

READING SERVING FOR MAJOR LEARNING: A TEACHING EXPERIMENT ON COMBINATION BETWEEN COLLEGE ENGLISH READING WITH STUDENTS' MAJOR LEARNING

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Abstract: This study investigates the integration of College English reading with students' major-related learning in the context of a College English course in China. The research was conducted with a second-year College English class consisting of 32 medical students. Data were collected throughout the experiment, including students' self-reports. The findings indicate that incorporating reading materials related to students' majors in the College English course expanded their reading scope and fostered collaborative learning through group-based literature reading and essay writing. Through this integration, students produced essays in English related to their major or personal interests in teamwork. The integration resulted in positive outcomes, such as increased student engagement, improved learning experiences, and heightened motivation. Additionally, a commonly reported challenge was slow reading speed, primarily due to unfamiliar genres and the presence of numerous professional terms or academic vocabulary.

Keywords: English reading, integration, learner engagement, major-related learning, medical students

INTRODUCTION

The integration of College English (CE) reading with students' specialized fields of study has gained significant attention in recent years, driven by the growing recognition that English is not merely a tool for language acquisition but also a critical medium for academic and professional development. This approach aligns with global trends in English for Specific

Purposes (ESP) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which emphasize contextualized language instruction within specific disciplinary frameworks (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Coyle et al., 2010). By linking language learning to students' academic disciplines, this method promotes the simultaneous development of both linguistic and professional competencies. As English proficiency is increasingly essential in a globalized world, integrating subject-specific content into language instruction not only helps students become more proficient in English but also equips them with the skills necessary to navigate their professional fields effectively. This integrated approach fosters both language acquisition and academic growth, preparing students for future career challenges.

In China, College English (CE) is a mandatory course for non-English major college students, focusing on the core language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, due to the limited classroom hours, typically around 3–4 hours per week, reading has become a central focus of instruction, as it constitutes approximately 35% of the College English Test (CET) content. The College English Teaching Guide (2020) explicitly encourages the integration of CE learning with students' specialized fields of study, suggesting that English be used as a tool to access academic literature within their specific disciplines. This recommendation highlights a growing expectation that students engage with major-related English resources to enhance their academic expertise and career readiness. By incorporating discipline-specific reading into CE instruction, students are not only improving their language skills but also gaining insights into the academic language and terminology relevant to their fields of study. This integration, therefore, supports both linguistic development and professional advancement, aligning language learning with students' long-term career goals.

The integration of English reading with discipline-specific content serves as an essential bridge between general language learning and professional education. This approach offers dual benefits: enhancing linguistic skills and fostering academic competence in students' chosen fields. By focusing on reading materials relevant to their academic disciplines, students can develop a deeper understanding of subject-specific terminology and academic writing styles. Recognizing the potential benefits of this approach, this study conducted a teaching experiment with medical students, aiming to explore how integrating English reading with their specialized field of study could improve both their language proficiency and academic engagement. The experiment involved reading assignments that included articles related to medical topics, along with collaborative essay-writing activities. These activities encouraged students to engage more deeply with English-language academic texts, helping them bridge the gap between language learning and professional academic practice.

English reading proficiency, particularly in discipline-specific contexts, remains a significant challenge for College English (CE) learners in China. According to Cai (2016, 2017, 2018), a persistent issue in CE instruction is the "time-consuming and low-efficiency" nature of traditional courses, which often fail to equip students with the necessary skills to engage with major-related English literature effectively. These challenges can hinder students' ability to fully benefit from the potential of English language learning in their academic and professional growth. In response to these challenges, this research explores the effects of integrating English reading with medical students' major-related learning through targeted reading assignments and collaborative academic tasks. By incorporating discipline-specific content into the reading curriculum, this study aims to address the gap between general language proficiency and the ability to engage with academic texts in students' chosen fields.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning with students' major-specific content has gained prominence as educators aim to enhance language proficiency while supporting academic or professional goals. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) emphasize that engaging with authentic materials not only develops language skills but also fosters critical thinking and analytical abilities, which are essential for academic success and lifelong learning. Approaches like Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and blended learning have shown potential in aligning language instruction with the needs of various disciplines. These methods address the dual goals of improving linguistic proficiency and supporting students' career-oriented growth, ensuring relevance in both educational and professional contexts. By emphasizing real-world applications, such approaches strengthen the connections between language acquisition and students' fields of study, enhancing their overall learning experience.

CLIL integrates language learning with subject matter instruction, enabling students to gain proficiency in both linguistic and disciplinary competencies simultaneously. Lasagabaster and Doiz (2016) highlight that CLIL fosters linguistic and cognitive development through exposure to authentic materials and interdisciplinary concepts. In STEM and business education, CLIL has proven particularly effective, as students exhibit higher motivation, improved critical thinking, and deeper engagement compared to peers in traditional EFL settings. The approach also supports long-term retention of knowledge by embedding language skills within contextually meaningful content. Through CLIL, students not only achieve enhanced language abilities but also develop a nuanced understanding of their disciplines, positioning them for greater success in both academic and professional arenas.

ESP adapts EFL instruction to address the unique linguistic demands of specific academic and professional fields. For instance, ESP courses designed for medical or engineering students emphasize specialized vocabulary and communication skills directly applicable to their disciplines. Kalugina et al. (2018) assert that integrating ESP into university curricula enhances students' language proficiency while preparing them for their future careers. The use of tools such as smart coursebooks and e-learning platforms facilitates this contextualization by enabling learners to engage with practical, field-specific materials. These resources provide opportunities to practice relevant language skills in real-world scenarios, thus bridging the gap between classroom learning and professional application (Graham, 2013; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Blended learning combines face-to-face instruction with digital resources, creating a flexible model for integrating EFL with major-specific studies. Idris et al. (2019) and Kirovska-Simjanoska (2020) emphasize the effectiveness of blended learning, particularly in ESP contexts. For example, engineering students using gamified platforms and simulations have demonstrated improvements in technical language proficiency and practical communication skills. This approach also fosters learner autonomy and engagement, which are essential for success in specialized learning environments. By merging traditional teaching methods with digital tools, blended learning provides an adaptive framework that caters to diverse learning styles while maintaining a strong focus on real-world applications (Graham, 2013; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

In the medical field, where advancements are predominantly published in English, the ability to comprehend academic literature is crucial. Discipline-specific English training equips students to stay informed about developments in their fields, enhancing their professional competence. Activities such as group discussions, essay writing, and presentations based on medical texts promote deeper understanding and the ability to articulate complex ideas. Ellis (2003) highlights that these collaborative practices not only improve comprehension but also

strengthen students' confidence in using English as a tool for professional communication. By aligning language instruction with the demands of medical education, students become better prepared for academic and clinical challenges.

Effective integration of English reading with specialized learning necessitates a shift from traditional teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered methods that emphasize autonomy. Scharle and Szabo (2000) advocate for a gradual increase in student responsibility, empowering learners to take control of their educational journey. This approach aligns with major-specific practices, fostering engagement and motivation through autonomy. By encouraging students to explore discipline-related texts and take ownership of their learning, educators help them develop independent study habits and critical thinking skills. This empowerment not only enhances language proficiency but also builds the confidence required for lifelong learning in specialized contexts.

The selection of materials plays a critical role in fostering engagement and relevance in EFL instruction. Allowing students to choose texts related to their majors increases interest and encourages ownership of their learning. Wang & Wang (2013) highlights that students may be more encouraged by incorporating materials of students' own choosing relating to the subjects that they study in their language learning. In the context of CE instruction to medical students, resources from platforms like PubMed provide valuable opportunities to engage with cutting-edge research while developing specialized language skills. Tailored material selection bridges the gap between language learning and disciplinary knowledge, enabling students to build both linguistic competence and subject matter expertise.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study was conducted at a university in Gansu Province, China, affiliated with the National Ethnic Affairs Commission. The participants were A-level students in the CE course, representing the highest English proficiency among the 2020 cohort. From this group, 32 students majoring in Clinical Medicine, Nursing, Stomatology, and Medical Laboratory Technology formed the experimental class.

Table 1: Demographic constitution of the participants in experimental group

Experimental Group	Total	Gender		Majors			
		male	female	Clinical Medicine	Nursing	Stomatology	Medical Laboratory Technology
	32	11	21	16	2	9	5

Instruments

Students submitted weekly self-reports online, detailing their progress and challenges in the process of accomplishing English reading assignment. According to Baer (2019), self-report is one of the research methods widely used to capture psychology features of a person. Since the study spanned three months, students submitted weekly self-reports, resulting in a total of 12

reports per student. Data involved in this study was from the section of students' reporting of progress in their reading major-related materials, the other sections were not covered.

Materials

The reading materials involved in this study were students' self-chosen major-related materials chosen by the students themselves, who searched for articles tailored to their major or interest. Popular websites, such as PubMed, were recommended by the students' professional course teachers. The essay writing tasks were completed in team's work and based on the students' own choice of literature related to their majors. This activity aimed to connect their reading with their academic fields. Wang & Wang (2013) suggest that allowing students to choose reading materials related to their majors may encourage them to engage more with academic reading on their own.

Experimental Design

The study spanned three months and followed a structured approach in three procedures as the following figure:

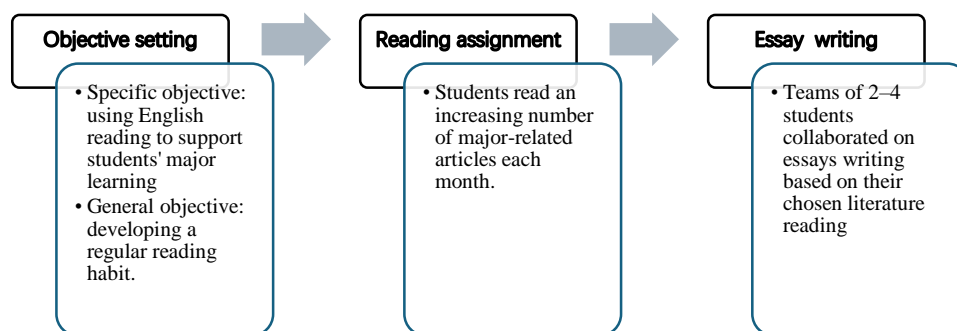


Figure 1: Three procedures in combination between English reading and major learning

Objective setting

Before the experiment, the participants and the researcher consulted on their English reading objectives for the CE course. After consultation, the students were encouraged to focus on two primary objectives in their reading: (1) a specific objective of using English reading to support their major studies, and (2) a general objective of cultivating a regular reading habit.

Specific objective

Initially, most students identified passing exams, such as school exams, CET6, or postgraduate entrance exams, as their primary goal for English reading. Students were encouraged to establish broader and longer-term objectives, aiming to make English reading serve not only their exams but also their major learning and future medical professions. To be successful as both medical students and future doctors, staying informed about cutting-edge medical advancements is crucial. Since much advanced medical literature is published in English, students were guided to view English reading as essential for accessing these resources. Consequently, the specific objective evolved into a more comprehensive one: using English reading to engage with major-related literature, support academic success, and enhance professional competence in their field.

To address the specific objective, written work was incorporated into the reading assignments. Participants collaborated on writing a short essay based on their major-related literature reading. Grouping was introduced in the second month, allowing students time to adapt to the intervention in the first month. Students were divided into 11 groups, each comprising 2–4 members with similar majors. Each group elected a leader and consulted to identify an essay topic related to their major, ideally one that interested all members. Once the topic was chosen, members read related English literature to gather theoretical support. Each member actively contributed to the essay-writing process.

General objective

The development of a regular reading habit was planned to progress gradually over the course of the semester. For the first month, for most students, the objective might be the initial cultivation of regular reading habit and preliminary touching upon the major-related literature in English by trying to read one related article. For the second month, students were encouraged to read two or three more major-related English articles in addition to reading regularly for the completion of other reading tasks. By the third month, the goal was to establish a regular reading habit and collaborate on writing a short thesis with team members based on more extensive English literature reading. Students were also encouraged to view English reading as a leisure activity, similar to how they might enjoy reading in Chinese, with the goal of becoming proficient and confident readers.

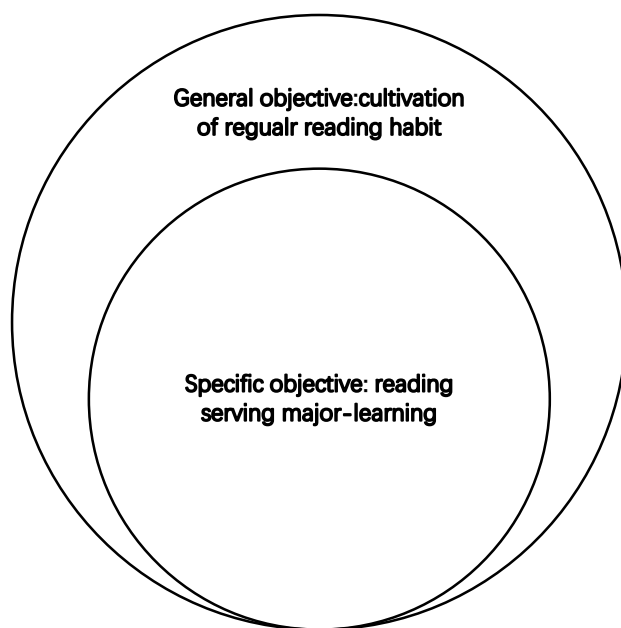


Figure 2: Objective building

The two objectives, while distinct, are closely interrelated. The general objective of cultivating a regular reading habit naturally encompasses the specific objective of using English reading to support major studies and pass exams. By focusing on long-term goals like becoming proficient in reading English medical literature, students can simultaneously prepare for their exams and enhance their professional development. The general habit of regular reading helps reinforce this process, enabling students to integrate English reading not only into their academic lives but also into their future medical careers. Therefore, the specific objective can

be viewed as a subset of the broader, general objective, both working together to create more autonomous and capable learners.

Reading assignment

Three categories of reading assignments were given to the experimental group on a monthly basis. These categories primarily differed in the workload: the first category had the least amount of reading, the second had a moderate amount, and the third had the most. Students signed a Reading Assignment Contract monthly, selecting their preferred category. The assignments included reading texts from textbooks, CET-6-related materials, leisure reading materials, major-related literature, and essay-writing based on their major-related literature reading. This study focused specifically on the major-related reading and essay-writing tasks.

Essay writing tasks were completed in teams and required students to select literature related to their majors. This activity aimed to connect reading with academic fields. Research by Wang & Wang (2013) suggests that allowing students to choose reading materials related to their majors may encourage greater engagement with academic reading. The reading assignments were structured to be completed within four weeks, with students dividing tasks into weekly goals. The number of major-related articles to read was adjusted according to the category of reading assignments. In the first month, most students read one major-related article, as argumentation in literary genres was more challenging compared to other genres and many students were unfamiliar with it. In the second month, the number of articles was increased to two, and in the final month, to three or four articles.

Collaborative Essay writing

The collaborative essay-writing process promoted teamwork and integrated English reading with professional interests. Just as aforementioned, students were organized into 11 groups based on similar majors, ensuring shared expertise and relevance. Each group selected an essay topic aligned with their academic discipline or personal interests.

Group members divided the workload, with each individual reading relevant literature and drafting specific sections of the essay. A group leader was appointed to coordinate activities, ensure collaboration, and report progress to the teacher. To facilitate communication, online groups were created on platforms like WeChat or QQ, allowing members to hold virtual meetings, discuss challenges, and brainstorm ideas related to the essay. This virtual component allowed for continuous communication and idea-sharing anytime.

Collaboration was central to the process, as members actively participated in discussions, provided feedback, and worked together to refine their essays. The goal was to create a cohesive and well-structured essay based on literature reading, reflecting the orientation "English reading to serve my major and my future job." Finally, after thorough group discussions and revisions, the completed essays were submitted, showcasing the collective effort and contributions of all members.

RESULTS

Broader Reading Scope

The intervention significantly diversified students' reading materials. Students expanded their focus beyond textbooks and CET-related content to include major-related literature. This shift fostered a more self-directed and engaging reading experience. The self-reports showed all

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students began engaging with major-related literature to complete team assignments, which involved writing short essays based on the articles they had read. This collaborative effort allowed them to appreciate the relevance of their reading in relation to their studies. These changes in reading habits indicated a shift toward a more diverse and self-directed approach to reading.

Essays completed

Most groups completed essays on topics closely related to their majors, such as diabetes, hypertension, and nursing practices. However, some groups accomplished essays based on personal interests, addressing issues like mental health and literary analysis. This variety reflected the flexibility of the approach and its responsiveness to individual motivations.

The following table lists the titles of essays completed by each group:

Table 2: Essays completed by groups based on major-related literature reading

Groups	Group leader	Members	Major	Titles of essays
Group 1	S15	S8, S27	Clinical Medicine	"Diabetes" or "wealthy disease"?
Group 2	S25	S16, S17	Clinical Medicine	I really want to love this world- A literature review on Depression
Group 3	S31	S18, S21, S24	Clinical Medicine	Some misunderstandings about medicine-taking in Hypertension
Group 4	S22	S20, S23	Clinical Medicine	An exploration on how to improve reading proficiency in EFL learning
Group 5	S26	S28.S29	Clinical Medicine	What do you know on Assisted Reproductive Technology(A R T)?
Group 6	S14	S13	Nursing	Development and basic introduction of Nursing
Group 7	S10	S2. S3	Stomatology	A study on the Phenomenon of College Students' Staying up Late and Skipping Breakfast
Group 8	S4	S11.S19	Stomatology	An Analysis on freedom of humanity in <i>Brave new world</i>
Group 9	S1	S12.S30	Stomatology	How should we prevent HPV?
Group 10	S7	S5	Medical Laboratory Technology	A simple introduction of instruments in Medical Laboratory Technology

continued

Group 11	S9	S6, S32	Medical Laboratory Technology	Say “No” to Mental internal friction
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Among the 11 groups, six groups (Groups 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 10) finished essays on topics closely related to their major. The remaining five groups (Groups 4, 7, 8, 9, and 11) completed essays on themes that deviated to some extent from their major. The themes chosen by Groups 7, 9, and 11 were not directly related to their major but were still medically relevant. However, Groups 4 and 8 selected themes from fields outside of both their major and medical studies.

The reasons for choosing themes deviated from their major were varied, but the common point was the interests-related. Group 4 stated that they were currently more interested in ways on how to improve their English reading proficiency, so that they could be more benefited in improving it by studying it. Group 7 noticed many of their schoolmates had the habit of staying up late and skipping breakfast, so they wanted to solve some problem closely related to their actual life. Group 8 chose the theme related to English novel literature under the suggestion given by the group leader, who had a strong interest in the novel *Brave New World*. Group 9 chose the topic on HPV for the reason that it’s somewhat hot topic and the project of early intervention of it had been carried out in some areas in China. Group 11 dealt with the topic on mental internal friction since one of their members was personally experiencing this issue at the time.

Positive changes

Student feedback highlighted significant positive changes, primarily reflected in increased engagement, enhanced learning, and heightened motivation. These improvements stemmed from a broader approach to learning that went beyond standard textbooks, incorporating materials closely related to students’ majors. This not only deepened their engagement but also allowed them to see the direct connection between their reading tasks and their future careers, making learning more meaningful. As a result, students experienced enhanced expertise in both English and their specific fields of study, while the relevance of the tasks fostered a stronger sense of purpose and motivation. Collectively, these outcomes underscore the value of a tailored and practical approach to fostering both academic growth and career readiness. The following examples from students’ response reflect the positive changes.

Increased Engagement: “In the past (we) only learn contents of the text books, now it’s more than things of the text books. What we have covered is much wider, especially we read things related to our major.” (S26).

Enhanced Learning: “This approach has improved my expertise in both English and my field of study” (S7).

Motivation: “Reading now feels more meaningful, as it connects directly to my future career” (S14).

Challenges

Students faced several challenges during the reading process, with one of the most commonly reported issues being a slowdown in reading speed. This difficulty was primarily attributed to unfamiliar genres and the presence of numerous professional terms or academic vocabulary, which required additional effort to comprehend. For example, encountering a high frequency of unknown words often disrupted their reading flow, making it harder to maintain focus and momentum. Take the following excerpt as an example:

Slow reading speed: "Reading the literature is relatively slow due to the new genre and many difficult terms in it, requiring more understanding of the content, and therefore the writing progress is relatively slow."(S5)

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The combination of College English (CE) reading with students' major learning proved to be an effective pedagogical approach. It not only enhanced students' linguistic and academic skills but also prepared them for future professional challenges. By fostering a habit of regular, self-directed reading, this method aligns with the broader goals of learner engagement and lifelong learning.

The results support the effectiveness of integrating CE reading with students' major studies, broadening students' reading scope by transitioning from textbook and CET (College English Test) materials to a broader range of texts, including and major-related literature. This approach aligns with Grabe & Stoller's (2020) assertion that extensive reading practices contribute to language development by providing students with meaningful contexts for language use. As S26 noted, the inclusion of broader, profession-related content provided a more meaningful learning experience, making the process both intellectually stimulating and career-relevant. This also aligns with the findings of Wang and Wang (2013), who argue that connecting academic tasks to students' fields of interest can significantly enhance engagement and intrinsic motivation. When students are given the freedom to explore topics of personal or professional interest, such as major-related literature, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning.

Overall, while most groups accomplished essays on themes aligned with their major, some selected topics based on personal interests or current issues, reflecting a range of motivations behind their choices. This outcome supports *Dörnyei's (2009)* framework on L2 motivation, which emphasizes the importance of linking language learning to future selves and professional aspirations. By aligning reading tasks with students' envisioned professional identities, it not only boosted their motivation but also fostered a sense of purpose in their academic journey. This diversified reading scope resulting from their own choices not only enriched students' linguistic skills but also sustained their interest and motivation, both critical for fostering long-term engagement in EFL learning. The shift from reading solely for exam preparation to reading for practical and academic purposes marks a significant transformation in students' reading habits. Initially driven by extrinsic motivators such as exam performance, many students gradually developed intrinsic motivation and found personal fulfillment in the reading process itself.

However, integrating English reading with major-specific learning poses challenges. The linguistic complexity of discipline-specific texts can overwhelm students, particularly in fields like medicine, where specialized vocabulary and intricate syntactic structures are prevalent. One notable challenge students encountered was a slowdown in reading speed, largely due to the unfamiliarity of genres and the high frequency of academic vocabulary. As S5 pointed out, this often disrupted the reading process, requiring more time and effort to comprehend the content and complete related tasks. This challenge is consistent with Grabe's (2009) observations on reading fluency, which suggest that unfamiliar text structures and specialized terms can hinder automaticity and impede overall comprehension.

Integrating English reading with specialized learning addresses key challenges in traditional CE courses. It enhances the relevance and efficacy of CE instruction by bridging the gap between language learning and students' academic and professional goals. Discipline-specific texts provide a practical and meaningful context for language use, helping students

improve both their linguistic competence and their ability to navigate complex materials in their fields of study. Over time, with consistent teacher support and gradual exposure to such texts, students became more confident in tackling demanding academic content, building a solid foundation for further learning.

This teaching approach underscores the potential of CE instruction to move beyond exam-oriented practices, offering students the tools and motivation needed for lifelong learning. Future research could further explore how to refine the integration of College English (CE) reading with discipline-specific learning to optimize both linguistic proficiency and academic expertise. One key area for future investigation is the development of targeted reading strategies that can address the challenges posed by the linguistic complexity of discipline-specific texts, particularly for fields like medicine. Another valuable direction for future studies would be to examine how to balance the flexibility of allowing students to choose topics based on their personal interests with the need to maintain academic rigor. While the freedom to choose topics related to personal interests was shown to enhance motivation and engagement, future research could investigate the optimal level of autonomy in topic selection that best supports academic development without compromising discipline-specific learning objectives.

In conclusion, integrating CE reading with students' major studies is a promising direction for improving both the relevance and outcomes of English instruction in China. By nurturing a habit of meaningful, discipline-related reading, this method empowers students to take charge of their learning and prepares them for challenges in their academic and professional journeys.

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