

English Perceptive Teaching of Middle School in China

—Based on an Empirical Study

He Lifen¹ & Yong Junying¹

¹ Foreign Language and Culture Department, North Sichuan Medical College, Nanchong, Sichuan, China

Correspondence: He Lifen, Foreign Language and Culture Department, New Campus of North Sichuan Medical College, Xueyuan Street, Gaoping, Nanchong, Sichuan, China. Tel: 13678286556. E-mail: hlfsally@163.com

Received: November 19, 2015 Accepted: January 4, 2016 Online Published: January 5, 2016

doi:10.5539/elt.v9n2p43 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n2p43>

Abstract

Perception is the reconstruction and interaction between the new information and prior knowledge in mind or in the process of internalization about the new information. It has three teaching procedures: First, teachers elicit the learners to acquire text meaning. Second, teachers create situation in practical teaching. Third, learners comprehend text information to get the internal values in individuals. An empirical study proves that the English perceptive teaching can help to develop the learners' cognitive abilities and emotion harmoniously. This thesis analyzes the results of the empirical study, finds the problems, and gives some suggestions to the English perceptive teaching in middle schools.

Keywords: perceptive teaching, analysis, implication

1. English Perceptive Teaching

Perception which means the learners' comprehension about their senses has two parts. One refers to the learners' senses — seeing, hearing, feeling, through which they grasp the knowledge. The other refers to the learners' comprehension through which they own independent or critical thinking toward the knowledge. In English perceptive teaching, the learners will deeply process or internalize the information and their knowledge will be reorganized, chosen and reconstructed in their mind.

There are three teaching procedures in the English perceptive teaching. First, eliciting to acquire text meaning. During this process, the learners will raise question, form hypothesis, make plans and refine the information to acquire English language and skills. The learners acquire the English knowledge based on their previous experience.

Second, creating situation to experience in practical teaching. During the situational teaching, which is the link between the first process and the third one, the learners will learn by doing to acquire emotions, attitudes or values. The learner' external activities and internal activities are interacted and intertwined to help learners not only acquire the cognitive abilities but also the emotional development.

Third, comprehending to get the internal values in individuals. As the learners are acquiring the English language knowledge and skills and forming the active emotions, attitudes and values, their knowledge and skills, emotions, attitudes and values will react the teaching procedure. The interaction will attribute to the learners' harmonious development of cognitive abilities and emotions.

2. Results of the Empirical Study

Based on the above theories, the researchers carried out the experiment in a middle school. It lasted from February 2015 to July 2015. The purpose is to find whether the English perceptive teaching will be helpful to improve the learners' language learning. The results are as following: the results show that learners' cognitive abilities can be developed in perceptive teaching; learners show great interests in learning and shape positive attitudes to English learning; their learning methods can greatly be promoted. The results also show that the middle level learners can gain more benefit than the high level and the low level in English perceptive teaching. Simply speaking, the results of the research show that perceptive teaching can not only improve learners' cognitive abilities but also improve learners' interests in English learning.

3. Analysis and Implications

3.1 *An Analysis of the Improvement of Learners' Cognitive Abilities*

The results show that perceptive teaching is helpful to improve learners' language proficiency. The further study shows that perceptive teaching helps to promote learners' cognitive abilities including observation, comparison, language transfer, generalization and comprehension. The reasons are the following:

3.1.1 Based on Learners' Prior Knowledge

Learners' prior knowledge is the basis of new knowledge. They could not only go over the prior knowledge but also distinguish the differences between prior knowledge and new knowledge, and then, they form a new knowledge structure. The relation between prior knowledge and new knowledge creates meaningful learning. Ausubel (1977) contrasts meaningful learning with rote learning and he thinks that meaningful learning, based on previous learning, can enrich and deepen previous knowledge. He also claims that the interaction of previous learning and later learning causes the assimilation of previous knowledge and later knowledge. Meaningful learning is important in language learning. Therefore, it is effective to master new knowledge based on prior knowledge or prior experience.

3.1.2 Emphasizing Learners' Rich Imagination

Teachers encourage learners to discover the similarities and differences between the words through imagination. When a learner learns *practice*, he can relate it with *act* and *ice*. Then he can imagine *the act on the ice is practice*. When he learns *cupboard* he can divide it into two words *cup* and *board*. He thinks that the model made of *board* where the *cups* are put is called *cupboard*. In this way new words can not be considered as separated ones but meaningful ones.

3.1.3 Regarding Learners as the Subjects and Emphasizing Independent Thinking

Cook (2000: 82) describes independent learning as "the notion of thinking in the sense of reflecting, calculating, memorizing, predicting, judging and deciding". It implies that learners should not be passive to receive knowledge but active to take on more responsibility for their own learning. The goals of independent learning are not only the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also the development of an independent and responsible individual. In perceptive teaching great attention is paid to learners' independent thinking. The teacher in the experiment told me that one of the most beneficial instructions was to let learners learn by themselves. Perceptive teaching can help learners' learning because it emphasizes learners' independent thinking.

3.1.4 Emphasizing Learners' Creativity

One theoretical base of perceptive teaching is Bruner's discovery learning. Bruner's (1966) emphasis on the formation of coding systems, together with his belief that abstract coding systems facilitate transferring, improve retention and increase problem-solving ability and motivation, has led him to advocate a discovery-oriented approach in school. The emphasis on discovery learning is premised in part on his belief that the formation of generic coding systems requires the discovery of relationships for themselves. That means learners learn by discovering and doing. In their discovering process there are some changes in learners' knowledge structure and cognitive structure. Therefore, the discovery process is helpful to improve the learners' creativity.

3.1.5 Emphasizing Comprehensible Input

i+1 is a concept associated with the natural approach, which rests on the premise that there is a natural order for language acquisition and that learners will acquire a structure when ready for it. In the classroom learners are supplied with comprehensible input corresponding to their current level of competence (i) but also containing new language data relating to the next stage (+1) towards which they are moving along some natural order. In perceptive teaching, teachers will present new information with learners' prior knowledge which is i. Based on this, teachers will introduce new structures which are +1 for several times. At last learners can comprehend and grasp the structures naturally.

3.2 *Analysis of the Improvement of Learners' Affective Development*

Learners' English learning concept, attitude, motivation and interest belong to metacognitive strategy (Hong, 2002). English learning concept refers to learners' ideas about how to learn English; Richards and Schmidt (2003) define language attitude as learners' ideas about the use of English; motivation refers to the driving force in any situation that leads to action (Richards & Schmidt, 2003); interest refers to learners' concrete activities in English learning. The results of the experiment show that perceptive teaching can improve learners' English learning concept, attitude, motivation, and interest ($p < 0.05$). The reasons are the following:

3.2.1 Emphasizing Affective Factors in English Textbook

There are always social values, beliefs and attitudes, which have a positive affect on learners, in the reading passages. These values or beliefs can encourage learners to overcome difficulties, teach them how to get along with others, and so on. So, Teachers should teach learners not only language knowledge but also these social values, beliefs and attitudes implied in the passage.

3.2.2 Emphasizing Learners' Own Experience

Teachers encourage learners to discover new information by themselves. It is enjoyable for learners to learn through their own experience. They can gain the enjoyment of the successful learning, which gives learners more confidence in learning English and helps them to overcome the difficulties in learning.

3.2.3 Providing Learners with Relaxing Learning Atmosphere

Teachers present some vivid methods that learners can learn more easily and effectively. They study in a relaxing atmosphere which can change some learners' attitudes to English classes and English teachers. As some students said: "In the experimental class the teacher is vivid, lovely and the atmosphere is relaxing." Some said: "the experimental class can develop our thinking." Some said: "The experiment is very interesting and we can find better ways to learn English."

3.3 Problems

3.3.1 English Perceptive Teaching can not Give High Level and Low Level Learners as Much Help as Middle Level Learners

In English proficiency test (the test designed in terms of perceptive teaching), the result shows that there are no significant differences between the low level learners in general ($P > 0.05$). About each item in the English proficiency test, Table 1 and Table 2 show that there are no significant differences between high level learners ($P > 0.05$) except generalization and there are no significant differences between low level learners ($P > 0.05$) except judgment.

Table 1. Results of the high level subjects about cognitive abilities in English proficiency test

Group	Observation	Comparison	Transfer	Judgment	Generalization	Comprehension
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
EC(15)	17.33	25.40	17.27	16.93	4.40	7.33
CC(13)	14.92	23.85	15.62	15.69	3.00	6.92
T value	1.933	1.179	1.44	1.220	2.127*	0.476
Sig.(2-tailed)	0.096	0.251	0.162	0.235	0.048	0.640

Table 2. Results of the low level subjects about cognitive abilities in English proficiency test

Group	Observation	Comparison	Transfer	Judgment	Generalization	Comprehension
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
EC(15)	3.93	10.00	6.71	9.20	0.40	1.80
CC(13)	3.33	9.31	6.20	5.31	0.38	0.69
T value	0.417	0.330	0.44	2.00*	0.52	1.862
Sig.(2-tailed)	0.68	0.744	0.663	0.04	0.96	10.76

About the questionnaire of English learners' learning concept, attitude, interest, and motivation, Table 3 shows that there are no significant differences between high level learners and Table 4 shows that there are no significant differences between low level learners ($P > 0.05$).

Table 3. Results of high level learners' learning concept, attitude, interest, and motivation

Group	Concept	Attitude	Interest	Motivation
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
EC	39.46	40.15	37.73	55.15
CC	39.40	39	35.69	54.20
T value	0.12	0.894	0.975	0.293
Sig.(2-tailed)	0.51	0.381	0.340	0.772

Table 4. Results of low level learners' learning concept, attitude, interest, and motivation

Group	Concept	Attitude	Interest	Motivation
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
EC	39.93	42.66	38.27	61.53
CC	38.15	35.54	33.23	51.54
T value	0.940	3.775**	2.74*	2.669*
Sig.(2-tailed)	0.357	0.002	0.014	0.014

These tables show that perceptive teaching cannot help high level and low level learners as greatly as the middle level learners.

Two reasons may explain this problem. One is the learners themselves. High level learners may be interested in English learning all the time both before and after the experiment. Therefore, the difference is not significant because they are interested in English learning all the time. Low level learners may be uninterested in or afraid of English learning before the experiment. Because of the short experimental period, it may be difficult for them to change their attitudes so quickly. The other reason is perceptive teaching itself. It pays attention to the majority but ignores high level and low level learners. It is better to pay attention to different level learners. Therefore, individualized instruction may solve this problem.

3.3.2 English Perceptive Teaching Ignores Learners' Writing

The result also shows that there are no significant differences in writing strategy ($P > 0.05$). Reflected upon the instructional orders of perceptive teaching (collecting, recognizing, discovering, comprehending, and consolidating), English perceptive teaching ignores learners' writing. It is better to design different teaching models for different language skills training.

3.3.3 To What Degree Should Teachers Give Learners Language Input?

Krashen and Terrel (1983) put forward: "i+1". It is a concept associated with the natural approach, which rests on the premise that there is a natural order for language acquisition and that learners will acquire a structure when ready for it (qtd. in Johnson, 2001). What is important is that the input of language should neither be so far beyond their reach that they are overwhelmed such as "i+2", nor so close to their current stage that they are not challenged at all such as "i+0". To what degree +1 should be in English perceptive teaching? It may be difficult to calculate in quantitative research. One of the qualitative methods—observation in class can be used. Learners' active reaction to teachers shows that language input is nearly "i+1". Otherwise, it is not enough.

Based on these problems in English perceptive teaching, some suggestions are put forward as following.

4. Suggestions

4.1 English Perceptive Teaching Should Pay Attention to Individualized Instruction

Individualization in foreign language teaching should be regarded as a systematic attempt to allow for individual differences in language learning. Some researchers did research on good language learners. Naiman (1978) probes the learning strategies of thirty understanding adult language learners through interviews and he finds that "... good language learners take advantages of potentially useful learning situations. They develop learning techniques and strategies appropriate to their individual needs." In individualized instruction, learners are able to choose their favorite learning methods, learning content, study time. Learners have different goals and objectives in language learning. The individualized educational plan should be designed by both teachers and students

considering the following elements: the learners' present learning level, instructional goals, criteria for evaluation.

4.2 English Perceptive Teaching Can Be Carried Out in Several Teaching Models

In the experiment all kinds of lessons followed the instructional orders. There are no special teaching models for English speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Some suggestions are given to design these four different kinds of lessons for English perceptive teaching.

Teaching Model 1: Situational and Experiential learning

Situational and Experiential learning is based on situational language teaching and experiential learning. Situational language teaching refers to a teaching in which "the selection, organization, and presentation of language items are based on situations (e.g. at the bank, at the supermarket, at home)" (Richards & Schmidt, 2003). "Experiential learning emphasizes the central role that experience plays in the learning process." (David, 1984). Situational and Experiential learning refers to the learning in which learners learn English in a situation through their prior experience and gain new experience for the next learning. The situation can be designed as the nearly "real" situation.

The steps of situational and experiential learning are the following: creating a "real" situation, entering the "real" situation, acquiring learning experience and comprehending. Situational and experiential learning can be used in English reading, writing and sentence pattern learning.

Teaching Model 2: Problem-solving Learning

Problem solving is a kind of learning that regards the internal events as "thinking." "Previously acquired concepts and principles are combined in a conscious focus on an unresolved or ambiguous set of events" (Brown, 2002). Richards and Schmidt (2003) describe problem solving as the following characteristics:

A topic of concern or interest to students is identified. It should pose a problem for which there are several possible solutions.

Students discuss the problem and relate it to their own experience.

Students analyze the cause of problems and seek solutions.

Through the question and answer exchanges, students generate vocabulary and other language that the teacher later draws on to develop a series of exercises, practice opportunities and application activities.

The steps of problem-solving learning are as following: discovering problems, solving problems, reflecting on solving and deepening of problem solving. Problem-solving learning can be used in English listening, writing, and sentence pattern learning.

Teaching Model 3: Transfer Learning

Ellis (1994) assumes that "where there were differences between the L1 and L2, the learners' L1 knowledge would interfere with the L2, and where the L1 and L2 were similar, the L1 would actively aid L2 learning." The process that is held responsible for this is called language transfer. In transfer learning, transfer refers to not only the relation between L1 and L2 but also the relation between learners' prior knowledge and new knowledge. As Richards and Schmidt (2003) define, transfer is the carrying over of learning behavior from one situation to another.

The steps of transfer learning are the following: presenting with prior knowledge, recognizing prior knowledge, transferring to new knowledge and application. Transfer learning can be used in speaking, reading, and sentence learning.

Although the thesis goes on wheels mostly, it is limited in the following points. Firstly, perceptive teaching is a new field. Only a few materials about perceptive teaching can be found especially in the foreign research. Secondly, in the questionnaire there are 85 items in which only 39 items are about learning method because the testing time is restricted. So, not all learners' learning strategies could be covered. Finally, the learners' affective education could not be improved as much as they are expected because the experimental period is only one year. If these factors could be improved on, the discussion will be more convincing.

Researchers may continue the study to probe into more sides of English perceptive teaching. Firstly, this study may be tested in senior middle school English and college English. Furthermore, researchers can do more researches about the teaching models of perceptive teaching so as to improve learners' listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills. Finally, researchers can make more researches on language input in English perceptive teaching by qualitative and quantitative method.

Acknowledgements

This paper is supported by the project English Teachers' Professional Development from the Ecological View — to build the Symbiotic Learning Community (13SB120), issued by Education Department of Sichuan Province.

References

- Ausubel, D. P. (1997). *The Facilitation of Meaningful Verbal Learning in the Classroom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Brown, H. D. (2002). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Beijing: Foreign Language teaching and Research Press.
- Bruner, J. (1966). *Toward a Theory of Instruction*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Cook, V. (2000). *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*. Beijing: Foreign Language teaching and Research Press.
- David, A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hong, X. (2002). *Thinking on Perceptive Teaching*. Unpublished dissertation.
- Krashen, S., & Terrell, T. D. (1983). The Natural Approach : Language Acquisition in the Classroom. In K. Johnson, & H. Johnson (Eds.), *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics: A Handbook for Language Teaching*. Beijing: Foreign Language teaching and Research Press.
- Naiman, N. (1978). *The Good Language Learners*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2003). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied linguistics*. Beijing: Foreign Language teaching and Research Press.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).