

Investigation on Picture Books Reading Education in Primary School

—Taking H Province for Example

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Abstract

Picture book reading facilitates the acquisition of reading literacy. How picture books are used in primary school education and whether picture book reading foster students' learning ability are the two questions to be discussed in the passage. According to the investigation, lack of time, difficult in choosing picture books and the renovation of teaching methods are the main problems exist. In order to promote the reading literacy: teachers should categorize picture books or stories with the same or similar topics, grammar, words and sentence structure in their ordinary teaching; Teachers or parents should know a general form of asking questions to enhance the effect of students' in picture book reading and improve students' reading literacy.

Keywords

Picture Books Reading, Primary School, Problems and Suggestions

1. Picture Book Reading

1.1. Picture Book

Reading is an important way of acquiring knowledge, enlightening wisdom and cultivating virtues. A high proficiency in reading enables students to get access to the reading materials quickly and fluently (Grolig et al., 2020). Picture books with text have often been used in shared reading studies with typically developing children (Wasik, Hindman, & Snell, 2016). Compared to the textbook reading, picture book reading has a clear advantage in cultivating students' reading literacy since its complete information structure, rich contents and the distinctive characteristics (Wang & Narentuya, 2017). For typically developing pre-readers, using wordless picture books with a clear-cut, linear plot is likely to support ear-

ly narrative skills because such books offer a sequence of pictures that form a narrative without relying on decoding skills (Paris & Paris, 2003).

The new curriculum standards for primary school English teaching have been issued for a year. How the teacher implemented the curriculum in reading is the purpose of our study. Our study expands previous researches by 1) investigating the situation of picture books teaching in primary schools in H province in China, 2) categorizing and integrating picture books teaching into regular courses in primary school.

1.2. Present Study

With the educational significance, picture books have been favored by parents as well as teachers in the past decades since students can absorb and constantly consolidate the language knowledge they have learned, expand their English vocabulary, obtain English information, understand foreign cultures and develop their English thinking ability (Lu, 2019). But the teaching of picture books reading is not systematic and planned (Di, 2018). The problems lay in lacking understanding of the picture books, teaching purpose, teaching materials and teaching strategies for teachers, lacking interest, guidance, reading ability and reading quality for students, lacking support from school and lacking accompany from parents.

In order to vary the teaching methods, scholars offered Picture Tour, Sustained Silent Reading, Story Maps, Jigsaw Reading and Reading Circles to guide the teachers in 2017 (Di, 2018; Wang & Narentuya, 2015). How was the picture book reading implemented in teaching? Did the teachers know how to categorize picture books and integrate them into the course learning? We conducted a survey to know more information about the upper questions.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedure

As we aimed to investigate the situation of picture books reading education in H Province, we hand out the questionnaire through Wenjuanxing APP to 13 primary school English teachers distributed in urban city areas and rural areas in H province. We have received 108 teachers' questionnaires and the validation of questionnaires is 100%. In which, 81.48% teachers come from urban areas and 18.52% teachers come from rural areas. All the teachers have the experience of teaching reading for three years. 87% teachers come from the capital city of H province and 13% teachers come from other cities of H province. Though some of the teachers grades range from one grade to several grades, we simply classify the teachers into three groups mainly according to the grades they teach: early-grade (Grade 1 to Grade 2), middle-grade (Grade 3 to Grade 4) and high-grade (Grade 5 to Grade 6).

The survey is mainly designed to know the understanding and implementing of reading strategies, the commendation tendency of teachers, the preference to

picture book supplementation, the difficulties in picture book supplementation, the meaning as well as the illustrations of picture book teaching. Teachers also need to finish the open questions to describe their implementation of picture book reading in class. Some of them may have an interview after the questionnaire.

2.2. Statistical Analysis

According to the data, all the teachers from different grades agreed that picture books are of crucial importance in the simulation of students' interesting in reading, the accumulation of vocabulary, the development of reading strategies and the cultivation of culture awareness. Some of them even think the picture book reading concerns about all-round development of human-being. Some teachers thought it is a good supplementation of the teaching material so that the students can deepen their understanding of knowledge in the book.

2.2.1. Early-Grade Teachers

Teachers from the early-grade are all come from urban areas and they pay a lot of attention to the use of strategies in course learning.

But 81.8% teachers use the strategies in class, 19.2% teachers never use the strategies in class. Nearly half of teachers offer picture books for extensive reading, another half offer no picture books for extracurricular reading. The 50% teachers who offer picture books for extensive reading often choose picture books according to the lesson plan, theme and students' cognitive features (Table 1).

For the early-grade teachers, the most difficult problem they have met is new words. Moreover, the various books make the reading for students of early age more difficult. When they try to use picture books in course reading, they choose simple picture books like *LaFaFa English Town* and *A quiet house* to help students understand the words and sentences better. Some of them also make use of *The Runaway Bunny* to explain mother's unconditional love deeply while some of them share Kong Rong's story to build up students' morality and worldviews (Table 2).

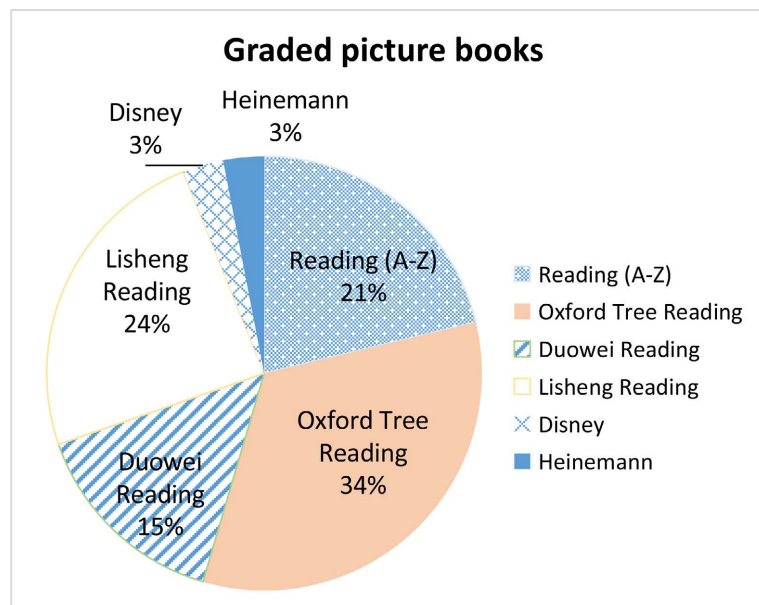
All of the teachers prefer to recommend *Oxford Reading Tree* as a supply to the course reading. *Reading A-Z*, *Duowei Reading* are the two graded picture books followed in the recommendation list (Figure 1).

Table 1. Basic information (early-grade).

Program	Group	Response		Case Percentage
		N	Percentage	
Grade	Early-grade	11	10.80%	12.10%
Location	Rural areas	0	0%	
	Urban areas	11	100%	

Table 2. Guidance and selection about reading strategy (early-grade).

Program	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Have you paid attention on the understanding and implementation of reading strategies?	Yes	11	100
	No	0	0
Have you required your students to implement the reading strategies in the extracurricular reading?	Yes	9	81.81
	No	2	19.2
Have you offered picture books for extensive reading?	Yes	5	45.45
	No	6	54.55

**Figure 1.** The recommendation of picture books (early-grade).

2.2.2. Middle-Grade Teachers

82.93% teachers in the middle grade come from urban areas and 17.07% teachers come from rural areas.

57.14% teachers from rural areas and 20.59% teachers from urban areas never ask students use reading strategies. 82.93% teachers in this group never offer students picture books in or out of the class (Table 3).

They all recognize the limited time as the main point of not leading in picture book reading in class. Compared to early-grade teachers, middle-grade teachers think the option of suitable picture books from various picture books is the key problem they have met and they care more about students' frustration aroused by the various contents. Nevertheless, the cognitive differences of students, a large amount of new words, stress from the outside and family and the contradiction from students' parents are all the reasons they don't want to spend time on extracurricular reading (Table 4).

Some of the teachers think the picture book reading is very important in the cultivation of people's competence, so they recommend students to read picture

books like *Oxford Tree Reading*, *Reading (A-Z)*, *Lisheng Graded Picture Book* to help students learn English well. They also combine the theme as well as courses. They use *Today is Monday* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* as a material to help students understand the days in a week. They use *Magic Tail* to elaborate on animals. They use *The Runaway Bunny* and *This is me* to explain the relationships and emphasize the parent love (Figure 2).

2.2.3. High-Grade Teachers

76.79% teachers from urban areas while 23.21% teachers from rural areas in this

Table 3. Basic information (middle-grade).

Program	Group	Response		Case Percentage
		N	Percentage	
Grade	Middle-grade	41	37.20%	41.70%
Location	Rural areas	7	17.07%	
	Urban areas	34	82.93%	

Table 4. Guidance and selection about reading strategy (middle-grade).

Program	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Have you paid attention on the understanding and implementation of reading strategies?	Yes	35	85.37
	No	6	14.63
Have you required your students to implement the reading strategies in the extracurricular reading?	Yes	27	65.85
	No	14	34.15
Have you offered picture books for extensive reading?	Yes	7	17.07
	No	34	82.93

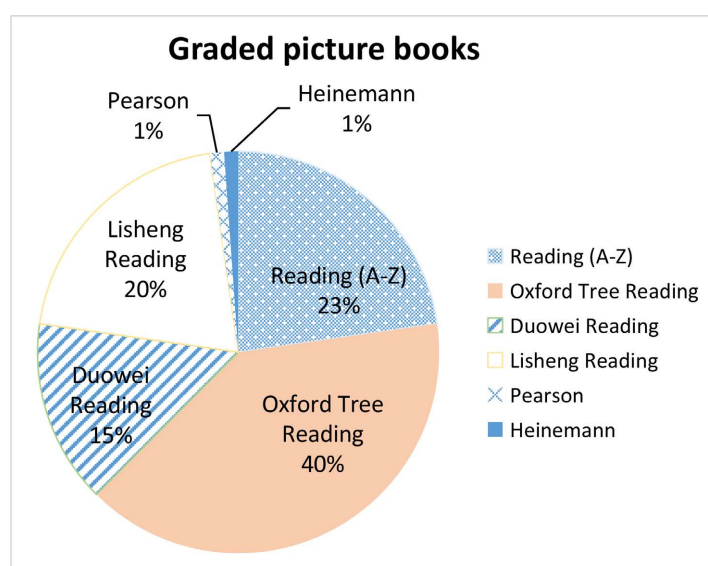


Figure 2. The recommendation of graded picture books (middle-grade).

group (Table 5).

94.64% teachers pay attention to the reading strategies in their teaching while 5.36% pay no attention to them. 46.15% teachers from rural areas and 33.96% teachers from urban areas never ask their students to use the strategies in their extracurricular reading. 66.07% teachers never use picture books in reading class (Table 6).

The limited time in class is the main cause of not adding picture books and the choosing of suitable picture books lays behind. Teachers adopt picture books of the same or similar theme as the textbooks to deepen students' understanding, cultivate their reading interest, enlarge their vocabulary, familiarize the reading skills and develop their culture awareness. Teachers use *Brown Bear What Can You See* and *We Are Going on a Bear Hunt*, *The Odd Pet* and *Black Rhino* as a supplementation of animals. When they talked about dream, they will use *Willy the Dreamer* and *Biff's Dream* to explore more information about dream. When they talked about food, they will use *Monkey Eats Worms* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to consolidate the knowledge. When they talked about feelings, they will use *When Sophie Gets Really, Really Angry* to stabilize the emotions. *Oxford Tree Reading* ranks first in the recommendation of teachers in this group, *Lisheng Graded Picture Book* and *Duowei Reading* follows up in the recommendation list (Figure 3).

3. Result

3.1. Did the Teachers Know How to Categorize Picture Books?

Some teachers don't use picture books in reading class, let alone the

Table 5. Basic information (high-grade).

Program	Group	Response		Case Percentage
		N	Percentage	
Grade	High-grade	56	53.10%	58.30%
Location	Rural areas	1343	23.21%	
	Urban areas		76.79%	

Table 6. Guidance and selection about Reading Strategy (high-grade).

Program	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Have you paid attention on the understanding and implementation of reading strategies?	Yes	53	94.64
	No	3	5.36
Have you required your students to implement the reading strategies in the extracurricular reading?	Yes	32	57.14
	No	24	42.86
Have you offered picture books for extensive reading?	Yes	19	33.93
	No	37	66.07

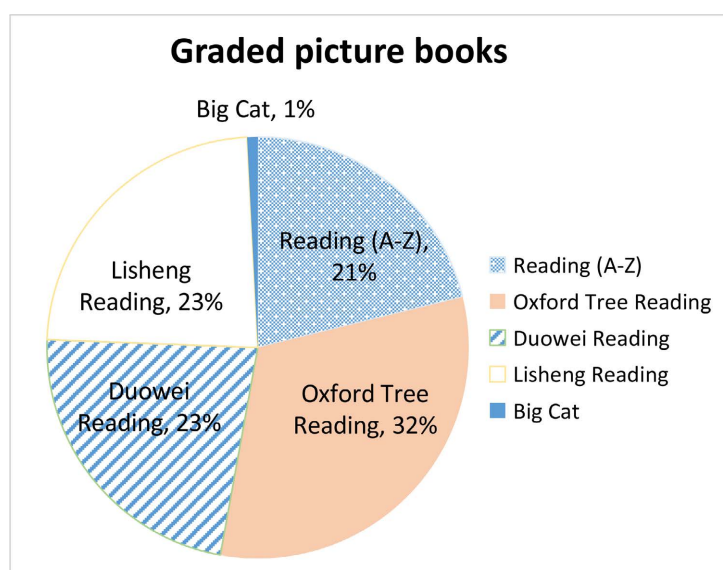


Figure 3. The recommendation of graded picture books (high-grade).

graded picture books. Middle-grade teachers from rural areas never make a supplementation of picture books in reading class. Even though they know the importance of picture books reading in primary school, they are constrained by the problems around them: the selection of picture books for students respectively, the reduction of students yearly, the inadmissibility of financial situation and accompany and the incomprehension of parents. The selection of picture books and communication with parents are delicate works which may not only cost teachers a lot of time with no apparent outcome but also bring them infinite trouble. Language points in the test, the financial and left-behind problems exist in many families are the contradiction can not be reconciled easily only by teachers.

Teachers have chosen picture books deeply concerned with the theme of the lesson they have. From the investigation, we can draw a conclusion that teachers combine the teaching materials as well as picture books together mainly according to the title of a lesson or the topic of a unit. And the picture books they recommend and the picture books they use in class are different. According to the interviews, a teacher mentioned that as the dominant pillar of learning, the content of textbook plays a crucial role in teaching. For a long time, the teaching policies, the tests and the expectations of parents are all settled according to the textbook. Since the content and topics in the textbook are fixed, teachers resort to the adaptation of picture books.

Teachers agree that the graded books in the market are good for students' reading and are willing to recommend them to students. Teachers from the three groups all agree that the graded picture books from other countries are beneficial for students' reading interest, vocabulary accumulation, reading strategies learning and culture awareness acquisition, but they have no idea of how to adapt the stories or the books to the lesson learning. The topics of lessons differ

largely. According to the teachers, they are likely to choose the picture books close to the topic since the graded picture books parallel to the context. According to their interview, the graded picture books edited and sold in public help students in the cultivation of reading ability without the combination of textbooks.

3.2. How Was the Picture Book Reading Implemented in Teaching?

From the investigation, picture book reading tends to have the characteristic of the following three aspects:

Morality is rooted in the language learning. For the first question, obviously, teachers have tried to use picture books in reading class to strengthen their understandings of the text as well as their morality. Believed that the picture books contain values, teachers ask their students to read the picture books after class since they believed that self-learning may enrich students' knowledge, broaden students' visions and build up students' values through the picture books. The integration of traditional ideas like modesty in Kong Rong's story in the early grade, filial respect in *The Runaway Bunny* in the early and middle grade shows that the moral education continues through primary school education.

Lower grade teachers tend to use reading strategies in reading class. Whether from rural areas or urban areas, all the teachers pay attention to the reading strategies and 81.81% teachers use the reading strategies in picture book reading in the early grade. Compared to the early grade teachers, 85.37% middle-grade teachers pay attention to the reading strategies and 65.85% teachers use the reading strategies in picture book reading. And 96.36% high-grade teachers pay attention to the reading strategies while 57.14% teachers use the reading strategies in picture book reading.

From the interview of teachers, we know that though early grade teachers use and recommend their students to read picture books, there are many difficulties in using picture books: the distinguish of a great variety of picture books abroad and at home, the selection of suitable books for their students respectively and the frustration the reading may bring to students, etc. They are afraid of recommending books inferior or superior to students' levels because they worry about the new words or new knowledge that appeared in the picture books may pose a threat to students and make them abandon their reading with frustration one day. However, for most of the higher-grade teachers, they have to cope with the tests all the time, they have no time to deal with task which is not contained in the textbook. And they worry more about the picture book reading which may take up so much time in reading class, and even disturbing their curricular teaching plan.

Besides, some parents are not willing to or have no time to consolidate the knowledge by picture book co-parent reading, which increases the burden of picture book teaching for teachers.

The gap in knowing and doing may reduce learning efficiency. Teachers pay a lot of attention to reading strategies while not most of them implement the

strategies in the picture book reading. Learning efficiency is hard to be guaranteed since students have no way to use the strategies they newly learned. When they met a passage later, they may not use the reading strategy to help themselves in reading proactively. Without the implementation of reading strategies, students may not have the chance to get access to the connotations and cultures implied in the words, neither they have the chance to get access to the collision of thought sparks and the creation of new ideas.

4. Suggestions

Select the picture books together with the topic of the textbook. Since the teachers agree that the graded picture books are beneficial to students' learning, how to categorize picture books for teachers is the first step. Teachers may choose a kind of graded picture books or kinds of graded picture books for students and match them according to the knowledge points, the theme, the content, the structure and the culture, etc.

Let's have a look at an example: The English book published by People's Education Press (PEP for short) is widely used in H Province. The topic of Unit Four in PEP for Grade Three Volume I is *We Love Animals*, the new words are duck, dog, bear, cat and pig. The sentence structure of this unit is "What's this? It's a...." Duowei Reading Volume I is suitable for beginners to read, and the topic in the volume is animals. In order to learn more words, teachers can choose *Whiskers* in Volume I to introduce wolf, lion and seal as a supply. At the same time, teachers may talk about the singular form and plural form according to the picture book and have a review of the sentence structure "Look at...." which appeared in Unit Three.

Take Unit Three in PEP for Grade Three Volume II for another example. The title is *At the Zoo*. And this unit talks about the adjectives to describe animals' features. In volume I of Duowei reading, *What's long?* is a very good extensive reading for this unit since the sentence structure "Look at...." can be used to view the previous unit, the animals are introduced to supplement other animals, the words are more difficult than the new words in the textbook for further study, the different living habits may arouse students' interest in the exploring of living conditions which may elevate the value of environmental protection.

To categorize picture books or stories with the same or similar topics, grammar, words and sentence structure is a way teachers can use in their ordinary teaching.

Use various activities to enrich the teaching methods. Since the factors of selecting a book have been discussed. "How to implement the teaching methods in class or at home?" is the following question to be solved. The combination of textbooks and picture books means the teachers need to choose a story of the same topic theme and sentence structure and distribute them in the teaching design and assign the students homework to read.

Activities can be used in class or at home. Parents and classmates may join in,

so students have role-play or pair-work together with them. They may even have a performance together. At the same time, students can match, draw a thinking map, retell the story, and conceive a story/picture book by themselves. The implement of teachers in all grades with reading strategies to exemplify and explain to students the topic and contents with picture books in the reading class as well as the extracurricular reading may enhance learning efficiency.

Build a form to guide parents in co-parent reading. Sometimes, the parents are obliged to attend to the reading and the picture books in the same volume may not be the best choice for the unit. We need to figure out a form to guide parents or teachers in reading so that we can make use of the picture books and enhance the reading effect finally. For picture books of fiction, teachers or parents would use the questions like “What’s the picture book talking about?” to predicate the title age and “How do you know that?/What do you notice about the...?” to cultivate their observation. “What will happen?” can be used to arouse their interest in the following pages. “What can we learn from the story?/What will you do if you were the...?” can be used to cultivate students’ value and rationality. For picture books of non-fiction, teachers or parents would use the questions like “What’s the picture book talking about?” to find out the main character in the story and “What do you notice about the...?” to ask more information for exposition. “What’s the function of...?/Do you know any other...?” are questions to stimulate their imagination and creativity. Similar questions can be used in picture book reading to enhance the reading efficiency.

Although the reading strategies and picture books combined in the reading, the stories in the picture books are scattered in the textbook, and the systematization and scientificity in the graded book are neglected. The passage revealed the situation of picture book reading in H province according to the two questions. How to combine the textbooks as well as graded picture books systematically is a further question to be discussed.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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