



# An Autonomous Training About College Students' Reading of All-capital-letter English

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**Abstract:** In many years of College English teaching, the writer finds that university students in China have difficulty reading out all-capital-letter English in the materials they are reading, and teachers and researchers have never paid attention to it. Such phenomenon draws the attention of the writer who begin studying about students' reading abilities of all-capital-letter English. This study describes an autonomous training about college students' reading of all-capital-letter English, in which 20 English majors in Jinggangshan University (China) participated. The research results demonstrated that students' reading awareness and reading abilities of all-capital-letter English had been greatly improved. It is suggested that in English teaching the comprehensive abilities of English should cover the reading abilities of all-capital-letter English and students' reading abilities of all-capital-letter English should be cultivated, to which English teachers and researchers should attach importance.

**Keywords:** College Students, Autonomous Training, All-capital-letter English, Reading Abilities, Cultivation

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## 1. Introduction

As we all know, written English can be divided into three categories: lower-case English, upper-case English, and all-capital-letter English. For lower-case English, any English learner is no stranger, because in most cases we learn, read and use them. When we say that an English word is in upper case, it means that the first letter of the word is capitalized; and when saying it is in all upper case, this means all the letters of the word are capitalized [1], for example, "Canada" and "Britain" are English words with initials capitalized; "FOREIGN EXCHANGE" and "PURCHASE CONTACT" are all-capital-letter English words. Especially in recent years, it is not difficult to find that the use of all-capital-letter English has been on the rise and can be seen everywhere. We can always see all-capital-letter English in many places, such as the foreign language programs of CCTV (China Central Television), some foreign language websites, boarding passes, people's clothes, public places, and even on the cigarette boxes and Mengniu milk (a milk brand in China) boxes. Also, there is a large amount of all-capital-letter English in the textbook of Business English course *Foreign Trade Correspondence*. As we can see, the use of all-capital-letter English is becoming more and more extensive, while the teaching of it, whether in

middle school or university, has been neglected. In order to explore the situation of college students' all-capital-letter English reading ability, the authors have carried out a questionnaire and reading test research, and published a paper entitled "*A Research on College Students' Recognition of All-capital-letter English*". The article points out: "College students' ability to read all-capital-letter English, especially those sentences, is poor. So in English teaching, we should pay proper attention to the cultivation of students' all-capital-letter English reading ability"[2]. In view of the present situation, the authors have tried carrying out an experimental study on cultivating college students to improve their reading ability of all-capital-letter English independently with the purpose of exploring effective ways and strategies to improve their ability in this respect, and have produced favorable results.

## 2. Research Design

### 2.1. Research Subjects

In this study, 20 students, including 2 male students and 18 female students, from the 2012 Business English major of Jinggangshan University (China) were selected as the research subjects. When the study program was announced, the 20 students volunteered to participate in the all-capital-letter

English recognition training.

## 2.2. Research Method

Under the teachers' intervention and guidance, the participants, while taking their business English courses, consciously and autonomously receive all-capital-letter English reading training on a weekly basis in the form of individual training and cooperative training. Recognition training includes all-capital-letter English words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. The students gather to communicate with each other on a regular basis. Furthermore, the recognition training lasts six months with a pre-test and post-test.

## 3. Research Process

The student-centered constructivist theory emphasizes students' active exploration, discovery and construction of the meaning of what they have learned. Based on this theory, the study, centering on college students' autonomous all-capital-letter English recognition training and supplemented by teachers' intervention and guidance, advocates cooperative learning and focuses on the following aspects:

### 3.1. To Enhance College Students Awareness to Read All-capital-letter English Autonomously

As mentioned above, although the use of all-capital-letter English is widely used, the results of the questionnaire conducted by the authors demonstrate that 82.78% of the college students said that they had not consciously read all-capital-letter English. Whenever and wherever they saw all-capital-letter English, they did not read them consciously. Therefore, the primary task of this study is to enhance their awareness to read this type of English autonomously.

#### 3.1.1. To Enhance Their Awareness through Presentation in Class

According to the experimental program, in the first two months of the recognition training, the teacher presented 10 common all-capital-letter English words or phrases for students to read during the first five minutes in class; in the following two months, the teacher presented five all-capital-letter English sentences for participants to read; in the last two months, the teacher presented a paragraph containing three to four all-capital-letter English sentences for them to read. At the beginning of the training, the students were so unfamiliar with all-capital-letter English that they could not get used to it and read it immediately. However, the teacher always insisted on presenting all-capital-letter English during the period, and encouraging the students to recognize it, which has gradually and imperceptibly created the atmosphere of all-capital-letter English recognition, and enhanced their awareness of reading it.

#### 3.1.2. To Enhance Their Awareness Through Task-based Questioning

The teacher asked their students the question and required

them to cooperate in seeking answers after class. The question was: In which places or aspects will all-capital-letter English be used or seen in modern economic society? The students took positive action after class, and their answers include many aspects. For example: you will see the words "NO PARKING" or "WATCH OUT" in public places, "SMOKING IS HARMFUL TO YOUR HEALTH. QUITTING SMOKING REDUCES HEALTH RISK." on cigarette boxes and "GATE WILL BE CLOSED FIFTEEN MINUTES BEFORE DEPARTURE" or "PLEASE ASK THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS" on the boarding passes. And some products are also packaged in all-capital-letter English. In addition, advertisements, slogans of some companies, and foreign language newspapers and websites often use all-capital-letter English, and CCTV foreign language channels also use plenty of this type of English. In the process of finding the answer to the question, the students' awareness of all-capital-letter English was gradually established.

#### 3.1.3. To Enhance the Students' Awareness While Studying the Course Foreign Trade Correspondence

There are many examples of all-capital-letter English in the textbook of the course *Foreign Trade Correspondence* used by business English majors: "STATEMENT OF CLAIM ", "INSPECTION AND TESTING CERTIFICATE ", "SALES CONFIRMATION ", "BILL OF LADING ", "AGENCY ", "PACKING LIST ", "CONTRACT VH-53541 GRINDING MACHINE DELIVERY READY PLS OPEN L/C AT ONCE ADVISING US THROUGH UNION BANK ZURICH. and so on. The teacher required the students to pay special attention to the textbook and find all-capital-letter English and list all of it in their notebooks. As business English majors, while studying the course *Foreign Trade Correspondence*, they come into close contact with the use of all-capital-letter English, so that they gradually realize that the ability to read this type of English would be of great significance for their future work.

#### 3.2. To Work Out and Implement a Training Plan for Recognition of All-capital-letter English

To work out a feasible all-capital-letter English recognition training plan is a key factor for the participating students to plan, monitor and evaluate their training behavior. In the course of the training, the teacher focused on helping and training the students to work out an overall training plan, a monthly training plan, a weekly training plan and a training schedule, on instructing the students to design the training record cards, such as pre-training record cards, while-training record cards and post-training record cards, and also on guiding and cultivating the students' ability to train according to the plan, ability to carry out the training plan, and ability to persevere.

#### 3.3. Narrative of All-capital-letter English Recognition Training

Under the teachers' intervention and guidance, each student

must consciously do a good job in the narrative of reading training and hand it in after the end of the training. The narrative must record their reading contents (for example what words, sentences or paragraphs are read every day), their problems or difficulties, their doubts or worries, their methods, their progress or achievements, and their feelings or useful lessons, etc. The authors find that the students carefully record their training process and feelings, from which we can see the change in their recognition awareness and the improvement in their recognition ability bit by bit. In the narrative of reading training, for example, one student wrote, "Because I paid no attention to all-capital-letter English before, at the beginning of the training, I had to think for a long time about how to read the words that are composed of the simplest letters and would convert them into lower-case letters in my mind before I could read them, not to mention sentences or paragraphs. When coming across polysyllabic words in a sentence, I could not read them out at all. The reason, in my opinion, was that we were still so unfamiliar with the pronunciation of the combination of letters that we ourselves would even feel awkward to the spelling." Besides, another student put it this way, "In the early stages of training, we failed to pay full attention to integrating all-capital-letter English reading into professional learning, rather we just simply converted the words into all-capital-letter ones, or made some segmented memories, and remembered some letter combinations. After the first test, I found that my ability to read all-capital-letter English was very poor. As a student majoring in business English, it was absurd. Therefore, I would strengthen my reading training and try my best to find a good way in future."

### **3.4. To Interact in All-capital-letter English Recognition Training**

In accordance with the overall requirements of the recognition training plan, the participating students must regularly gather to interact with each other and report their own recognition training, such as contents, methods, difficulties or problems, and solutions. In the course of interaction, some students suggested "forming a group of four, and each person of the group writes down 20 all-capital-letter English words a day to exchange and read." In terms of recognition methods, the students thought that they can become more familiar with all-capital-letter English by converting lower-case English words into upper-case ones. After a period of reading training, they also discussed that they could also practice reading by mastering the pronunciation rules of upper-case letter combinations. In addition, they also proposed establishing a QQ group, where each student could take turns to design and upload an all-capital-letter English test paper which could be shared by everyone of the group. Through these exchanges and interactions, all of them have jointly trained and made great progress.

## **4. Research Results**

After the six-month all-capital-letter English recognition training, the 20 students took a post-test. As participants, the

students have gained a lot, believing that the training was very necessary, especially for business English majors. The research results can be summarized as follows:

### **4.1. College Students' Awareness of Reading All-capital-letter English Has Been Improved**

Although there is much all-capital-letter English in the textbook of the course *Foreign Trade Correspondence*, the students admitted that they had no response to all-capital-letter English and they never read it consciously. All they could see was the mere combination of upper-case letters. After the training, their awareness of the recognition of all-capital-letter English has been strengthened. Now they are sensitive to all-capital-letter English and will read it out consciously when they come across it. As business English majors, they fully realize that improving the ability of reading all-capital-letter English is of great help for their foreign trade work in the future. In the training narrative, one student wrote, "I had the first test today. To tell the truth, it really took me a lot of time to read some of the words that are usually very simple after they were replaced with all-capital letters. What's worse, I was not able to read some of the longer words, not to mention the sentences. As a business English major, I felt ashamed about this and gradually realized the importance of strengthening the ability of recognizing all-capital-letter English." Another student said: "In today's test, I felt that it was really hard for me to read the all-capital-letter English words, which could have been much easier in their lowercase. When I tried to read these words, I always became too stumble to read a complete sentence. Therefore, I think I should do more such reading in the future." Still another student said: "The reading training had not only cultivated my awareness of reading all-capital-letter English, but also improved my overall reading ability, which was the greatest benefit I had reaped from the training"[2].

### **4.2. College Students' Ability of Reading All-capital-letter English Has Been Improved**

From the comparison of the different statistics, it can be seen that most of the students' recognition accuracy has been greatly improved after the training, and the overall recognition accuracy has increased from 65% in the pre-test to 85% in the post-test, and the recognition accuracy of paragraph even increased from 45% to 83%. Most of the students said in their narrative of recognition training that the training has significantly improved their abilities to recognize all-capital-letter English. One student wrote: "I used to be so weak in reading all-capital-letter English that I could only read a few simple all-capital-letter words, not to say sentences or paragraphs. After several months of training, my ability has been significantly improved." Another student said: "Before the training, we were used to using lower-case English and would become stuck when all-capital-letter English came into view. But now, I shall read it actively, so the speed as well as the ability to recognize all-capital-letter words has been improved" [2].

### **4.3. College Students' Awareness of Scientific Research Has Been Cultivated**

As sophomores majoring in business English, they are still unfamiliar with scientific research. Yet, in the present situation where higher education advocates the cultivation of college students' innovative and entrepreneurial abilities, the authors, by conducting the experiment, encouraged the students to participate in Jiangxi's educational planning research project "The Present Situation of College Learners Recognizing All-Capital-Letter English and Corresponding Measures", in order to cultivate foreign language students' research awareness. In the project research, students participated in the project both as participants and as subjects. First of all, they participated in the search and collection of related materials, which were then carefully read so that they could have basic knowledge of the related theories. Secondly, they participated in the design of the research program, interviews and questionnaires. Thirdly, as the subjects, they were involved in the independent recognition training, the pre-test and pro-test. Fourthly, they were required to collect and analyze the questionnaire and data, to fill in some project-related tables, and to write a research report. Therefore, the students were given opportunities to be involved in each session of the project so that they could be exposed to scientific research and gain a preliminary understanding of it.

### **4.4. College Students' Awareness of Cooperative Learning Has Been Improved**

Cooperative learning, characterized by full participation and interaction, refers to the mutual learning in which students have a clear division of responsibilities in order to complete a common task. Modern education encourages cooperative learning in order to promote mutual communication and development among students and help teachers and students to learn from each other [3]. The all-capital-letter English recognition training in this study is carried out on the basis of cooperative learning. In the group activities, the group members often communicated or argued with each other, learnt from each other, and made progress together. No matter whether it is in the small group, or in the whole group, or in the QQ group, each student had the opportunity to exchange his or her views on the training and to develop good interpersonal skills. When participating in the training, they cooperated harmoniously and performed excellently. Therefore, the training constantly boosted their confidence and helped them to find out the ways of recognition suitable for their own circumstances. In the end, their skills and abilities of reading all-capital-letter English were greatly improved. Such improvement benefited from the whole group's six-month cooperative learning.

### **4.5. An Corpus of All-capital-letter English for Recognition Training Has Been Established**

In the process of recognition training, every student was required to read a certain number of all-capital-letter English words, sentences or paragraphs every week, and to record

them in their notebooks. In the QQ group, each student uploaded an all-capital-letter English reading test in the same format. Besides, the research team collected all of the all-capital-letter English in the textbook *Business Correspondence and Dialogues*. And they also collected all-capital-letter English advertisements, contracts and signs in other books and on the Internet. Through the joint efforts of all the participants, we compiled a corpus of all-capital-letter English, which can be used by more English learners [2].

## **5. Conclusion**

With the acceleration in internationalization, English is undoubtedly playing an increasingly important role as a bridge, and at the same time, all-capital-letter English is more and more used in every aspect of social life. However, foreign language teaching in China has not paid enough attention to the cultivation of all-capital-letter English recognition ability so that the vast majority of English learners can only recognize lower-case English. The research results, based upon the training experiment, show that college students' awareness and abilities of reading all-capital-letter English were greatly improved, their awareness of cooperative learning was enhanced, and their awareness of doing scientific research was cultivated, which proves the feasibility and necessity to conduct such a recognition training. We believe that all-capital-letter English reading ability should be treated as essential part of English comprehensive abilities, be seriously taken by English teachers and researchers, and be employed in the actual teaching. Only in this way could we avoid the embarrassing situation that the English learners could only understand lower-case English, and also improve the English learners' comprehensive abilities.

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