

Graded Reading and College English Reading of Foreign Cultural Classics: Practice and Reflection (Postprint)

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Conducting a comprehensive investigation of prevailing English graded reading systems and standards and applying them to university-level graded reading practice not only furnishes reliable empirical evidence for pedagogical reform in university English graded reading instruction, but also engenders profound reflections on demonstrating the role and professional competencies of librarians through library service innovation, particularly within the context of the “undergraduate-oriented” talent cultivation objectives of contemporary first-class undergraduate education.

[Method/Process] The “Extracultural Classics” graded reading promotion project for university English, conceptualized, organized, and executed by Shanghai Normal University Library in alignment with the “talent cultivation” objectives of first-class undergraduate education, centers on the theme of “Lexile grading, reading classics.” By leveraging diverse media modalities and employing “extensive reading” and “intensive reading” as dual pathways, the project advocates an interactive practice model integrating “in-class reading” and “extracurricular reading,” thereby serving both an auxiliary function to traditional university English instruction and furnishing reliable empirical evidence for future reforms in university English graded reading pedagogy.

[Results/Conclusion] Grounded in the audience characteristics of university reading promotion initiatives and the ultimate objectives of undergraduate education, the planning of university library reading promotion activities should closely align with institutional educational missions, comprehensively address the pressing needs of student learning and development, and necessitate meticulous, detail-oriented planning. Through multi-channel innovation in reading promotion models, libraries can manifest their professional value and thereby foster the healthy and effective advancement of library resources and services.

Full Text

Practice and Reflection on “Graded Reading” and “Extraterritorial Cultural Classics” in College English Reading

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Abstract:

[Purpose/Significance] This study thoroughly investigates currently popular English graded reading systems and standards, applying them to college English graded reading practice. It not only provides a reliable practical foundation for reforming college English graded reading instruction, but also offers deep reflection on how library service innovation can demonstrate the role and capabilities of professional librarians under the current “undergraduate-oriented” talent cultivation goals of first-class undergraduate programs.

[Method/Process] Based on the “talent cultivation” objectives of first-class undergraduate education, Shanghai Normal University Library planned, organized, and implemented a graded promotion project for college English reading of “extraterritorial cultural classics.” Centered on “Lexile grading and reading classics,” this project utilized various media to promote “extensive reading” and “deep reading” through an interactive practice model of “classroom reading + extracurricular reading.” This approach not only supplements traditional college English teaching but also provides a reliable practical basis for future reforms in college English graded reading instruction.

[Result/Conclusion] According to the characteristics of the university reading promotion audience and the ultimate goals of undergraduate teaching, university library reading promotion activities should be closely integrated with institutional training directions and comprehensively consider students’ urgent learning and developmental needs. The planning process requires “intensive cultivation and meticulous work,” with multi-channel innovative reading promotion models, to demonstrate the library’s professional value and promote the healthy and effective development of library resources and services.

Keywords: graded reading; Lexile English; reading promotion; resource promotion

1. Literature Review

Graded reading, a concept proposed many years ago in Western countries such as the UK and US, involves providing scientific reading plans tailored to children’s intellectual and psychological development, offering targeted reading materials for different children. Only when children read materials that match their cognitive and mental characteristics can they avoid having their reading enthusiasm dampened by reading obstacles. In 1836, American educator William McGuffey developed the first widely applied graded reading standard, the famous *McGuffey*

Key Readers, which has been passed down through generations and revered as a reading classic in America, influencing at least five generations of Americans. During the 1920s, various graded reading systems emerged in the West, and by the 1930s, graded reading materials had established relatively precise standards.

In China, the *China Children's Development Outline (2011-2020)* explicitly states: "Promote a grading system for children's books to provide age-appropriate reading materials for children of different ages." This marked the entry of "graded reading" into public awareness, with government departments, research institutions, and schools at all levels gradually recognizing its importance for cultivating reading habits and abilities. As economic globalization deepens, English plays an increasingly prominent role in economic, cultural, and knowledge exchange. Mastering and proficiently applying English has naturally become an important goal of "talent cultivation" in first-class undergraduate education. Reading is the most fundamental, direct, and effective way to master a language and improve language proficiency. Therefore, cultivating English reading skills can effectively help college students integrate into another culture, master new ways of thinking, expand their horizons, understand themselves and the world, and gain advantages in fierce social competition.

However, with continuous college enrollment expansion, students' English proficiency and language abilities vary significantly across institutions. The limitations of single teaching resources and rigid learning models mean existing classroom English teaching and reading patterns cannot meet the goals of first-class undergraduate "talent cultivation." Moreover, the cultivation of English reading habits and abilities is essentially the cultivation of cultural thinking abilities, which cannot be achieved through classroom teaching alone. Systematic reading activities and intellectual exchanges should be actively carried out both in and out of class to gradually expand knowledge and horizons and cultivate cross-cultural awareness. University libraries, possessing relatively rich English reading resources, can effectively incorporate student growth and development into reading promotion activities in alignment with first-class undergraduate talent cultivation goals. By investigating students' English reading abilities and interests beforehand and adopting popular organizational activities and formats, libraries can construct a graded promotion model for college English reading of "extraterritorial cultural classics" to supplement and extend college English teaching.

A search of CNKI using "graded reading" as the keyword yielded 262 journal articles and 30 master's/doctoral theses (as of September 15, 2019). The earliest paper, published in 2007, was *Reforming College English Teaching Models to Improve Students' Comprehensive English Application Ability*, which explored an effective English teaching reform model by updating teaching methods and constructing an extracurricular English reading grading system. This demonstrates that graded reading attracted early attention in college English teaching reform upon its introduction to China. From 2007-2008, only two relevant papers were published annually, increasing to about 20 per year from 2009-2015,

and experiencing explosive growth after 2015, reaching 50 papers annually in recent years. Most articles focus on concepts, grading standards, and college English teaching models. For instance, in 2009, Professor Li Chaoping from Zhejiang University introduced graded reading to Chinese reading, discussing starting ages, grading standards, and public library practices such as “summer programs” and pleasure reading for minors. Since then, graded reading has appeared in library reading promotion practices, primarily in public libraries promoting English or Chinese reading resources for children or primary and secondary students, with few cases in college English reading promotion.

2. Foreign Graded Reading Systems and Standards

After decades of practice and development, graded reading has become quite mature abroad, particularly in the UK and US, where comprehensive systems and standards have been established. Currently, two common types of graded reading systems exist.

2.1 Guided Graded Reading Systems These systems are further divided into “A-Z Grading Method” and “12-Color Grading Method” based on level range and format. The “A-Z Grading Method” uses the 26 English letters to categorize books into 26 levels, with difficulty increasing from A to Z, each level called a Guided Reading Level (GRL). The “12-Color Grading Method” uses 12 colors—pink, red, yellow, blue, green, orange, blue-green, purple, gold, white, light green, and rainbow—to represent reading levels, with content progressively advancing through color changes. The *Oxford Reading Tree* and *Cambridge Reading* series published by Oxford and Cambridge University Presses are representative examples. Guided grading standards analyze books based on factors such as vocabulary quantity, high/low-frequency word ratios, sentence length and complexity, ideological depth, and topic familiarity through combined computer and expert analysis. However, this method cannot grade readers’ reading levels.

2.2 Lexile Graded Reading System The Lexile Framework for Reading begins with early readers, where one Lexile represents a difficulty unit—one-thousandth of the gap between understanding an early children’s book and an encyclopedia—with a maximum score of 1700L. Unlike guided systems, Lexile uses a unified scoring system to assess both readers’ reading levels and text difficulty, enabling readers to select books with matching scores based on their abilities. This system’s precise, highly operational standards serve not only as extracurricular reading but also as an effective comprehensive training method for reading and language skills, making language learning goal-oriented and systematic. Additionally, Lexile has developed a complementary language training program, the “Lexile Professional Advancement Plan,” which enables reasonable matching of readers’ comprehension abilities, reading levels, and text difficulty to effectively assist educators in organizing systematic reading. This tool can

be used by teachers from kindergarten through university, reading specialists, librarians, and curriculum managers.

Thus, the “Lexile Reading Grading Framework and Assessment System” involves factors such as basic reading abilities, text comprehension difficulty, and reading material selection, providing a convenient system for language reading, comprehension, application, and level evaluation for both teachers and students. In 2017, Shanghai Normal University Library introduced two sets of American Lexile graded reading books (with some free system accounts) and established a “Lexile Reading Space” in the foreign language reading room, organizing themed lectures and “English Reading Corners” to attract students. However, limited book quantities and accounts prevented large-scale implementation, and the single activity format relied heavily on autonomous reading without librarian guidance, yielding minimal results. In early 2019, leveraging foreign reading room renovation, the library expanded the “Lexile Reading Space” into an independent area and relabeled all suitable English books in the collection with Lexile values after professional assessment, integrating them with the two introduced Lexile series. This restructuring aimed to more effectively support resource provision and reading services in first-class undergraduate construction by addressing current weaknesses in college students’ English learning.

3. Graded Reading Practice in Reading Promotion

3.1 Overall Approach The college English reading “extraterritorial cultural classics” graded promotion project centers on “Lexile grading and reading classics,” utilizing various media to promote “extensive reading” and “deep reading” through an interactive “classroom reading + extracurricular reading” model.

Focusing on classic works of British and American “social culture” and “academic culture,” the project targets college students with similar foundational and cultural backgrounds. Through reading classics and text interpretation, it organizes a series of “Lexile graded reading” activities. Culturally, it aims to help students progress gradually from shallow to deep understanding of reading materials and classic culture, achieving dialogue with classics, masters, and history. Pedagogically, it enables students to master and properly use the Lexile system to independently select targeted classic cultural resources, making Lexile a crucial channel for comprehensively improving English abilities.

The project implementation is based on two aspects: (1) utilizing the new platform “Lexile Reading Grading Achieve3000 Assessment System” and modern media communication methods such as the Internet, WeChat, and QQ as interactive platforms; (2) relying on the “Lexile Reading Space” and Lexile e-books provided by the system platform as spatial and resource service guarantees.

3.2 Implementation Content 3.2.1 Developing Graded English Reading Enhancement Plans Through Comparative Traditional Reading Models

Targeting liberal arts majors (literature, philosophy, history) and using voluntary participation, the project established two comparative groups: a “Traditional English Reading Group” and a “Lexile Graded Reading Group,” supervised by dedicated librarians. The traditional group relied on autonomous learning, with librarians only providing space and resources without any reading guidance. The Lexile group followed the Achieve3000 Lexile graded reading framework, adopting a “librarian guidance + autonomous reading + interactive sharing” approach. Members engaged in deep reading of serialized “extraterritorial cultural classics” selected by librarians across different cultural carriers, texts, and themes, while participating in various Lexile graded reading promotion activities. The program integrated multimedia and multi-dimensional reading exchanges around four stages: pre-reading activities, reading materials, post-reading writing and communication, and comprehension assessment.

The comparative experiment lasted one semester, with librarians preserving baseline and post-experiment reading ability test data for each participant and conducting phased comparative analysis. Through comparing reading experiences and effectiveness data between the two groups, and based on individual progress and interests of Lexile group members, further English reading enhancement plans were developed. The goal was to construct a graded promotion model for college English reading of “extraterritorial cultural classics” that effectively improves students’ English reading comprehension and writing skills through approaches complementary to classroom teaching.

3.2.2 Regularly Conducting English Graded Promotion Activities with Librarian Recommendations

The Lexile group activities primarily involved establishing a Lexile Reading Salon, with five training stages formalized into various activity formats. Pre-reading activities included lectures introducing the Lexile system and reading culture to help students understand the background of classics. Reading materials involved both intensive and extensive reading, allowing immersion in the “Lexile Reading Space” for deep reading while broadly accessing more materials. Post-reading writing and communication consisted of sharing sessions and competitions. Comprehension assessment used the Achieve3000 system to evaluate reading effectiveness.

Since early 2019, the library formed the “Lexile Reading Salon” based on the Lexile group, organizing lectures such as “Introduction to Lexile English Grading System” and “Lexile English Learning Strategy Sharing” in the Fengxian campus library’s Lexile Reading Space. Dedicated librarians recommended classics matching students’ reading levels and organized regular “Read a Book With You” sessions and post-reading speech sharing activities. Through “classic recommendations,” librarians encouraged broad reading of matched resources. Regular Lexile testing was conducted to analyze reading effects, adjust progress and materials, and award prizes—English classic books—to high scorers to boost confidence.

In the “classic recommendation” activities, librarians provided individually matched books based on each member’s interests and Lexile value. Table 1 shows the carefully selected “extraterritorial cultural classics” recommended by dedicated librarians for salon members in the first half of this year. Each work represents an era’s 缩影 and embodies meaningful literary, linguistic, and cultural interconnections. Through Lexile-based reading practice, language learning becomes closely connected with social culture, enabling students to improve language skills while experiencing intellectual and cultural enrichment.

3.3 Practical Effects and Characteristics This project encourages “immersive reading + interactive sharing,” guiding students to appreciate and understand “extraterritorial cultural classics” while developing language comprehension and logical thinking skills for deep and effective reading. It breaks through traditional teaching models requiring word-by-word recognition and mandatory grammar mastery, demonstrating significant practical effects and distinctive features.

3.3.1 Effectively Enhancing Students’ Reading Confidence and Language Thinking Ability

The Lexile system and online assessment platform are complementary. Librarians can objectively monitor dynamic changes in students’ Lexile values, particularly for those with minimal improvement, by adjusting reading difficulty within the vast “extraterritorial cultural classics” collection. This targeted approach enhances reading confidence and skills. Rather than simply demanding “more reading,” the project provides personalized, meaningful challenges. Based on a comparative Chinese-Western cultural perspective, activities like “Read a Book With You” compared *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with *Journey to the West*, fostering deeper understanding and appreciation of classics’ intellectual essence while developing language expression and thinking abilities.

3.3.2 Boosting English Graded Reading Effects Through Online and Offline Integration

Online activities involve salon members using modern media to share reading notes and discuss themes via WeChat and QQ groups, enabling timely consultation with librarians and peers. Offline activities include post-reading speech sharing sessions organized by members and librarians, featuring student presentations, librarian feedback, and carefully reviewed reflections. After one semester, Lexile group members’ average scores improved from 750L to 900L, with individual gains of 100-200L, while the traditional group showed minimal change. Both online and offline activities stimulated reading enthusiasm, promoted deep comprehension of classics, and cultivated language expression and thinking skills.

3.3.3 Facilitating Campus Implementation and Promotion of Graded Reading

During implementation, participants learned to use Lexile values to select appropriate resources and experienced the operational model of the Lexile system and Achieve3000 assessment. This multi-dimensional approach systematically develops English reading habits and abilities. The project demonstrated the scientific, rational, and feasible nature of the Lexile system through comprehensive understanding of its development, influence, grading principles, and scoring. Based on participants' improved English proficiency and enthusiasm, the model proves highly conducive to campus-wide implementation and promotion.

3.3.4 Better Serving College English Graded Reading Teaching Reform

Using Lexile values for scientific grouping and the Achieve3000 system for analysis and comparison, Lexile group members showed significantly improved English abilities compared to the traditional group. This model leverages online platform advantages with differentiated online and offline components, enabling librarians to select appropriate “extraterritorial cultural classics” and supplementary materials based on individual differences. It monitors and adjusts reading processes in real-time, cultivating new skills in autonomous inquiry, cooperative learning, reading reflection, and comprehensive application. As a targeted “autonomous + interactive + inquiry” model, it not only assists traditional college English teaching but also provides reliable practical evidence for future teaching reforms.

4. Reflections and Recommendations

As a beneficial attempt at campus “academic culture” and deep reading activities, our library gradually established a graded promotion model for college English reading of “extraterritorial cultural classics,” integrating it into library reading promotion activities with phased piloting and expansion based on participant conditions. The significant improvement in participants' Lexile values led to substantially increased registration for subsequent activities, primarily due to three factors:

4.1 The Pivotal Role of Dedicated Librarians in Graded Reading Promotion

The initiative, organization, and implementation of any reading promotion project depend heavily on librarians' subjective agency. Previous Lexile activities were limited to single formats relying on autonomous learning without effective guidance, resulting in low participation and minimal outcomes. In this project, the foreign language reading room librarian—possessing years of college English teaching experience, strong responsibility, initiative, and approachability—was invited to serve as an instructor and co-planner for all project activities. Dedicated librarians helped students select appropriate classics, provided timely answers and feedback on reading questions and assignments, and communicated with students to adjust and improve activities. Other library team members provided excellent support for the dedicated

librarian's instruction, demonstrating that collaborative effort maximizes effectiveness. Therefore, reading promotion activities must involve experienced, motivated professional librarians in planning, coordination, and organization.

4.2 Integrating Library Professional Activities into Graded Reading Promotion

Due to account limitations, the project couldn't utilize the platform's rich on-line classic resources. However, the library integrated existing Lexile resources with all English materials in the collection that could be labeled with Lexile values, reorganizing them in a single space. Breaking traditional shelving methods, all resources were arranged by Lexile value for easy access. Dedicated librarians carefully compiled intensive and extensive reading lists of "extraterritorial cultural classics," supplementing collection gaps promptly. This professional activity-based promotion model differs from eye-catching cultural events like skits, fashion shows, or photography contests. It ensures collection completeness, significantly improves resource utilization, and connects closely with libraries' social functions of "inheriting human cultural heritage" and "systematically collecting and preserving valuable documents," truly demonstrating professional value.

4.3 Focusing Promotion Project Planning on College Students' Learning and Growth Needs

A good reading habit requires sustained periods and continuous external motivation. This project's graded reading promotion model was planned to address current college students' weakest, most concerning, and most needed aspects, directly relating to their English learning and future development. Spanning one semester, the project effectively supplemented classroom English learning with extracurricular reading. The planning emphasized activity continuity and systematic learning, generating high student enthusiasm. During sharing sessions, time constraints even led students to request extended or increased activity frequency. Therefore, library reading promotion must integrate into undergraduate teaching's "talent cultivation" process, focusing on students' urgent learning and growth needs to enhance their analytical, problem-solving, and thinking abilities through reading, rather than emphasizing short-term sensational effects through seasonal or one-off events.

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