# A Study of Micro-reading in Improving Non-English Majors' Reading

**Xiaoyu He**

School of Foreign Languages of China West Normal University,
Nanchong, China
Email: 378501643@qq.com

**Abstract:**

*Reading is an indispensible means of language input in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning. In order to improve reading comprehension and abilities, non-English majors are supposed to read English articles and books extensively in class and after class, but they seldom do extensive reading. As for students, they are not conscious of the importance of reading English articles and books and thus do not form the English reading habit. As to teachers, they spend a great deal of time in class explaining how to accomplish reading scores, which means what teachers stress on is not reading itself but reading skills and strategies. Most studies at home and abroad have discussed reading strategies, but seldom discuss the role of micro-reading in improving English reading. Therefore, the research proposes that micro-reading is one effective way of arousing non-English majors' reading interest, thereby improving their reading scores and abilities. The core characteristic of micro-reading is short-but comprehensive-texted. Apart from it, micro-reading conforms to the mental features of college students, for the fragmentation ideology, liberalization thought and the high cyber-technology have great impacts on their reading. What's more, micro-reading materials show themselves in the manifesting form of words, pictures, audios and videos. Most importantly, micro-reading advocates the integration of reading and writing. These above-mentioned characteristics account for why micro-reading can be applied in non-English majors' reading class. Then the researcher applies three ways of micro-reading in pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stage to verify the proposed view.*

**Keyword**: micro-reading, non-English majors' reading, short-but-comprehensive-texted, mental features, the integration of reading and writing, forms, three ways of micro-reading

## 1. Introduction

Reading, a vital means of obtaining information in the era of knowledge explosion, is indispensible to learning English as a foreign language. However, students feel bored and headache when asked to read long texts full of hard-to-understood words and sentences. Moreover, they are ignorant of or unfamiliar with background cultural information which texts communicate.

Micro-reading refers to one new style reading whose reading materials are in forms of words, pictures, audios and videos from the Internet, blogs and the textbooks (Zhang, 2014). Put it simply, micro reading materials are short texts and videos from the Internet, blogs as well as Wechat, aiming to inspire students' desire for English reading, thereby improving students' reading scores and abilities. Moreover, micro-reading is classified as three kinds, which are rapid experience reading, character experience reading and writing migration reading. What distinguish micro-reading from traditional reading are its characteristics. With short but comprehensive texts in forms of words, pictures, audios as well as videos, being applicable to psychological characteristic and being integrated with writing, micro-reading can be employed in non-English majors' reading class.

The author gets 67 papers whose topics are relevant to micro-reading from CNKI, but only one paper discusses the role of micro-reading in non-English majors' reading. Meanwhile, the author gets 5 papers related to micro-reading from EBSCO, but none discuss micro-reading in English reading. Through analyzing the traditional non-English majors' reading class and discussing characteristics of micro-reading, the author proposes implementing micro-reading in pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stage is impactful on non-English majors' reading.

## 2. Analysis of Traditional Non-English Majors' Reading

CET, short for college English test in China, is the evaluation criterion of non-English majors' English proficiency. As for CET-4 and CET-6, 4 and 6 stand for non-English majors' English proficiency. The bigger the number is, the higher students' English proficiency is. Since reading part accounts for a large proportion of CET scores, in traditional reading class, most teachers lay one-sided emphasis on exam-oriented skills and strategies in the pursuit of high scores of reading comprehension in CET-4 and CET-6. What is neglected by most teachers is reading itself.

First, it is vocabulary and grammar teaching that teachers actually conduct in traditional non-English majors' reading class, whose goal is to enlarge students' vocabulary and teach grammar instead of having reading materials truly understood. However, as a matter of fact, the ultimate goal of reading is to obtain the gist and information which reading materials pass on.

Second, in order to achieve high scores in CET-4 and CET-6, reading skills and strategies are paid attention to by teachers and students, for students need to make use of these reading skills and strategies to get answers quickly in the time-limited exercises and exams. After finding answers, these reading materials are put aside by students. In this process, the gist of reading materials and the background information are almost neglected. Out of getting high reading scores in exams, students take numerous reading exercises and thus find little or no joy in reading itself.

Third, the traditional non-English majors' reading class is teacher-centered. In pre-reading stage, new words,

expressions and grammar related to reading materials are explained and taught by teachers. Students are required to memorize these words and expressions and grasp the newly-learned grammar before reading. Giving an account of cultural background information and reading skills are teachers' jobs. In the while-reading stage, students are asked to read texts in the textbook and finish reading exercises. The post-reading stage is just for checking students' answers and asking students to answer questions associated with reading texts. Hence, it is easy to find that students are passive receivers in traditional reading class. They often keep silence in class and find reading English boring.

Fourth, writing exercises are not taken in traditional non-English majors' reading class. Meanwhile, after-class writing exercises are not assigned by teachers. In their views, only reading activities and exercises can be conducted in reading class. However, writing plays an essential part in accomplishing reading comprehension in that writing acts as output, which facilitates reading as input. Besides, putting reading and writing together is essential to accomplish language learning.

Fifth, a forty-minute reading class doesn't allow for reading long passages and reading extensively. Due to it, the reading textbooks serve as the reading materials in class, but it is unable to meet students' appetite for obtaining update information from reading.

## 3. Characteristics of Micro-reading
As mentioned, micro-reading is classified to three kinds, namely rapid experience reading, character experience reading and writing migration reading. Characteristics of these three kinds of micro-reading are discussed to illustrate that micro-reading is capable of arousing students' interest in reading and promoting their reading proficiency.

### 3.1 Being Concise-but-Comprehensive
"Micro" in micro-reading refers to short-texted, but it is not equal to simple-texted. Although micro-reading is short-texted, it is full of rich contents. Students feel bored with long and monotonous reading texts and prefer short and interesting micro-reading materials which make it easy to stimulate students' motivation for reading English articles and books.  Owing to its characteristic of being short but comprehensive, it is convenient for the teacher to implement micro-reading into pre-reading stage, while-reading stage and post-reading stage.

### 3.2 Educational Appropriateness
Micro-reading possesses the characteristic of educational appropriateness for non-English majors, which means micro-reading is applicable for their mental features. As youths, non-English majors fancy reading online texts and blogs full of change in line with times. Long and difficultly-understood texts are not students' first choice when reading. If micro-reading is carried out in non-English majors' reading class, reading materials and contexts will be more authentic, which can cater to students' reading needs.

### 3.3 The Integration of Reading and Writing

In traditional reading class, students play roles of passive receivers. However, they would like to take active part in reading class rather than passively receive teachers' instruction. As micro-reading advocates, the way of changing the passive role is to integrate reading with writing. From the view that reading and writing are interdependent and inseparable, it can be easily inferred that reading and writing are of mutual promotion. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct writing activities in non-English majors' reading classes. Writing comes before or after reading. In this way, students' reading proficiency can be promoted.

### 3.4 Diverse Manifesting Forms of Reading Materials

What tells micro-reading from traditional reading is that micro-reading materials are in the diverse manifesting forms. In traditional non-English majors' reading class, textbooks are treated as the main reading materials. However, micro-reading offers reading materials in such forms as words, pictures, audios and videos, which are not so boring as they used to be in the traditional reading class.

### 4. Micro-reading in Improving Non-English Majors' Reading

Three kinds of micro-reading involving rapid experience reading, writing migration reading and character experience reading can be applied in pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stage. Respectively saying, rapid experience reading is proper for pre-reading stage. Writing migration reading can be implemented in pre-reading and post-reading stage. Character experience reading is capable of being carried out in while-reading stage and post-reading stage.

### 4.1 In the Pre-reading Stage

If rapid experience reading is implemented in pre-reading stage of non-English majors' reading class, vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge concerning texts will be taken place by short micro-reading materials closely related with students' life experiences. As its name suggests, rapid experience reading features rapidness and experience. To be exact, short-but- comprehensive texts are close to students' life experiences. In this stage, well-selected rapid experience reading materials are shown on PPT or distributed to students, which is conducive to provoke students' desire for further reading in while-reading stage. If students have read texts whose topic are around their own life experiences in pre-reading stage, they are more willing to explore others' life experiences in textbooks in the next stage. Students read through rapid experience reading materials, then make discussions, do brainstorming and draw semantic map.

Take one example, before asking students to read the text Goodbye School by Roald Dahl from reading course 1, New College English, short texts about Mayun, the founder of Alibaba Group, are distributed to students in pre-reading stage. In addition, short videos about his English speech are played as supplementary reading to short texts. As known, Mayun is adept at delivering English speeches. The following is Ma's English speech on IPO listing shows.

Hello, I'm Jack Ma, founder and chairman of Alibaba group. 15 years ago, 18 founders in my apartment had a dream, that someday we can build up a company, that can server millions of small business. Today, this

remains our mission to make easy to do business anywhere. At Alibaba, we fight for the little guy, the small businessmen and their customers, our role is simple, through our ecosystem, we help merchants and customers find each other and conduct business on their terms and in ways that best serve their unique needs. We help merchants to grow, create jobs and open new markets, in ways that were never before possible. Today, 15 years passed. We've grown so significantly and have become a household name in China. And soon, we are ready for the world to know us. You will hear details from our business later. But first let me take you on a journey around China, to see some of the real people, real stories that Alibaba has impact on them. I am proud to share with you these stories that show the heart and spirit of Alibaba. I am proud that we ignite innovation, create jobs benefit customers and help entrepreneurs fulfill their dreams. With Alibaba's platforms, people are improving their lives today, and have hope for a better tomorrow. From our humble beginnings and throughout the past 15 years, Alibaba has changed commerce in China. Our business has grown, but we never lost sight of our customers, focusing on solving their problems, leads to the best outcome for our business. Alibaba has come a long way, but we want to be a company that can last 102 years. We still have 87 years to go, and we believe one thing, "Today is difficult, tomorrow is more difficult, but the day after tomorrow is beautiful'. So we have to work very hard in order to survive the long journey.

The above 320-word speech is short but involves a great many business words such as founder, chairman, businesses, mission, vision, on their terms, household name, entrepreneurs, commerce and survive. Apart from abundant business terms, this speech also conveys comprehensive information. Ma's speech acts an encouragement to young college students in China, as his saying goes, today is difficult, tomorrow is more difficult, but the day after tomorrow is beautiful. Applying this speech text and video in pre-reading stage can inspire students' enthusiasm for further reading the text with the similar theme in the textbook. The speech text is rapidly read by students, while the video about Ma's speech plays a supplementary part in pre-reading stage, which satisfies students' sensory stimuli. As for college students, they are more concerned about updated reading contents instead of long and boring ones, which conform to their psychological features.

Except rapid experience reading, writing migration reading is another effective micro-reading in the pre-reading stage. As its name shows, reading is supposed to be integrated with writing. In other words, without writing exercises, it is difficult for students to achieve thorough reading comprehension. In non-English majors' English class, based on the themes of texts in the textbook, writing tasks which substitute traditional vocabulary and grammar teaching are designed beforehand by the teacher.

For example, before reading the text, Making Friends in American Culture, from reading course 1, New College English, students are required to write an eighty-word composition about their own experiences of making friends in China within fifteen minutes so as to arouse their curiosity towards probing into different cultures of making friends in other countries. After conducting writing exercises and tasks, the teacher seizes the opportune moment to make group discussion and debate in which the differences and similarities of friends-making in China and America are compared, paving the way for students to better explore different cultures in the text students are going to read.

**4.2 In the While-reading Stage**

In while-reading stage, as one type of micro-reading, character experience reading plays a key role of making a change to the class atmosphere of dullness and boredom in non-English majors' reading class. In the traditional non-English majors' reading class, the teacher explains and analyzes the difficult and important sentences, and asks students to do translation exercises for students' better understanding of reading materials. As a result of employing character experience reading in while-reading, students are not passive receivers any more. On the contrary, they actively participate in performing roles after reading the materials selected from the Internet, blogs and texts in books. Students' performance is profitable for teachers to check whether students truly understand reading materials or not. To speak of, among all text types, narration is the most appropriate one for character experience reading.

For instance, a story titled poor taxi driver is selected from the Internet by the author to be character experience reading material, which talks about a poor taxi driver, Tommy, whom four incidents happen to in one day. First, he carries a Betel Nut Girl who wants to harass him. Second, a pregnant woman makes him feel nervous. Third, he picks up a robber and then meets a police officer who only manages traffic, regardless of the robbery. Finally, a ghost student gets on his taxi. Students are divided into groups to perform five main characters in this story. Through their own performance, their reading interest in Taxi Driver, a drama screened in 1976 has been greatly aroused.  Taxi Driver is director Martin Scorsese's and screen writer Paul Schrader's gritty, disturbing and nightmarish modern film classic, which has more profound cultural background information than that of the simple story Poor Taxi Driver. After playing roles in Poor Taxi Driver, students are eager to explore roles in Taxi Driver in the process of watching the film and reading its English-version script.

**4.3 In the Post-reading Stage**

Writing migration reading can not only be applied in pre-reading stage, but also fits into the post-reading stage. Assigned writing exercises and tasks after reading are contributive to strengthen students' reading comprehension. In traditional non-English majors' reading class, students are asked to answer the post-reading questions, do the exercises designed in the textbook as well as consolidate the important language points. What students have learned from reading is only some language points in the text, not the gist and culture which the text conveys. Accordingly, implementing writing migration reading in non-English majors' reading class highly motivate students' reading desire and engage them in the active interaction with the reading materials. And teachers give the responsibility back to students in learning reading through assigning writing tasks.

In the meantime, character experience reading can be regarded as an assigned after-class reading task. Compared with other reading assignments, students prefer character experience reading full of creativity and challenge. The researcher as the teacher of sophomores majoring in history, law, and electronic and information engineering, in the middle of one semester, groups students to make PPTs and videos based on the topic of each unit of Watch, Listen and Talk 1, New College English, within one month. Students show great enthusiasm for making videos in which every group member plays a role. One month later comes the achievement exhibition. The representative of each group is making presentation about their PPT and

playing their video to their classmates, while five students randomly selected as commentators are scoring them. The four scoring criteria are in the following, each on a scale of 1 through 5. First, the speaker's voice is loud and clear. Second, the speaker explains PPT instead of reading words on PPT completely. Third, there are no mistakes and errors on PPT. Fourth, the video is clearly understood. That way groups compete with one another. In order to better cooperate with their group members, students themselves endeavor to dig into texts and interact with texts, which is exactly the ultimate goal of the non-English majors' reading course.

## 5. Conclusion

Micro-reading is a new effective way of inspiring non-English majors' interest which is the first teacher of English reading learning, thereby enhancing students' reading scores and competence. Major findings in the research are as follows. First, micro-reading greatly stimulates non-English majors' desire for reading English articles and books and it is able to make a big change of atmosphere in non-English majors' reading class. Second, implementing three types of micro-reading is not a lot of work in non-English majors' reading class, for micro-reading is short-texted and easily carried out in each reading stage. Third, three types of micro-reading are designed and applied in pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stage, which can demonstrate the effectiveness of micro-reading. Fourth, the paradigm of reading class shifts from being teacher-centered to being students-centered, which is helpful for students' language learning.

To sum up, this research proposes that micro-reading is an effective way to arouse non-English majors' reading desire, thereby facilitating students' reading scores and abilities. Then application of three kinds of micro-reading in pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stage strongly proves the validity of the proposed view. In further study, micro-reading can be applied in English majors' reading class and middle school students' English class.

## References

Anderson, N.J. (1999).*Exploring Second Language Reading: Issues and Strategies*. Boston: Hcinle& Heinle Publishers.

Carrell, P. L., Devine, J. &Eskey, D. E. (Eds.). (1988). *Interactive Approach to Second Language Reading.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Du, H.M. (2015) *Micro-writing in Mother Tongue Education in the United States. Curriculum, Teaching Material and Method.*

Grabe, W. & L. F. Stoller. (2002) *Teaching and Researching Reading.* Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.

Koda, K. (2007). *Insights into Second Language Reading.* Beijing: World Publishing Press.

Nunan.D(2001) *Second Language Teaching and Learning.* Beijing: Beijing Foreign Language and Research Press.

Nuttall, C. E. (2002). *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Press.

Wu, Q.L(ed.) (2011) *Reading Course 1, New College English(Second Edition)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Zhang L.P (2014) The Complementation and Coexistence of Micro-reading and Traditional reading. *Publishing research.* (80-82)