

# 英語を使える学生が育つための教科書

## －英語リーディングの授業で見られた諸問題点について－

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文科省の目標である、英語を使える人材の育成を達成する為に、大学教養英語をどのように改善すべきか、また実用的な英語人材をこれからの日本社会にたくさん送り出すために、英語の授業をどのように行っていくかということが、私達英語教員にとってとても重大な研究課題になり、今までの諸問題点を考察しつつ、解決策を探っていかなければならない時期にもなっている。

外国語として英語を学習する場合、日本の英語教育は中国や韓国と同じ日常的に実際に使用する場がなく、第2言語研究と同等な視点から研究成果を考えるわけにはいかない。またこの三つの国が共に儒教の影響があって、従来から教育熱心に行ってきた。特に中国・日本共に母語には表意文字（漢字）と表音文字（ひらがな・カタカナと現在中国で用いられている一部の漢字簡易体につけられた拼音）を使用し、英語は外国語であるという点では条件が全く同じである。近年韓国と中国の大学英語教育は、国を挙げて英語達成度のガイドラインを定められ、英語教育に大きな力を注いできた故に、TOEFL成績をかなり伸ばしている。しかし、今の日本の学生は（一部の外国への留学、大学院への進学学生を除く）昔ほど英語に興味がなく、やる気も比較的減退しつつである。ここ10年の間、日本は中国と韓国とのTOEFLスコアには大きな開きがあって、下位に位置している。

英語を外国語として勉強する日本の学生にとって、英語を円熟に使えるために、どの方法が一番有効であるか、またこの全入時代の学生

に英語をどのように教えればよいのかは、英語教員達がかなり悩まされる一つの課題である。ここ数年の学生の英語学習の実態と結果を通して考察してみると、学生の語彙力と文法力がかなり欠けていることが大きな原因として分かる。特にこの低い語彙力がコミュニケーションやリーディング、そして専門の外書講読などの授業において、パフォーマンスの大きな障害になっている。

この問題は、勿論学生だけではなく、英語の教育制度、教員の指導力にも大きく関係がある。統一した大学生英語達成度のガイドライン、各大学が自分の学生に合った英語カリキュラムや適切な教科書、そして学習者の動機付けと評価方法などを定めるという前提がなければ、大学英語教育レベルアップにはならない。本論文は英語リーディングの授業に焦点を当て、教科書や学習法などの諸問題の分析を行い、改善法を提案していく。第一部は、適切な教科書が学生の語彙力を高める極めて重要であることについて、第二部は読解力を高める為に語彙力の訓練法や自主学習を取り入れる英語授業とその効果について、第三部は、統一カリキュラム内でのリーディングを行うことが可能かどうかについて、疑問や提案を含めて論じる。そして、大学全入時代に、動機減退が見られた学生の再動機づけや依存系学習者から自立型学習者へ育てていくために、e-learningを利用し、如何に英語を使える学生が増えていくことが出来るかどうかをも考案する。

# Goal-Bound Textbooks for Improving Students' Ability of Using English

— Problems & Tentative Suggestions for English Reading Class

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## 1. Introduction

What is reading? According to Neil (2003), "It is a fluent process in which readers combine information from a text with their own background knowledge to build meaning. The goal of reading is comprehension." In reading process, vocabulary acquisition is highly demanding for EFL (English as a foreign language) learners. Native speakers are said to have at least a 20,000 word-family receptive vocabulary (Nation, 2001), even though EFL learners don't need to have such an extensive vocabulary; as low frequency words seldom occur, it is said that they should have at least 3,000 word families.

In China, the College English standard, set by Ministry of Education requires that all the non-English major students pass Band 4 test after two years' study, with a vocabulary ability of 4,200 words, including 1800 learned at high school. When students finish their third year at university, or Band 5-6 tests, they should master another 1,300 words and an additional 1,000 words for advanced level after they pass Band 6. Thus their total vocabulary should reach 6,500 words.

In Japan, the University Entrance Exam Center Test requires all students to have mastery of 1,500 words, and another 900 advanced words are necessary for entering into the top universities (Kazahaya, 2003). But after students enter university, there is neither such a national standard for vocabulary acquisition for EFL learners, nor a goal-syllabus-test system to reinforce their English proficiency. Therefore the following situation occurs: "It is a common assumption that Japanese university students' English proficiency is at its highest at the time of the entrance examination, after which it is said to decline rapidly. If this is the case, it is a serious problem for teachers of English and curriculum planners (Okamoto, 2007)." Because of an unsystematic College English methodology, lower-motivated students at some universities don't study out of class; it is not rare to see that many students can't voice their opinions well or read efficiently, not to say read those original professional books in their senior years.

What are the causes for this English teaching situation? What are the key steps we have to take to solve these problems? The following paper aims to examine the characteristics of English language acquisition from the viewpoint of curriculum design, reading materials, and vocabulary building for improving students' reading ability as a key point for using English

Keywords: textbooks, vocabulary, goal-bound-curriculum

## 1. Appropriate Reading Materials

What are appropriate reading materials for Japanese EFL learners at universities? How should textbooks be designed for them? And who should make them? What are the goals for these textbooks? All these questions should be solved before the textbooks get into students' hands, so that we can reach a true goal for English education. As a teacher of English in Japan, one of the most difficult tasks for me is to find a good textbook for reading class at various levels. Hereby I'd like to make a comparison between the textbooks in Japan and China.

### 1.1 College English Textbooks in China

In China, the university teachers all use the College English Books for non-English major students. There is a rigid syllabus at university to meet the national educational goals. To reinforce or support this system, the Band Test was devised by CET. This system of goal-syllabus-test is well established and seems to be working very efficiently to produce highly proficient English learners, irrespective of their majors at university (Taura, 2008).

The history of making unified College English Textbooks can be traced back to 1986; which have been tested in various places and well accepted by most universities, and twice received the award as the best textbook series by the Ministry of Education in China. These sets of textbooks have been revised in 1992 and 1997, and again newly published in 2002 by several authorized publishers. The College English Textbooks are divided into 6 volumes. 1 – 4 are for general students to use in each semester for the first two years, and 5 – 6 are for advanced students. In addition, there is a sub-1 book for lower level students. All the 6 volumes include the following books: 1) General English 1—6, 2) Listening and Speaking 1—6, 3) Reading 1—6, and 4) Fast Reading 1—6. All the textbooks are designed with 8 units, and published with detailed Teachers' Manuals. The 2002 textbook series published by the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, for example, is the most popular set of books among hundreds of institutes and most of the students at universities in China. Seventeen prestigious editors and scholars are all from top universities, covering various kinds of universities from Education and Foreign Languages to Engineering, Science & Technology.

In order to take a close look at the textbooks for most of the students, this paper focuses only on volumes 1 – 4. From this set of four textbooks, we can find the following features:

**a) General English:** This main textbook is designed for students to study twice a week both in class and at home. Each unit of the eight has one theme, including two passages, Text A for focus reading and Text B for sub reading; and organized in four parts: Part I pre-reading task, Part II Text A, Part III Text B, and Part IV theme-related language learning tasks. Part I and III are assigned for students to do outside of class; teachers only need to check the result from time to time. Part II and Part IV are mainly taught and practiced in class.

In Part II, after a 800-word Text A, there is a detailed bilingual vocabulary list, then 10 more comprehension questions, three points for discussion, Text Organization for writing paragraph headings and main ideas, Language Sense Enhancement (poetry reading), Language Focus on vocabulary drill, Structure, and Comprehension exercises, and lastly, a cloze exercise and Paragraph Translation. The whole Text A has a 15-page exercise.

In Part III, Text B is for home reading; the theme is connected with Text A of similar length. After the text, there are exercises for Comprehension Check, Translation of the sentences, Language Practice, Group Discussion, Essay Writing, and Writing Strategy. Students can check their answers in the appendix.

Part IV is designed for further understanding Texts A & B, and all the language practices, focused on class discussion and writing. It is expected to take one hour to do the exercise in class.

One whole unit has about 30 pages, Text A within 20 pages exercise, and Text B within 10 pages practice. The whole book has about 300 pages, with 100 pages of five kinds of appendices for references. It is usually suggested to finish each unit within 5 hours.

**b) Listening and Speaking:**

This set of books also has 6 volumes, with teachers' manual and CD ROMs. Each book contains 16 units, and each unit includes four parts as follows: *Part A* focuses on skill training: 1) Communication, 2) Listening Strategy. *Part B* is the exercise for listening and speaking drill, with three exercises: 1) Pre-listening Task; 2) Listening Tasks, which has two drills: one is "Listening for general understanding/main idea," the other is "Listening for details/specific information." 3) Speaking Tasks, this aims at helping students to get used to social communication by providing two sample dialogues. *Part C* is called "Additional Listening." *Part D* is intended for "Home Listening."

In addition to the above four parts, some English songs, humorous stories, and famous idioms and proverbs are introduced in "Leisure Time" in every other unit for students to enjoy, and there are two sets of tests at the end of each book for students to test themselves.

**c) Reading:** This book is designed as extracurricular reading material to accompany the main course book—General English.

The length of the passage from Book 1 to Book 4 develops from 800 words to 2000 words. Every book has eight units, each of the eight units has three passages, containing the following five parts: 1) Brief Introduction, to stimulate before reading; 2) Side notes of new words on every page for easy reading; 3) among three passages, the first one is closely connected with the theme of main course book—General English. Another two reading passages contain the subjects of various themes such as short story, SF, biography, history etc, in order to broaden students' viewpoints and enrich their knowledge of the humanities. Following the first main passage, there are:

a) Comprehension exercises, vocabulary check, and questions for discussion; b) Reading skills and exercises. This latter practice covers "Recognizing topics and main ideas," "Highlighting the topic sentences", "Recognizing prefixes and suffixes", "Using a dictionary", "Identifying transitions between ideas", "Outlining and summarizing", "Developing reading strategies" and others.

**d) Fast Reading:** This set of books also has 6 volumes with 8 units as all the other books, but they are much thinner than any other books and in loose-leaf style. That means all the pages can be separated for tests. Each unit has four passages and is divided into four parts: A1, A2 and B1, B2. A1 and B1 are for class practice, A2 and B2 are for homework. The reading time set for each 500-to-800-word passage is between five and eight minutes, and then another five minutes to finish the comprehension answering sheet with five to

seven questions. So it is designed for students to read using all the reading skills they have acquired from their reading textbooks and classes. At the end of each exercise book, an appendix, “Key to comprehension exercises” is attached for students to check by themselves.

With this whole set of books, the publishers also provide College English Band Test books from 1 to 4 for general students to practice, as well as 5 to 6 for high level students to prepare, because all the non-English major students have to pass the Band 4 test, when they finish their study of two years. Some high level students can take the test for Band 6 if they pass the Band 4 earlier than other students in the first year. Since this set of goal-based textbooks is very systematic and complete, students feel they have enough material for study, and teachers find it a great help to use ready-made, all-round materials for class teaching. The effect of using these books is stunning, and almost 95% of students pass the Band 4 test in big cities, and approximately 70% in common cities and remote areas.

In addition to the above set of College English Textbooks, there are many other different versions of the same level books published in various places in China. Different universities usually choose their favorite versions for appropriate usage by their students. So it has been a great challenge for different publishers and universities to compete with each other.

## 1.2 College English Textbooks in Japan

In Japan, the English textbook publishing market is larger than in any other Asian country. There are so many Japanese publishers as well as a large number of foreign presses that it is always so hard to make the choice of an appropriate textbook for teaching.

According to my experience of teaching English in Japan, it always consumes much energy to find a good English textbook for non-English major students, and the reading textbooks are seldom in graded volumes for students to learn step by step. Different teachers use their favorite textbooks at different universities. The Ministry of Education, Science & Technology doesn't have a guideline for College English Teaching. I always wonder if the free choice for textbooks by different teachers good to meet a required goal? Is it an effective way for language education? These remain as very serious questions. In my opinion, the system lacks efficiency and competition. Maybe this is one of the reasons for Japanese students' lower English achievement, especially compared with other Asian countries such as Korea and China in TOEFL results. The features for College English Textbooks published in Japan can be classified as follows:

### a) Various kinds of books, but not systematic, or graded

Since The Ministry of Education in Japan doesn't set a guideline for College English Education, teachers and students are not sure which level is appropriate for them to reach each year. It is well-known that English is just a tool for people to apply for getting information and communicating with other people in the world. What is the shortest and most effective way to achieve this accomplishment should be taken into account by education authorities. Free teaching and free curriculum harms the results of CEE. In the process of language training, learners should be taught and practice step by step. As stimulation, students need to know their own level by some bar test to see how much they have improved after a semester or a year's study. It is a critical issue for CEE and publishers to pay great attention to.

### **b) Very good reading materials, but lack of exercises**

Most of the English textbooks in Japan lack detailed exercises for students to practice. After a passage, the exercises are usually two or three pages, which cover some comprehension questions, vocabulary fill-in-the-blank exercises, and sentence translation. Three of my favorite reading textbooks can be used as examples: 1) *Read Up—22 Steps to Strategic Reading* (Seibido): it is so well designed with most helpful skills for students to know. Each chapter begins with “Questions and Vocabulary Expander” for preparation. Then “Skill Builder” comes with the “Reading Passage”. After the passage, there are five true or false questions, then a listening activator and “Info Organizer” for summary practice. The whole chapter is only 4 pages. 2) *On-line VOA English <Life>* published by Shouhakusha: the first part of each unit comes with a “Column” in Japanese as an introduction, the second part is a whole-page passage with 20 or more blanks to fill out while doing the listening, the footnotes for new words are very limited with Japanese translation. Then 10 true or false questions, another 10 choices to match the new words with their English meaning, and last comes the “Composition” of three translation sentences and two questions for discussion. The whole unit also covers only six pages. 3) The third textbook I have used for reading practice is *Intermediate Fast Reading* (Seibido). This book is quite similar to *Fast Reading of China’s College English*, which begins with three questions as “Before you read”, then the item of 10 “Target vocabulary”, then a 300-350- word “Reading Passage” with five questions for comprehension check. After the passage, there is a “Listening Comprehension” for students to write out their answers to three questions, and five multiple-choice questions for “Vocabulary Reinforcement”. The last part ends with a task of finding three “Idioms” in the reading passage. The whole unit has only four pages. At the end of the book, there is a note for each unit, explained in Japanese.

So Japanese editors and publishers provide hundreds of good English textbooks to the College English market, ranging from grammar training, vocabulary study, reading skills, news reading, to listening, and writing, but using only one book is usually not enough to cover the necessary skills, so teachers should combine some books by themselves for different level students to use. All these books are published by different publishing houses, and made by separate editors and scholars. It is very hard for teachers to select a good reading book for students to learn step by step both in class and at home to reach a certain level of English.

### **c) Large vocabulary, but without bilingual word list**

As I have mentioned above, all the textbooks and materials are very informative and updated, but sometimes they are too difficult for non-English major students, and there are too many new words which have special and technical meanings. Besides, the levels are not divided, nor are the books published in a series. There is no coherence among the books, so that students cannot learn English in a systematic way. They study this book in this semester and that book in another. Sometimes they pick up one teacher who focuses on grammar, and sometimes they encounter a teacher who emphasizes listening practice. So to the students, it’s a mess.

The most obvious shortcoming of English textbooks used at Japanese university level is the exercises for vocabulary study. The word list usually contains no pronunciation, nor bilingual explanations. Students can not pronounce correctly and read well in class, and it

takes time for teachers to instruct them. This is a serious problem for Japanese students.

So in a word, most of the College English textbooks published in Japan are geared toward extensive reading, not for intensive reading in class. Without intensive reading and focused study on words, phrases and grammar, students cannot master English and little achievement can be made.

#### **d) Teachers' manuals with very simplified and poor references**

All the English textbooks for university use are designed with teachers' books, but the reference is very limited, just some answers to the exercises, and translation of the reading passages. There is no instruction for teachers such as tentative suggestions for time allotment, focusing points, intentional language goals. Compared with some conversation books published by some foreign publishers in Japan such as Oxford and Cambridge publishing houses, Japanese publishers' teachers' manuals are far less informative than those above. Take Oxford "*English KnowHow*" Book I for example: each chapter of the teacher's handbook contains 10 pages of instruction with very detailed information. In addition to this, there is a Workbook for students to do homework. Teachers need just to check the results in class. All these save teachers a lot of time and help to improve class teaching effect.

With the above comparison, the following result can be a support to Okamoto's (2007) assumption that Japanese university students' English proficiency is at its highest at the time of the entrance examination, after which it is said to decline rapidly.

Two years ago, my research group administered two versions of mock TOEFL tests at six universities – two national universities in China, and in Japan two national universities, one prefectural university and one private university in the year 2005 – 2006, once at the beginning of the first year as a pre-test and the other at the end of the year as a post-test. We selected 30 students from each university at random to take the tests to assess our subjects' English proficiency level. We found that improvement was observed in the listening scores at three Japanese universities whereas all four Japanese universities had a decrease in their scores of reading and structure. Meanwhile, the two universities in China maintained all their scores and furthermore improvement was seen in their reading skill scores. As a result, no deterioration was observed in the first year of the Chinese universities while both improvement and deterioration revealed among Japanese first year university students.

In summary, a set of good graded textbooks in hand is a key to the success of English teaching and study. Therefore, producing a set of goal-bound College English Textbooks is currently an indispensable task for English scholars and publishers to carry out.

### **. Reading Strategies & Vocabulary**

"Reading is an essential skill for learners of EFL. For most of these learners it is the most important skill to master in order to ensure success not only in learning English, but so in learning in any content class where reading in English is required." (Neil, 2003) With strengthened reading skills, learners will make greater progress and development in other areas of learning. What is involved in reading? How do we make sense of printed materials? These are the questions all teachers have to answer when preparing to teach L2/EFL reading.

## 2.1 Vocabulary Training and Test

The goal of reading is comprehension. Building a strong vocabulary is the very important base for reading. If we regard English as a house, the vocabulary can be considered as bricks, grammar as frame, and then rhetoric as decoration. As a researcher of EFL, my earlier experience told me that reading aloud of the words with correct pronunciation is an effective way for memorizing, and memorizing words with phrases or sentences is an even more helpful skill for using them. Recent research has emphasized the importance of vocabulary to successful reading (Nation). Neil also insists that basic vocabulary should be explicitly taught and L2 readers should be taught to use context to efficiently guess the meanings of less frequent vocabulary.

Since the Japanese University Entrance Exam Center Test requires all the students to have a working vocabulary of 1,500 words, and another 900 advanced words for getting into the top universities, university English teaching should follow up this criterion to improve students' ability not only to skillfully utilize them, but also increase their level by making higher criteria. According to Nation, "To cope well in English, a second language learner would need 5,000 words and preferably 10,000 words. It is most efficient to learn these words from the most useful to the least useful." So it is important for teachers and course designers to have a set of guiding principles that can be applied in a variety of teaching and learning situations.

Therefore when teaching reading, vocabulary training should be focused on 1) the most useful vocabulary first. As introduced by Nation, the most frequent 1000 word families of English cover around 75 percent of the running words in academic texts and newspapers, over 80 percent in novels, and about 85 percent of the running words in conversation. 2) getting students to read and listen to graded readers connecting these words; 3) getting students to study the words and do exercises based on them; 4) to speak and write using the words. Of course, vocabulary learning is a large and continuing task; in addition to providing useful input — good textbooks, and support to help them, it is ultimately the students who have to carry out learning themselves. So we are in deadly need to have some good reading textbooks with enough vocabulary practice.

Additionally, giving vocabulary tests is also a necessary way to stimulate students to know their level of word power. Nowadays we can get students to practice through computers both in class and at home. Take my own testing experience in 2005-2006, most of the first year students' word levels were found at the bottom of one or two among five levels, even after three months of study as they got into the university. But by assigning vocabulary practice as homework by using academic English software in the computer room, and regular checking, many students improved their word power to level 2 and 3 at the end of the final term. The vocabulary study program, called "power words" developed by a software company, is fairly welcomed by students, for its colorful screen, pronunciation help, variety of contents; automatic checking system etc. Students' response to vocabulary study with the computer program is more favorable than study with books. So this kind of new audio and visual practice is an attraction and stimuli to students for vocabulary study.



## 2.2 Silent reading & Oral reading

In conducting a reading class, should we teach a reading class by applying “silent reading” or “oral reading”? Which should go first, and what functions can they be expected to serve in improving students’ vocabulary reading performance?

Some scholars prefer silent reading. As Allington emphasized (1984), “Reading is primarily a silent activity, the majority of reading that we do will be done silently. In Western cultures oral reading was the primary practice until the 19th century.” Huey (1908) compiled a summary of the early studies on oral versus silent reading and came out strongly in favor of silent reading. He suggested that classroom approaches to teaching reading should emphasize the silent nature of this skill and avoid overemphasis on oral reading. In our present reading classes, we use different strategies when reading orally than when reading silently. Since comprehension is the goal of reading, our primary focus in the classroom should be on getting meaning from the print. So making silent reading the goal in the classroom instead of using oral reading is more important.

However, oral reading is a necessary process before silent reading, and is the best approach for teaching the beginners. I prefer oral reading first, silent reading second. The reasons are as follows: 1) it provides pronunciation practice. For any EFL learner, reading aloud is a primary action before comprehension. Only through correct reading of the new words and sentences can one memorize them well and speak them out with confidence. 2) it helps EFL learners to do phrase reading. 3) it encourages readers to retell or recite the passage in front of the class. After the practice of oral reading, then doing the silent reading will definitely help further understanding of the reading materials. Especially, to Asian students, oral reading of the vocabulary and then the sentence is an indispensable step for them to have enough confidence to speak out their opinions before people. This is the goal for EFL learners to communicate in English.

## 2.3 Intensive reading & Extensive Reading

When giving reading class, we usually separate intensive (detailed) reading and extensive (fast) reading. The former is similar to the “bottom-up reading” model. Students start with basic reading of letter and sound, then words, phrases, sentences, longer text, then the whole meaning to achieve comprehension. For this bottom-up approach, one element is that “the pedagogy recommends a graded read approach. All reading material is carefully reviewed so that students are not exposed to vocabulary that is too difficult...” (Neil) This intensive reading is always used for teaching beginners or low-level classes.

On the other hand, extensive reading is close to “top-down reading,” which begins with the idea that comprehension resides in the reader. The reader uses background knowledge, makes predictions, and searches the text to confirm or reject the predictions that are made. A passage can thus be understood even if all of the individual words are not understood. Within the top-down approach to reading, the teacher should focus on meaning—generating activities rather than on mastery of word recognition. So this extensive reading model is typically matched for fast reading to high-level reading process. I often apply this meaning-based technique in teaching a short story reading class.

If we integrate intensive reading with an extensive reading approach, students’ reading

ability can be gradually improved. But at present, we are lacking this kind of curriculum and textbooks which include both materials. For non-English major students to lay a solid foundation, intensive reading should be conducted as a main approach, while extensive reading should be applied as a sub-skill practice.

Therefore, it is very important to make the graded set of intensive reading textbooks with detailed bilingual vocabulary list, so that students can learn in a very systematic and explicit way to improve their abilities of using English.

#### **2.4 Exploit students' background knowledge & questioning ability**

Except the above reading techniques, "a reader's background knowledge can influence reading comprehension." (Carell, 1983) Background knowledge includes all of the experiences that a reader brings to a text: life experiences, educational experiences, knowledge of how texts can be organized rhetorically, knowledge of how one's first language works, knowledge of how the second language works, and cultural background.

If students are reading on an unfamiliar topic, we may need to begin the reading process by building up background knowledge of their own language: such as reading some topic-connected Japanese newspapers, and articles on internet. Encouraging students to keep on reading newspaper and watching news on TV daily, can help them build some background knowledge so as to comprehend well the unfamiliar reading materials. My own experience of conducting reading class by beginning with 10 minutes' internet English headline reading tells great effect of background knowledge. Furthermore, reading comprehension can be significantly enhanced if background knowledge is activated by setting goals, asking questions, making predictions, teaching text structure, and so on.

But sometimes we can't reject that the role of background knowledge is the negative influence it may have, because incorrect background knowledge can hinder comprehension. So we may have to correct the background knowledge through a predicting activity before reading comprehension can be achieved.

Besides, for high level reading, *Questioning the author*, developed by Beck, McKenown, is also an excellent technique for engaging students in meaningful interactions with the text. The approach requires that the teacher model the reading behavior of asking questions in order to make sense of what is being read. Students learn to engage with meaning and develop ideas rather than retrieve information from the text. This particular technique is the kind of activity that teachers of reading should engage the class in, rather than asking students to read a passage and then testing reading comprehension of the material. Use of this approach engages the teacher and students in queries about the text as the material is being read. Examples of queries include "What is the author trying to tell us? What is author's intentional message? Does the author explain this clearly? Do you agree with him?" and so forth. So this questioning ability requires high level of vocabulary, and at the same time enhances students' active reading power.

With the above analysis of four reading strategies, we can find that vocabulary power is a basic ability associated with reading, using different kinds of reading techniques to memorize and use words, phrases and expressions, and exploring the background knowledge and questioning ability are all helpful reading strategies of which we have to make full use. But without a goal-bound-curriculum, graded textbooks and measurement

for each year's English study, it is very difficult to reach an educational goal. The Ministry of Education should set clear guidelines for College English Education in Japan, or at least each university should have its own principle regarding the level goals for students, so that the textbooks can be well designed with this guideline and principle, and the teaching result will be far better than that at present.

### **3. Discussions & Suggestions**

#### **3.1 Is it possible for all the universities to follow the guideline set by The Ministry of Education in Japan for college English teaching?**

In Japan, there are more than 100 national & public universities, and more than 300 private universities. All the students are learning English from junior high school, but their levels are from bottom to top. How it is possible to make some unified college English textbooks for so many universities? It is really a very difficult task, maybe almost impossible, and many teachers will definitely be against it. But when we come to think about the reality of the present students' English achievement when they get out into society, when we get unfavorable feedback from companies or organizations, when their levels are compared with other Asian countries, we can't help considering a practical national CET plan for different universities to follow, so that students' English level can be greatly improved to compete with those of other countries, as well as to meet the needs of a globalizing economy and international society.

If the Ministry of Education could work out an outline for CET, with a certain goal, just like the outline for the university entrance examination, then different universities also could make their individual curricula in accordance with the situation of their own students; It is certain that great changes and accomplishments could then take place in CET in Japan.

#### **3.2 Who is responsible for making unified English course books and goal-bound tests?**

As is discussed above, this is also a radical problem to talk about. If it comes to the stage that these kinds of textbooks and goal-bound tests are going to be put into practice, then it may go first to the MOE and then JACET (Japan Association of College English Teaching). Taking the reference of the method employed by China; we can see that all the national members for the committee are chosen by the MOE from different levels and districts of universities, and are all professional experts and prestigious scholars nationwide. Japan should have its own specific College English course books designed for different levels of universities and students to use. After the first step is set up, such as the CET guideline, the national committee of the CET, the second step that should be taken into account is that several sets of course books be produced by professors and publishers. Of course, it takes some years and a great endeavor to finish; even if sample course books are created, they still need to be tried at some universities to get feedback to see if they are practical and acceptable by both teachers and students.

Course books are prepackaged, published books used by students and teachers as the primary basis for a language course (Graves, 2000). Since course books are not written for a specific group of people, but meant to be used by different or successive groups of learners,

they should be made for a generalized target group, and must be adapted to our particular group of learners—Japanese college students at different levels. So it is an urgent task to make such a set of bilingual College English Textbooks for Japanese students.

#### 4. Conclusion

“Practice makes perfect” and “Where there is a will, there is a way” are the two most important proverbs among many, and indispensable mottos for any foreign language learners. In any language learning, there is no short cut or magical trick; practicing again and again is the only way.

To sum up, this paper emphasizes the importance of appropriate graded English textbooks, by comparing Chinese College English Textbooks with those used in Japanese institutions, and suggests making some sets of Japanese College English Course books in series; also it employs the theory of “practical English language teaching” for the analysis of reading strategies with vocabulary training; lastly it raises some questions that language teachers are always concerned about, as well as proposed personal suggestions to solve these English learning problems.

In order to improve students’ ability of using English and to enable them to become as proficient as possible, vocabulary training is just one of many other strategies for EFL learners. But it is a critical problem among many students with poor vocabulary skills in classroom performance for communication, reading and presentation. If the national guidelines and a well-designed curriculum could be decided, and appropriate graded textbooks and certain criteria for English achievement, such as graded tests, could also be put into practice, College English Education in Japan might see a marvelous change which could enable Japanese students to perform quite well at the international competition.

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