans include teaching aims, important points and difficult points, teaching methods and teaching procedure. But most of the teaching methods are traditional, for example, a reading class is designed by "divide the passage into parts and write down the main idea of each part" in pre-reading, "answer the questions" in while-reading, "finish the exercises" in post-reading. The teaching plans are lack of innovation. (2) For the simulated teaching, most students can carry out the whole teaching smoothly, but the shortcomings lie that some teaching methods and teaching aims stated in their teaching plan are not realized in actual teaching procedure. Students are not adept in combining theories and practice. Inappropriate teaching manners are also one problem which one third of the students have, for example some students show stiff and

unsmiling facial expressions during the whole teaching process. Two students even wear flip-flops in teaching. (3) For the read-aloud practice in classroom, students can pronounce the words correctly, they can also master the pause and stress; but it's hard for them to perform with emotions and do appropriate body movements according to text. Some students are very shy to perform on the stage, thus causing unnatural manners.

4.4 Interview feedback

After the experiment, the author interviews students randomly from experimental group. The interview outline is: (1) the feelings in read-aloud learning and teaching; (2) the suggestions for read-aloud teaching; (3) self-evaluation for their stimulated teaching. The interview results are as follows: (1) Students hold a positive evaluation of read-aloud learning. Firstly, they think that read-aloud practice corrects and improves their target language pronunciation by listening, imitating and reading aloud of the texts. Secondly, read-aloud practice helps themselves to sense the rhythm of English better. The beauty of English is sensed by reading aloud by themselves. And the appreciation of famous read-aloud acts let them feel the glamour of this performance. Thirdly, read-aloud practices have a positive impact on their thinking and mentality. Some students mention that the reading of the English poem *A Psalm of Life* inspires them; they get determination and energy from this poem. Other students mention the reading of *When You Are Old* helps them to understand true love more. (2) In the aspect of read-aloud teaching, students hope to get more personal reading guidance. Sometimes they know the theories, but they cannot detect their own mistakes in reading. In addition, they mention that they do not have the initiative doing read-aloud practice unless the teacher required. (3) In the self-evaluation of simulated teaching, some students think that their language use ability is insufficient, and some students think that they are nervous when they go on stage, but they are not aware of their inadequacy in teaching innovation ability. On the whole, they are lack of in-depth thinking about their own teaching.

4.5 Results Discussion

The above data and interview reveals several points. Firstly, both students from experimental class and control class have improved their teaching competency after a semester's learning of the course "Teachers' Language Art". It is because some teaching skills such as class activities organization, heuristic teaching etc. are learned and trained in the course. At the same time, as English educational majors students also learn other teacher educational courses; their comprehensive ability has been improving through formal higher education learning. Secondly, the teaching competency of experimental group students is better than control group students after the experiment. In other words, their teaching competency has significantly improved. The reason is that in the process of read-aloud learning, students improve their language competency by imitating and practicing. Their pronunciation and sense of language rhythm have improved. Students' manners, self-confidence and

emotional expression also improved during read-aloud practice. Some students who were easily nervous when they first came on stage did not have stage fright after several read-aloud experiences. Actually, good pronunciation, good manners, self-confidence and emotional expression are indispensable elements for excellent teaching. In addition, the analysis of read-aloud texts can train students' ability of logical analysis and emotional understanding.

In the process of the experiment, the following problems are found: in the first place, students have a poor command of rhythm; and it is more difficult for them to perform artistically with emotion. Some students are even shy of reading with emotion. For this problem, teacher's guidance and teaching methods are very important. Teachers should build up an atmosphere of opening the voice and involving emotions. Secondly, it is hard for students to cultivate read-aloud habits. They hardly do read-aloud practice unless required by teachers. For this problem, teachers should innovate teaching methods to motivate students' interest and enthusiasm for read-aloud. For example, we can hold a read-aloud competition in the whole campus. Thirdly, students are lack of innovation capability in teaching design and simulated teaching. Most of students' teaching process is carried out in a step-by-step way. Some students conduct the whole teaching process by asking questions and checking answer. And the questions they ask are lack of enlightening for the target students.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of Research

Several points can be concluded after the empirical study. Firstly, teaching and learning of read-aloud play a positive role in pre-service English teachers' teaching competency training. Independent sample test shows that experimental students' teaching competency score is significant better than control students. Secondly, read-aloud training can improve students' target language ability, language rhyme sense, manners, self-confidence, expression and analytical ability. These traits contribute to students' integrated teaching competency improvement. Thirdly, pre-service English teachers' teaching innovation capability is seriously inadequate, and the students are not aware of this inadequacy. Fourthly, in read-aloud teaching, teachers should reform teaching methods to motivate students' learning interest and pay attention to students' reading habits cultivation.

There are still some deficiencies in this study. Firstly, the assessment of pre-service English teachers' teaching competency is based on simulated teaching, which cannot fully reflect students' teaching competency. Secondly, the samples of the study come from the same undergraduate university, which cannot reflect students' situation at all levels and regions. Future study can be conducted by expanding the number of samples, increasing the type of samples and improving the evaluation methods.

Acknowledgments

The research is funded by teaching reform project of Yuncheng University “Research on the Teaching Model of English and American Literature Course under the Guidance of Read-aloud Principle” coded JG201914. The author wishes to acknowledgement support of their funding. The author also likes to thank each participant of the experiment.

References

- [1] Dineke E.H. Tigelaar, Diana H.J.M. Dolmans, Dineke H.A.P. Wolfhagen & Cees P.M. Van Der Vleuten. The development and validation of a framework for teaching competencies in higher education [J]. Higher Education, 2004.
- [2] Gu Weidong. Teaching Method of Read-aloud---Guiding American Literature Teaching with Read-aloud [J]. Journal of Yuncheng College, 2000 (S2): 90-91.
- [3] Hu An-qi. The effect of recitation input on college English listening skills training: an experimental report on the training of non-english majors' listening skills [J]. History of Heilongjiang, 2009 (20): 156-157.
- [4] Kagan, D. M. (1992). Personal Growth Among Pre-service and Beginning Teachers [J]. Review of Educational Research, 62(2), 129-169.
- [5] Lee Shulman (1987) Knowledge and Teaching: Foundations of the New Reform [J]. Harvard Educational Review: April 1987, Vol. 57, No. 1, pp. 1-23.
- [6] Lu Min-xia. English Read-aloud and the improvement of English Listening and Speaking Ability [J]. Journal of Yangzhou University (Higher Education Research Edition), 2001 (03): 50-53.
- [7] Yue Hong-li, Kong Hai-yan. Read-aloud teaching strategies in college English classroom [J]. Overseas English, 2018 (05): 4-5+10.
- [8] Lu Min-xia. English Read-aloud and the improvement of English Listening and Speaking Ability [J]. Journal of Yangzhou University (Higher Education Research Edition), 2001 (03): 50-53.
- [9] Zhao Fengyun. Research on Developing Pre-service Teachers' English Pedagogical Content Competence-----A Case Study of Developing Skills at Handan College [D]. Shanghai Foreign Studies University, 2010.
- [10] Zhou Jun. Situation reproduction and demonstration training method in bilingual read-aloud teaching [J]. Journal of Yancheng Institute of Technology (Social Science Edition), 2018, 31 (03): 42-44.
- [11] Zhu Chun. Foreign Language Teaching Psychology [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008.