



**A Case Study on Learner Autonomy in
English Reading Outside the Class in a Higher
Vocational College**

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By

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Abstract

21st century is an age of information explosion. Reading, especially English reading (ER) has become one of important ways for people to communicate with the outside world. Moreover, it is an essential language skill for learners who learn English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL). During the past decades, different researchers or experts at home and abroad have tried different approaches to help EFL/ESL students develop fluent reading on the basis of different perspectives. Gradually, it has attracted more and more attention to foster or promote learner autonomy (LA) in ER. At present, existing studies on it in our country where English is a foreign language, mainly focus on ordinary universities or high schools while ignoring the students in the Higher Vocational College (HVC). However, the practical reading teaching experiences have justified that HVC learners' reading activities should deserve more attention. It is not only because of the big difference between ordinary universities and HVC, but also the complex and unique educational background of HVC students. This thesis presents the case study conducted on English majors' autonomy in reading outside the class in the HVC aiming at promoting the students' out-of-class reading autonomy with the help of the teacher's instruction and guidance. Meanwhile, the students are expected to benefit from the promoted autonomy for their lifelong study.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the collected data and findings, both quantitative and qualitative analysis were employed in this research, in which the questionnaire, reading tests and teacher-students interviews, etc. were the main instruments applied among the freshmen in the Foreign Language Department of Jiangmen Polytechnic. To be precise, a survey resorting to a well-designed questionnaire was firstly carried out among 162 freshmen. The result shows that the majority of the English majors hold a positive attitude and understanding towards ER, but their overall level of autonomy in reading is low, especially in reading after school. Then the case study which lasts 18 weeks, a whole semester, was followed to keep a close eye on 13 students' reading behaviors outside the class. And it turns out that the

teacher's instruction and guidance do promote the learners' out-of-class reading autonomy. More or less, they have formed a reading habit or awareness and their reading achievements have been improved as well. Based on the findings and results, some conclusions were reached and implications were suggested at last. For example, teachers' direction is indispensable to the development of LA in out-of-class reading; the cultivation of reading awareness or habit is significant to promote students' autonomous reading after school; reading instruction in the class should focus on the development of LA, and learners' intrinsic motivation for ER is a key element to achieve autonomy in out-of-class reading.

Key Words: Higher Vocational College; English major; out-of-class reading; autonomy; case study

摘要

21 世纪信息化的今天, 阅读, 尤其是英语阅读已成为人们获取外界资讯的重要手段。不仅如此, 它还是二语/外语学习者必备的一项语言技能。几十年来, 国内、外的教育专家、学者结合相关理论, 基于不同的角度, 就如何科学、有效地提高外语/二语学习者的阅读水平纷纷提出了自己的观点。其中, 倡导培养或促进学习者阅读自主性正日益受到广泛关注。在我国——英语作为外国语存在的背景下, 目前, 有关培养或促进外语学习者阅读自主性的相关研究大多集中于普通本科院校或中学课堂里的学生, 却忽略了高等教育中另一支异军突起的力量——高职院校。有鉴于此, 本文结合笔者的阅读教学体验, 针对高职院校与普通本科院校的本质不同以及高职学生群体的特殊性等, 对高职院校英语专业学生的课外阅读行为实施了个案研究, 旨在通过教师有目的、有针对性的指导来促进学生的课外阅读自主性, 从而为他们适应未来学习的阅读要求和终身学习打下良好的基础。

本文以江门职业技术学院英语专业一年级新生为对象, 运用问卷调查、阅读水平测试、师生访谈等方法对学生的课外阅读行为进行定性和定量分析, 从而保证研究数据和结果的有效性、可靠性。首先, 通过对 162 名学生的问卷调查, 发现多数学生对英语阅读持积极态度和正确认识, 但其课外阅读情况令人堪忧, 自主性明显偏低。鉴于这种存在着的矛盾, 本文对来自同一自然班的 13 名学生的课外阅读行为进行了为期 18 周 (一个学期) 的个案研究。结果表明, 学生的课外阅读自主性在教师的指导后得到了一定程度的促进, 学生或多或少都养成了课外阅读的良好习惯或意识, 阅读成绩也有较明显提高。基于上述研究结果, 本文最后就促进高职院校学生课外英语阅读自主性得出了一些结论与启示, 如教师的指导作用不可漠视, 重视对学生英语阅读习惯或意识的培养, 重视课堂教学对学生自主阅读能力的训练, 激发学生阅读的内部动机。

关键词: 高职院校; 英语专业; 课外阅读; 自主性; 个案研究

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Abbreviations

ER: English reading

EFL: English as a foreign language

ESL: English as a second language

LA: learner autonomy

HVC: the Higher Vocational College

L2: the second language

L1: the first language

CET 4: College English Test Band 4

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter showcases the importance of English reading (ER), the background and significance of the study, the research purpose and its framework with step-by-step introduction.

1.1 The importance of ER

As is known to all, 21st century is an age of information explosion. It is a time when knowledge increases much faster than ever before. It is also a time when the Internet, the new media, comes into every corner of human's life and takes the place of traditional media such as the radio, TV, etc. and becomes the main means to communicate with the outside world. According to the statistics, nowadays about 85% of the web pages are read in English, 80% of e-mails are exchanged in English, and over 80% of information about science and technology is transmitted in English, too. In this case, the ability of ER is becoming more and more influential to shape a strong future for people's life, for communities, and even for countries. As the saying goes, "Reading makes a full man." Only those who are good at ER can survive the floods of information and do well in step with the rapid development of the world.

ER is of vital importance especially for English majors of colleges around China where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL). According to the syllabus of English teaching to Chinese college students in English major, reading is an essential language skill in English learning and hence is one of the compulsory courses for students. Besides, a series of English books are appended specially to the syllabus for learners to read.

It is no doubt that reading, the written communication, is really a proper way to get exposure to the world of English due to the lack of the authentic language circumstances. Recently some studies at home and abroad have found the significance of reading to foreign language learning. To the benefits of learners whose major is English, for example, reading is a highly effective means of extending their mastering

of language. Firstly, reading exposure will do much help to cultivate their interest in English learning. Through reading, they can have access to the source of ideas and information, they can take a sip of colourful English culture and customs, and they can have a good taste of the charm of the English language. Hence their interest and curiosity to learn English will be aroused accordingly. Secondly, sufficient language input will be ensured by reading. In other words, the more the students go to read, the more experience of English, the target language, they will enjoy. Then considerable language acquisition including the expansion of vocabulary size and grammatical development, etc. can take place spontaneously. Last, but not least, ER is crucial to the development of other language skills, i.e., listening, speaking and writing. Reading materials provide opportunities to study vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and the way of constructing sentences and texts. Sometimes good reading materials can introduce interesting topics, stimulate discussion, and illicit imaginative responses, etc. (Harmer 2000:68). So without reading, nothing can be done in the improvement of students' competence in English listening, speaking and writing.

All in all, ER is an indispensable part in English learning. Only when English majors possess strengthened reading proficiency can they are more likely to make greater progress in all academic areas, can they enrich their knowledge and abilities so as to adapt to the increasingly complicated and changeable society.

1.2 Backgrounds and significance of the study

Generally speaking, reading, the cognitive activity in human society, is an active and complex process that involves readers and printed materials in building meaning. To be precise, ER challenges the reader's background knowledge, vocabulary size, grammatical skills and reading strategies, etc. Then how to help students achieve proficient reading is put forward? So far, there have been mainly three approaches, namely the bottom-up approach, the top-down approach and the interactive approach. All of these are based on three different perspectives of reading models.

Bottom-up models define reading as a text-driven process in which the reader

begins at the very bottom meaning of every word and works towards the meaning of the whole discourse (Gough 1972:331; Samuels & Kamil 1993:22). It requires exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and larger language units. In this model, reading is largely a matter of identification and meaning is understood through analysis of language parts. So the bottom-up approach attaches more importance to students' grammatical skills and vocabulary development.

Different from bottom-up models, the top-down model, arose out of the psycholinguistic research by such scholars as Goodman (1971:135) and Smith (1971), describes reading as a meaning-driven process. To be more specific, the reader applies his or her background knowledge that is compatible with the input information provided by the text to make hypotheses about the text, or to predict what he or she expects to read in the article, and then the reader samples the text to determine whether or not the prediction is correct. It is a process of interaction between the reader and the text. In this model, reading is treated as a "psycholinguistic guessing game" (Goodman 1971:135). Hence, the role of background knowledge in the understanding of the material is emphasized in the top-down approach.

Proposed by Stanovich (1980:32), interactive-compensatory models suggest that readers process texts by utilising information provided simultaneously from several different sources, and that they can compensate for deficiencies at one level by drawing on knowledge at other levels. These sources include all those looked at separately in bottom-up and top-down processes, that is phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic and discourse knowledge. Therefore, the students' prior knowledge and various types of language knowledge are the major concerns of the interactive approach.

Obviously each of the approaches contributes a lot to reading instruction. Whatever the effectiveness though, they are still traditional teacher-centred educational ways and ignore students' learning. After all, reading is learnt rather than taught. Learners should be active and take charge of what they do in the reading process. As Bamford and Day (1997:7) state, "until students read in quantity, they will

not become fluent readers". In other words, students learn to read by reading. In this case, many new approaches such as the reading lab approach, the individualized reading approach and the content-centred approach, etc. are explored to encourage students to read. These stress the students' reading activity and so they go further in developing learners' reading ability.

However, not all the reading performance will lead to the great improvement of students' reading. It is those active, pleasant reading that originates from students' autonomy will matter. After all, reading is, to a great extent, selective. Learners can read for different purposes, choose different reading materials, and adopt different strategies in getting access to materials. In addition to this, with the shift of focus from teachers to learners, it has been widely accepted that real reading can in any case only be carried out by the students. That means students themselves take the responsibility of their own reading. Consequently, the concept of learner autonomy (LA) in the process of teaching and learning EFL reading gets more and more attention. Autonomous reading is regarded as a most effective way to activate students' prior knowledge, build vocabulary and structural awareness, improve comprehension skills, and promote confidence and motivation. As a result, helping learners become more autonomous in EFL reading is of great value.

At present, much attention has been paid to LA and English learning as a whole, but few relates to autonomy with specific reference to reading. In this context, students' autonomy in ER is a continuing topic to be discussed. Take China for instance, with the advocacy of promoting students' autonomous reading, there are more and more researches done in ordinary universities or high schools while ignore students from Higher Vocational Colleges (HVC). However, when teaching English reading in the HVC, I find most of the students, even though they are English majors, display their passiveness and reluctance in ER. They make no choices on their own unless they are forced to do so, and do a little reading after class if they have to complete the assignments. Therefore, reading activities of HVC students, especially English majors should deserve more concentration. More reasons are given as follows:

Firstly, the complex and unique educational backgrounds of students majoring in English in HVC. There are mainly two student parties enrolled by HVC. One is from ordinary high schools and has received a formal English education, but many of them are poor foreign language learners; the other comes from vocational high schools, in which most of the students go on to learn English for only one or two years. On the whole, the reading level of these English learners is low and uneven. What a pity is that quite a few of them do not seem to have confidence or interest in reading. Their past frustration and experience result in their passive attitudes in the reading class, let alone their active reading after class.

Secondly, large student population and limited learning resources in HVC. Because of various factors, the number of HVC students has increased drastically in the recent years while the resources cannot meet the need of the great expansion of class sizes. On the average, there are more than 40 English majors every class. That means they have little access to abundant reading resources.

Finally, the challenges and problems resulting from the current status quo of ER teaching and learning in HVC. Today the reading classes of HVC are still dominated by traditional teacher-centered approach. For the most of time, students have no choices but to follow instructors' directions and do what they are asked to do. Teachers always like to place more emphasis on the explanation of language knowledge than on the cultivation of learners' reading ability. What is worse, they stress too much on class reading teaching while neglect the learners' reading performance expanded out of the class. As a matter of fact, "practice first" makes HVC greatly different from ordinary universities. In other words, the teaching periods occupy a relatively smaller part in the whole training plan of HVC students. Then, a practical question, how to improve these English majors' reading proficiency in a limited time, is raised.

Since the study of out-of-class reading is a relatively new area of research with considerable implications for the theory of autonomy, case studies on English majors' autonomy in reading outside the class in Jiangmen Polytechnic was conducted in this thesis.

1.3 Purpose of the study

Two main research questions are what the present study intends to go through:

1. What is the overall picture of English majors' autonomy in ER outside the class in Jiangmen Polytechnic?
2. Do the teacher's instruction and guidance in the case study promote students' out-of-class ER autonomy? If yes, to what degree will LA in ER be developed?

1.4 Framework of the study

Here is the layout of the dissertation: Chapter One is the Introduction; Chapter Two provides a historical review of ER, LA and case study as well as a theoretical framework of promoting LA in ER; Chapter Three explains the research methodology step by step; Chapter Four tries to explore some findings out of the study and then related discussion is followed; The last chapter, that is, chapter five outlines the conclusions and implications from the study and meanwhile points out the limitations.

Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The particular focus of this chapter will be relevant literature related to reading research, LA and case study. Meanwhile, a theoretical framework for promoting LA in out-of-class EFL reading is included.

2.1 Research of reading

2.1.1 The definition of reading

What is reading? How to define it? Early reading research has elaborated a lot on the nature and definition of it. Bloomfield (1961) holds the view that reading is decoding. That means reading is no more than to pronounce words swiftly and accurately. Evidently, such narrow and one-dimensional definition excludes the comprehension. Thus it is far from the nature of reading. Another increasingly common view in the research literature is that reading is a two-dimensional act; it involves both word identification and comprehension. While reading, readers have to identify words rapidly and automatically, organize ideas, make generalizations, and draw inferences, etc. From this point of view, reading is not only decoding, but also comprehension. Over the years, one of the developments of reading nature has been most acknowledged. That is, reading is not only perception but also the use of syntactic and semantic information. Goodman (1976:498), one of the leading proponents of this position, claims that reading is a “psycholinguistic guessing game”, which involves an interaction between thought and language. In other words, real reading is not precise perception and identification of all elements, but more accurate guesses on the basis of better sampling techniques, great control over language structure, broadened experience, and increased conceptual development. After that, a more current view regards reading as an interactive process. Wixson and Peters

(1984:4) argue that reading is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader's existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written language and the context of the reading situation. In conclusion, the definition of reading has gone through different stages from elaborating linguistic factors only to extra-linguistic factors and further to both of them.

2.1.2 Models of reading

The past decades have seen the efforts made by many western psychologists, psycholinguists and linguists to study the reading comprehension process systematically. The bottom-up reading model, the top-down reading model and the interactive reading model are the three representative models to be discussed a lot.

The bottom-up reading model

Proposed by Gough (1972:331), La Berge and Samuels (1974:293), the bottom-up reading model emphasizes the function of the text itself. Thus reading is a text-driven process in which the reader decodes the written symbols in the text letter-by-letter or word-by-word, and then reassembles the pieces to form meaning. It requires exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and larger language units. In this model, reading is largely a matter of identification and meaning is understood through analysis of language parts. Obviously, this model lays too much emphasis on the lower level of reading, i.e. the rapid and accurate identification of lexical and grammatical forms. It has failed to recognize the role of the reader's prior knowledge.

Because of the deficiencies, the bottom-up model suffers much criticism and gradually loses its voice with the advent of top-down reading model.

The top-down reading model

The top-down reading model arises from the psycholinguistic research by such

scholars as Goodman (1971:135) and Smith (1971). As opposed to the bottom-up model, it stresses that reading is essentially knowledge-based. It is the reader rather than the text that plays a key role in reading comprehension. To be precise, readers use their background knowledge that is compatible with the input information provided by the text to make hypotheses about the text, or to predict what they will read in the article, and then the readers sample the text to determine whether or not the prediction is correct. Therefore, the top-down model is also known as the psycholinguistic model and interaction of the reader and the text is central to the reading process. In practice, however, the model over-emphasizes the role of higher-level skills, the prediction of meaning while neglecting grammatical forms.

In response to the perceived weakness of both bottom-up and top-down reading models, a third model i.e. interactive model comes into existence.

The interactive reading model

In the latter part of the 1970s and in the 1980s, a growing body of research described reading as an interactive process. And the interactive model is first advanced by Rumelhart (1983). Interactive reading models, which combine aspects of bottom-up and top-down models, assume that an interaction between higher-level and lower-level skills lead to fluent reading comprehension. That is, reading is a constant interactive process from bottom to up and from up to bottom at the same time, during which both identification and interpretation is required. So the model supports the utilization of a variety of sources such as linguistic knowledge and background knowledge etc. Besides, the interactive model stresses an interaction between readers and texts. The reader reconstructs the text information partly from the knowledge drawn from the text and in part from the prior knowledge available to the reader.

Behind interactive models comes out the schema theory of reading, which explains exactly how readers make use of various kinds of knowledge and how readers interact with the dynamic process of reading.

2.1.3 The schema theory of reading

The term, schema, is introduced by Bartlett (1932) and is central to reading theories and models. It was in the late 1970s that the schema theory began to emerge and push forward the research of reading comprehension process. With the development of cognitive psychology, more and more linguists abroad tend to conduct studies on the reading process from the perspective of cognitive psychology and explore quite a few findings. Carrell (1983:25) defines readers' prior knowledge "schemas" and thus "schema theory" is proposed. According to this reading theory, readers' right interpretation of a text is based on two components. One is the appropriate schemata related to the text and the other is relevant schemata successfully activated in reading process. Thus the outstanding feature of schema theory is the interactive text-based and knowledge-based process. The reader is seen as an active participant, and all of the reader's knowledge and previous experience play an important role in reading comprehension.

2.2 Research of LA within language learning context

2.2.1 The definition of autonomy

The idea of autonomy in language learning originates in Holec's (1981) project report to the Council of Europe. With a description of the social and ideological context in the report, autonomy within language learning emerged in the late 1960s. For many of its advocates, autonomy is a natural product of the practice of self-directed learning, in which the objectives, progress and evaluation of learning are determined by the learners themselves.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of autonomy within the field of language learning suffered a crisis of identity. Holec (1985), a prominent researcher on autonomy, emphasizes that the term *autonomy* should be used to describe a capacity of the learner. Riley and Zoppis (1985: 287) describe learners working in a self-access centre as working in semi-autonomy or complete autonomy. Dickinson (1987: 11) defines autonomy as the situation in which the learner is totally responsible

for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions and also used the term full autonomy to describe the situation in which the learner is entirely independent of teachers, institutions or specially prepared materials. However different the approaches to describe autonomy in language learning, one thing that researchers are well aware of is that learners need to be freed from the direction and control of others so as to develop autonomy.

At the same time, the theory and practice of autonomy in language learning suffered a close and uneasy association with the idea of individualization (Altman & James 1980; Brookes & Grundy 1988). According to Brookes and Grundy (1988: 1), autonomy and individualization are associated by a mutual link to the concept of learner-centeredness. In this way, individualization and autonomy overlap each other and both are concerned with meeting the needs of individual learners. Self-directed learning is as a result in a sense a form of individualization, and self-access resource centers, the provision of opportunities and support for self-directed language learning, are also regarded as performing important functions in the individualization of learning. However, individualization also takes the form of programmed learning, in which learners are expected to work their way at their own pace but the most important decisions in learning are up to the teacher rather than to the learners themselves. Riley (1986:23) argues that programmed learning deprives learners of the freedom of choice which is essential to the development of autonomy. Besides, recent studies on autonomy have emphasized that the development of autonomy necessarily implies collaboration and interdependence. No doubt, these researches challenge the widespread belief that autonomy implies the learner working in isolation, and also prove to be one of the most challenging developments in the theory of autonomy in the 1990s. Kohonen (1992: 19), for example, clearly states that autonomy contains the notion of interdependence. Little (1996: 210) has also argued that collaboration is essential to the development of autonomy as a psychological capacity, adding that the development of a capacity for reflection and analysis, central to the development of LA, depends on the development of an internalization of a capacity to participate fully and critically in social interactions.

Up to now, it is evident in retrospect that the idea of autonomy in language learning evolves with the social and ideological changes of the time. Autonomy and language learning is increasingly becoming part of the mainstream of research and practice.

In higher education, the notion of student power is current (Cockburn & Blackburn 1970) and radically student-centered educational reforms are put forward by Freire (1970), Illich (1971), Rogers (1969) and others. Gremmo and Riley (1995:151) suggest that the rise of autonomy in language learning corresponds to an ideological shift away from consumerism and materialism towards an emphasis on the meaning and value of personal experience, quality of life, personal freedom and minority rights. In addition, major innovations in language teaching theory and methodology over the past three decades have contributed a lot to the research on autonomy in language learning. More and more language educators hold the belief that it is not the teacher but the learner who should stand at the center of the process of teaching and learning (Nunan 1988). And several prominent figures in the fields of communicative language teaching and learner-centered practice have incorporated the concept of autonomy into their work (see Littlewood 1996:427; Nunan 1997:192). In the light of the changes within educational systems and the practice of language teaching, the successful learner is seen as a person who is able to construct knowledge directly from the experience of the world, rather than one who responds well to instruction.

You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself.

Galileo Galilei (1564—1642)

Therefore, to help learner develop autonomy is of great significance during the course of language teaching and learning.

2.2.2 LA and language learning

So far, LA has not been defined with one voice. Holec (1981:3) describes LA as follows:

“The ability to take charge of one’s own learning.....i.e. determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting the methods and techniques to be used; monitoring the procedure of acquisition.....; evaluating what has been acquired”.

Little (1991) holds a close idea and defines it as a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. According to Littlewood (1996: 428), an autonomous person has an independent capacity to make and carry out the choices which govern his or her actions. Gardner and Miller (2002:6) view autonomous language learners as those who initiate the planning and implementation of their own learning program.

Nevertheless, these definitions of LA do share something in common. To sum up, it consists of at least the following points:

- (1) LA involves a learner’s capacity and willingness to take responsibility for their own learning.
- (2) LA involves planning, decision making, conscious reflection and evaluating, etc.

Little (1991/1996) gives three arguments for fostering LA. Firstly, if learners are reflectively engaged with their learning, the learning is likely to be more effective. Secondly, if learners are proactively committed to their learning, the motivation is supposed to be obtained. Thirdly, in the particular case of second and foreign languages effective communication is based on a series of procedural skills that can be acquired only by use. Just as Littlewood (1996:427) notes, all learning can in any case only be carried out by the students themselves. After their formal education, they have to go further learning. Therefore, learners should take the responsibility for their own learning. In this case, helping students become autonomous language learners is as important as teaching them how to use the language.

Then how to promote LA in language learning? Little (1988:80) points out three main approaches to autonomous learning. They are individual-centered approaches, group-centered approaches and project-centered approaches respectively. As for the individual-centered approach, it is characterized by a focus on individual learners

and their needs. Usually a learning contract is adopted in such approach. By contrast, the group-centered one focuses on the needs of a particular group of learners and a strong commitment to group learning and group progresses. Within the context of the group, much learning occurs from interactions between group members. The project-centered approach, however, lays equal or even more emphasis on the particular learning project and its outcome than the individuals or the group which is working on it. According to Benson (2001:109), any practice that encourages and enables learners to take greater control of any aspect of their learning can be regarded as a means of fostering autonomy. He also classifies six approaches that are helpful to develop LA. That is, the resource-based approach, the technology-based approach, the learner-based approach, the classroom-based approach, the curriculum-based approach and the teacher-based approach.

Likewise, there are many researches of LA in English learning at home. As early as the 1980s, a large amount of discussion is found in domestic leading language and linguistics journals. Some focuses on the introduction and reviews of related study from abroad, and some emphasizes the importance and feasibility of fostering students' autonomous English learning, etc. Peng's (2002:15) study, for example, looks into the possibility of fostering autonomy in English learning among Chinese college students by discussing autonomy in terms of both principle and action. By probing into some of the students in Jingzhou Teachers' College, Li (2001:229) proves the vital importance and necessity of developing autonomous learning ability and in the meantime suggests some ways to do so. Through investigation, Yang (2002:84) points out the urgency of developing students' awareness of autonomy, and presents some practical strategies. He (2003:48) states it is important for teachers to learn about different ideas of LA in language study and the conditions of LA. Besides, Bai and Jing (2003:52) explore the prospect of introducing learner autonomy into EFL teaching context in China. They argue for autonomy to be cultivated in EFL learners and explain how it can be developed in a poor input environment.

Since many researchers have realized the importance of LA, some attempt to

propose practical models in language teaching and learning process. Based on the argument on the relationship between meta-cognition and LA, Wang(2002:18) and Ren (2003:68) conduct a meta-cognitive strategy training program and point out that such training is of great importance for encouraging learners' autonomy in English learning. Cao (2003:39), for another example, attempts to set up an individual-centered model for public classroom language teaching and learning with the aim at stimulating learning and teaching motivations to the largest possible extent. Besides, Lu (2003:89) also presents the teaching model of student-centered interaction, in which the teacher should follow directive, encouraging and equal principles while the students should follow participating cooperation, orderly competition and study for application principles. She argues that the new teaching model involves the participation of both the teacher and the learners, and then facilitates the development of learner autonomy.

With the shift of focus from teachers to learners, more researchers have gone deep into the exploration of learners' autonomous awareness (Qi 2004:90), autonomous learning ability (Xu 2004:64; Zhang & Li 2004:17) and learner beliefs about autonomy (Lei 2005:68) in recent years. According to Xu (2004:64), the ability of college students' autonomy in English learning is low on the average. And so some suggestions are proposed by her.

Obviously, there is now a large body of literature at home and abroad being devoted to LA and second or foreign language learning, but there is indeed a little in conjunction with the specific field of reading. Kletzien and Bednar (1988:30) find that students work on reading with no idea for what purpose they are reading, what they are supposed to learn and how to learn. All the findings imply that they lack the active management and regulation of their own reading. Similarly, after investigating Chinese students who are non-English majors, Wang & He (2001:11) discover that these learners are weak in using strategies in extra-curriculum ER. What's more, Duan (2006:110) draws a conclusion that English majors make no plans for their after-class ER, neglect the effectiveness of language input and pay little attention to language output and collaborative study in reading. In this case, it is time put forward the idea

of promoting LA in ER, especially EFL reading.

2.3 Case study

Case study is one of the ways to do research. As a form of qualitative descriptive research, case study is often used to look intensely at a particular participant or small group, collecting data, analyzing information and drawing conclusions by means of multiple sources of evidence such as archival records, interviews, tests and direct observation, etc. By doing so, the researcher may gain a sharpened understanding of an event or situation at last.

The use of case study can be traced back as far as the early 20th century after the establishment of the concept of a *case history* in medicine. But over the years, case study has suffered criticism. In the 1920s, for example, many researchers regarded case study as unscientific when it is compared with statistics. From the 1930s on, the sociological positivists criticized case study research both for it failed to offer evidence of inter-subjective agreement and for the few number of cases studied made generalization impossible. By the 1950s, quantitative methods, in the form of survey research, had become the dominant sociological approach while case study had become a minority practice.

The popularity of case study is gained in education and in particular educational evaluation since the 1950s. According to Armisted (1984:75), having stepped out of Harvard Business School, case study have been instituted either as part of a course of study or as the main focus of the course to which other teaching material is added.

After a brief discussion of related literature, how to stimulate LA in EFL reading then? So far many relevant researches have been conducted in domestic ordinary universities or high schools. As discussed in the previous chapter, however, HVC students' reading behaviors should win more attention. Now that the study of out-of-class reading, any kind of reading that takes place outside the classroom, is a relatively new area of research with considerable implications for the theory of autonomy, extra-curriculum ER is fixed on the field of the research. Based on the

approaches to autonomous learning that are discussed by Little and Benson and related theory, case studies among the English majors' real reading life outside of the class in Jiangmen Polytechnic are carried out in this thesis to see whether the teacher's instruction and guidance can facilitate the development of the students' autonomy in out-of-class reading. And ultimately many conclusions and implications are expected to be obtained to promote HVC English majors' reading autonomy after school. With this purpose, the theoretical bases are firstly outlined in the following passages.

2.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework in this thesis mainly refers to Krashen's reading hypothesis, language threshold hypothesis, humanistic and cognitive psychology as well as constructivism.

2.4.1 Krashen's Reading Hypothesis

According to Krashen (1991:427), language is too vast and complex to teach and learn, and the Reading Hypothesis is a special case of the Input Hypothesis. In other words, comprehensible input in the form of reading also stimulates language acquisition. He argues that reading leads to greater literacy development including vocabulary development, competence in writing and spelling, and the ability to understand and produce complex grammatical structures (Krashen 1991/1992/1993/1995). In addition, the Reading Hypothesis holds the view that reading itself is the cause of reading ability. Students who participate in free reading programs outperform children who are taught by traditional methods. Doubtlessly, the Reading Hypothesis stresses much on readers' abundant but free reading which indeed calls for the autonomy inside learners.

2.4.2 Language Threshold Hypothesis

Language Threshold Hypothesis states that the second language (L2) readers

need to know enough L2 knowledge such as vocabulary and structure so that the first language (L1) reading strategies and skills can be used efficiently to help them comprehend the L2 text. If the reader is devoting most of his or her cognitive resources to figuring out the language of the L2 text, there are few cognitive resources left over for the fluent comprehension processes that would normally support the L1 reader. Readers usually cross the threshold whenever they encounter L2 texts in which they know almost all of the words and can process the text fluently. Consequently, the students whose English is second language should be encouraged to do more reading autonomously out of class since it turns out to be a highly successful way of developing knowledge of vocabulary and an implicit understanding of when and how words are used.

2.4.3 Humanistic psychology

Traditional teaching stresses too much on the teaching side while neglected the learner's role. However, learning how to learn is more important than being taught something. In humanistic view, the basic concern is the human potential growth, and education is to enhance actualization and give free rein to one's potential. It is just humanism that has promoted the growing recognition of LA. Maslow, a leading figure of American humanistic psychology, views one primary function of education is helping learners to develop as individuals in their own right and achieve self-actualization (see Williams & Burden 1997). Another representative of humanistic psychology, Carl Rogers (1969), studies the whole person as a physical and cognitive, but primarily emotional being. He puts emphasis on the development of an individual's self-concept, internal forces that cause one person to act and grow and learn.

In short, humanistic psychology focuses on the positive aspects of people, their inner-directed, conscious motivations and self-directed goals. Therefore, individual and personal growth is emphasized and promoting LA has become the goal of humanistic education.

2.4.4 Cognitive psychology

In learning and modeling, cognitive processes play a key part. Cognitive psychology holds that learning is more effective if the learner integrates knowledge within a personal framework (Gagne & Briggs 1974). According to Piaget (1969), a dominant figure in cognitive developmental psychology, everyone makes his or her own sense of the world. In a cognitive approach, the learner is seen as an active participant rather than a passive one in the whole learning process, using various mental strategies in order to sort out the system of the language to be learned.

For Bruner, who is an important advocate of Piaget's ideas, the best way to make sure that students learn the most basic and significant things in school is to take pains to assure that knowledge is self-discovered. Students must discover concepts, meanings, and relationships, and they must do it through an inductive process of exploring problems and reaching their own conclusions.

Thus, teachers should try to induce and utilize the learner's active thinking, help him or her facilitate autonomous learning.

2.4.5 Constructivism

Constructivism is a category of learning theories in which emphasis is placed on the agency and prior knowledge of the learner, and often on the social and cultural determinants of the learning process. The key idea that autonomy in language learning has borrowed from constructivism is that effective learning is active learning. Constructivism views knowledge as reorganization and restructure of experience, and it cannot be taught because it is unique for every individual (Benson & Voller 1997). Only when learners construct knowledge on their own initiative can knowledge become part of their cognitive schema. As a result, constructivist approaches encourage and promote self-directed learning as a necessary condition for LA. In this case, language teachers should try a variety of ways to have students involved in learning and constructing their own understanding of the language. After all, it is more

important to teach them how to learn than to give them knowledge.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

Based on the close relationship between autonomous out-of-class reading and reading fluency, a survey was firstly made to gain a general picture of English majors' autonomy in reading outside of the class in Jiangmen Polytechnic. Following that, case studies under the teacher's instruction and guidance was conducted to keep a close eye on students' reading activities after school.

3.1 Research questions

There contains mainly two research questions:

- (1) What is the overall picture of English majors' autonomy in reading outside of the class in Jiangmen Polytechnic?
- (2) Do the teacher's instruction and guidance in the case study promote students' out-of-class ER autonomy? If yes, to what degree will LA in ER be developed?

3.2 Subjects

In order to ensure the certain feasibility of case studies, one of the five freshman classes was selected firstly from foreign language department of Jiangmen Polytechnic. Resorting to a pilot reading test, two groups of the same class comprising 26 English learners, only three male students included were set up and each involved 13 members whose reading level were close on the average. Of the two peer groups, one was assigned as experiment group (EG) in which the case study was carried out while the other was control group (CG) whose ER outside of the class, however, was not particularly focused on. All of them were around the age of 19 at the time of the study and shared similar educational background. They had learned ER since the last semester and were taking two periods of reading course each week this term.

Table 3-1 provided some basic background information of EG and CG more

briefly.

Table 3-1 Background information of the subjects

Group	Student population	male	Female	Age	Dialect	History of English learning
EG	13	2	11	19	Cantonese	6 years in ordinary high schools
CG	13	1	12	19	Cantonese	6 years in ordinary high schools

3.3 Instruments

To ensure the validity and reliability of the collected data and findings, both quantitative and qualitative analysis were employed during the course of the research. To achieve this, a questionnaire (see Appendix 1), two reading tests, students' reading logs (see Appendix 3), teacher-students interviews, students' feedback and the instructor's class observation were the main instruments.

A. The questionnaire

In the light of the teaching practice and related theories that were discussed in the previous chapters, the questionnaire was designed and consisted of 13 items of multiple choice, together with 4 open questions. On the whole, the items mainly covered three categories, i.e., the students' attitudes towards ER, their general idea of ER and the reading performance of them out of the class (see Table 3-2). To sum up, 162 questionnaires were distributed and the returning rate was 100%. However, the total number of valid questionnaires collected was 140 with the validity rate of 86.42%.

Table 3-2 Items and content of the questionnaire

Content	Items
Students' attitude towards ER	1, 2, 3 (1), (2), 4, 5

Students' general idea of ER	6, 7 (1), (2), 8 (1)
Students' out-of-class ER behavior	8 (2), 9, 10 (1), (2), 11, 12, 13

B. Reading tests

Two reading tests were administered to subjects to measure their reading proficiency. As for the pre-test, it was extracted from the reading comprehension section of College English Test Band 4 (CET 4), June, 2006 (see Appendix 2), the nationwide standardized English proficiency test. Overall, such a reading paper contained two parts with 30 items altogether. Part one was skimming and scanning including 7 items to be judged whether they agreed with the information given in the passage or not, or if they were mentioned in the passage. Besides, there were three blanks to be filled in on the basis of the passage. As a matter of fact, it was quite challenging for students to finish all of them in fifteen minutes. The following part was reading in depth and the time limit was 25 minutes. In other words, students had to finish one passage for word selection with 10 items and two passages for multiple choice comprising 10 items too as soon as possible.

Similarly, the post reading test (see Appendix 4) was also selected from CET 4 which was held in June, 2007 so that the two reading tests can be in a high reliability and validity.

According to Table 3-3, the two years' reading comprehension tests were quite alike concerning the total vocabulary, reading time and reading speed.

Table 3-3 Parameters of reading tests

Reading test	Original source	Total vocabulary (words)		Reading time (min.)		Reading speed (words/min.)	
		Part I	Part II	Part I	Part II	Part I	Part II
Pre-test	CET 4, June, 2006	1005	1445	15	25	67	57.8
Post-test	CET 4, June,	1211	1498	15	25	80.7	59.9

	2007						
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C. Students' reading logs

During the whole process of the study, EG students were required to record when, where, what and how long they read on their reading logs once they took up reading after class. Plus the reading problems the students met and the reading progress they made. Resorting to such logs, the instructor would know well about the learners' out-of-class reading behaviors.

D. Teacher-student interviews

Teacher-students interviews were held frequently so that the teacher could keep track of the learners' authentic reading performance outside the class. And if necessary, some suggestions or help would be offered by the teacher. Overall, the frequency of the personal interviews varied with the proceeding of the study. At the very beginning, the first four weeks, it was high. That was, once a week. Then there was a face-to-face talk every two weeks. In the last six weeks, the communication between the teacher and students only took place twice.

E. Students' feedback

Now that the students were those who carried out ER ultimately, their feedback was highly appreciated in the research.

F. Classroom observation by teacher

Class observation was sometimes utilized by the teacher to see if there were any slight changes that happened to the sample students, and even to make a comparison of the learners' reading performance between EG and CG.

3.4 The procedures of the research

3.4.1 Preparation stage

To gain an overall picture of students' autonomy in ER after class, a survey through a well-designed questionnaire was carried out among 162 freshmen who came from foreign language department of Jiangmen Polytechnic at the beginning of the semester.

Followed by the survey, the pilot reading test was adopted in a selected freshman class of English department. It was the results of the reading achievement that separated EG from CG. Originally, the total score of this reading comprehension part accounted for 35% of the whole CET 4 paper. For ease of a direct view of the students' reading proficiency, the number of correct items was counted, then it was compared among the 26 English majors to make sure the average reading performance of each group was close.

3.4.2 Experimental stage

Based on the work prepared before, case studies was carried out in the EG, exploring the sample students' real reading life after school and more importantly, verifying the influence of the teacher's instruction and guidance on the English majors' autonomy in out-of-class reading. As for CG, however, there was no particular focus on their ER outside of the class. Generally speaking, the duration of the case study was about 18 weeks, from Mar. 10 to July 11, which was equal to one semester.

The case study was likely to be much more convincing if it was based on a combination of several different sources. Thus, data was gathered from the reading tests, students' reading logs, teacher-students interviews, students' feedback and the instructor's class observation during the course of the study. And the reading tests were adopted to select cases and see whether students made some progress in ER at last.

The following was the whole process of the case studies among EG members. There were 13 cases altogether with only two male students included. They graduated from local ordinary high schools, and the reading level of them was low and uneven. What's more, many seemed to have lost confidence or interest in ER.

(1) Student 1

This subject was a female whose reading achievement was the best of the EG according to the results of the pilot reading test. She was a student cadre in charge of the study business in her class. Besides, she was a member of the campus orchestra. In the first week, from Mar. 10 to Mar. 16, the student did a little reading in her spare time. And the case was about the same in the next seven days. In general, she was found to read without any plans in her mind. For example, she never thought about what she should read and for what purpose she read, etc. After discussion, she agreed to have her reading plan made, and with it she set about reading in a planned way. What's more, she reported her reading weakness on her reading log. That was, she was often stopped by new words and could not help turning to the dictionary in the process of ER. In this case, some suggestions had to be offered to her. Two weeks later, it seemed that the girl had some trouble in carrying on her reading job. Her excuse was too many student activities occupied her spare time. Then she was advised to arrange her time appropriately and effectively. However, her reading cause was further hampered by the following May Holidays. Nevertheless, she would make a use of the campus reading room, school library and Internet to pick up ER. What's more, she began to realize the necessity of keeping a regular reading. That's why she continued with a daily reading in the following stage, especially in June when CET 4 was coming. And even she herself was satisfied with her persistence. During the last three weeks, the lady was interrupted by the final exam as expected, she still tried to insist on her reading plan though.

(2) Student 2

This subject was a male student. His reading achievement ranked second after Student 1 of all the cases according to the results of the pre-test. However, the male was found to read nothing in the first seven days. He complained that his passion for ER had been extinguished by the floods of reading exercise when he was a senior high school student. When the second week came, everything seemed as usual. With the

help of the student-teacher communication, the learner agreed to have a try to get his interest come back. Provided with a computer, the student sometimes read online. In order to find the lost motivation earlier, he accepted such advice as reading in a planned way. From Mar. 31 to Apr. 6, the gentleman concentrated his efforts on high school English textbooks. He explained that the lack of grammar knowledge led to his poor reading comprehension ability. In the following two weeks, he got down to read China Daily regularly. Meanwhile, he kept up learning grammar. But he always forgot to complete his reading log. Although the sample's reading activities were affected by May Holidays, he was still satisfied with his job. It was reported that his reading interest was increasing little by little. Then he was praised and encouraged to broaden vision by reading more. During the later days, he spent half an hour or so on daily reading and developed a great passion for English proeses and poems. As for the reason why he did not go to the reading room or library, he smiled and said he was used to reading online but promised to have a try. When CET 4 was near, the subject student realized the importance of ER and was busy in coping with reading comprehension exercise. Within the last three weeks, he could move on but acknowledged the low efficiency as a result of the final exam. Nevertheless, he was confident of keeping on reading in the future.

(3) Student 3

This student was also a female, and she got eleven correct items in the pre-test. She was appointed as the monitor of the class. And she had to take up some part-time jobs. From Mar. 10 to Mar. 16, the learner read nothing. In fact, she never thought about reading autonomously after school. Although a little reading was followed in the second week, it was the result of the homework. According to her, she preferred to be told what to do. Hence, a reading plan was suggested to her, and on the basis of the plan she did take up daily reading. No more than two weeks, however, it seemed difficult for her to keep it up. The girl complained she was often bothered by many external factors, especially part-time jobs. Then some tips were listed to help her,

especially how to arrange and make a good use of her time. Under the teacher's direction, the sample student tried to go on with her reading cause. She began to realize how important it was to develop a good reading habit. Even so her reading process was still interrupted due to May Holidays and part-time jobs. In addition, her reading time was just spent on the English Learning newspaper which she subscribed to. Later, she was advised to take advantage of more readable resources provided by school reading room and library. And she did that. With the hope of passing CET 4, the subject developed more autonomy in ER. To her disappointment, she could not see a big change on her reading proficiency. During the last periods, the lady's passion for reading was lessened further, though she did not give it up.

(4) Student 4

The sample student was a young lady. In the light of the reading results of the pre-test, she made eleven items correctly answered. The student had never read autonomously in the first two weeks unless she had to cope with some assignments. After exchanging ideas, the girl attributed it to her laziness. She longed to improve her reading proficiency but there was no action to be taken. As a result, a reading plan was strongly recommended to her. Even so the learner showed a great passivity to conduct reading at first. In the following week, she was found to pick up a Chinese-English book to read. Moreover, she was pleased to share her ideas in the course of the interview. When asked the source of the book, she said it was from her roommate and confessed that she seldom went to the school reading room or library for readable materials. Even *crazy English*, the magazine she subscribed to was left behind. From Apr. 7 on, the girl looked a little upset for there seemed no visible progress of her reading level. With the help of the teacher, she realized the significance of reading a lot and made up her mind to do more reading in the rest of the days. Unluckily, the sample's reading process was interrupted by the following May Holidays. With some guilt, the lady tried her best to carry on reading in the following stage. Sometimes, however, she could not help stopping it for fun. Then she

was advised to learn to arrange her time properly. When CET 4 neared, the case was different greatly. More autonomy in her reading was displayed. During the last stage of the empirical study, the learner was so busy preparing for final exam that she could not pay much attention to her reading job. Nevertheless, she believed that the reading awareness of her had been cultivated more or less.

(5) Student 5

This case was a female student, who was one of the members of the student union in foreign language department. The number of the correct items she had achieved in the pilot reading test was ten. At the very beginning, the sample student conducted little reading, let alone her reading log. When talking each other, she admitted that it was necessary for her to work out a reading plan, and in the light of which she was made to take up English reading in the second week. From Mar. 24 to Mar. 30, she had her reading plan revised and reported that she had got known more foreign cultural knowledge by reading for these days. The female was delighted and was encouraged to keep on reading every day. Unfortunately, the learner's reading activities were disturbed constantly in the following seven days. It seemed that various kinds of student business occupied her much time. But the truth was that she had no idea how to arrange time properly. After being given some tips, she was relaxed. Therefore, there was nothing special in the coming two weeks. The main reading problem of her was that she was easy to get restless once meeting a long passage. When asked why, the girl said she had been used to reading short articles. Then she was advised to taste some long ones whose topic could attract her very much. Similar to the first case, this one also missed some reading work for May Holidays and would let it be. She decided to do more reading in the rest of the days. In this case, school reading room and library were suggested to her. And she did go to these two places where she never appeared before. What a disappointing point was that she could not take a good advantage of the reading resource there. To be precise, the materials she finished in the reading room were all chinese version. The English

books she borrowed from the library were beyond her reading ability. In the teacher-student interview, she acknowledged herself to be wrong because she did not benefit from her efforts. Likewise, the young lady displayed more autonomy in English reading when CET 4 was approaching. She was rewarded by a great harvest within three weeks, that is, one third of English novel, two magazines, daily newspaper and reading comprehension exercise. Besides, the sample believed that she had developed a reading awareness. At the end of the stage, the case's autonomous reading was affected more or less by the final exam. A good point to mention was that she had made up for the lost reading time.

(6) Student 6

The subject student was a lady. On the basis of the reading achievement of the pre-test, she had ten items finished correctly. She participated in the student union of foreign language department. According to her, she liked ER, especially when she came across readable materials. In the first week, a few passages that she was interested in were tasted. The learner was found away from reading yet in the following days because there was nothing interesting to her. When discussing the solution, she was pleased to draw out a reading plan and even had it improved. With a great passion, the girl conducted her plan for two weeks, during which she could enjoy many reading resources offered by school library and Internet. From Apr. 7 on, her passivity seemed to come out and became more obvious as May Holidays approached. In her own words, much business of the student union was a big factor. A good point to be mentioned was that although there were many intervals in the march of reading, the lady tried every means to make them up. Still she was encouraged not to be interrupted. Since then, the sample read on till the coming of CET4. In the reading log, she said it was important to have an everyday reading and she made it in these days. So far she had mastered quite a few vocabulary. Similar to the cases before, the subject was disturbed by final exam at the end of the semester. However she could persuade herself to keep up reading. To a great degree, she had acquired the reading

awareness. Last but not least, the learner never went to the reading room during the course of the study. When asked why, she answered it was unnecessary.

(7) Student 7

The student was a girl whose reading achievement in the pilot reading test was the same as Student 6. At first, the learner hardly read anything. For her, ER was a painful work. She worried her efforts would not make a great difference. With the help of the teacher, the student saw her reading weakness more clearly. She looked more confident and decided to start with a reading learning plan. But one disappointing thing was that there seemed no much change that happened on her. She just read a little within a whole week. The given reason was that she had been in a low mood recently. Then some tips had to be offered to let her know how to adjust the reading learning to the internal and external world. It was on Mar. 31 that the student got down to reading business. She was found reading an English novel, which was one of the series of Oxford bookworm. To have a better understanding, she finished Chinese parts in advance, then focused on the English ones. Anyway, she deserved praise and was encouraged to begin with readable materials. But her approach to reading was not advocated. Later, she picked up English Learning newspaper she subscribed to and read it nearly everyday. What surprising was that she had never thought about reading online even though she had the access to the Internet in her dormitory, let alone the reading room or library on the campus. Without exception, the lady was also affected by the following May Holidays. Her reading log was not finished well, either. After the Holidays, the lady continued with her reading work. And she was found to take advantage of the English magazines of her own. Sometimes she would even go to the reading room and library. During the first three weeks of June, the sample student displayed more autonomy in ER. In her belief, the big gain was the development of the reading awareness. From June 23 to July 11, the end of the study, the learner's autonomous reading decreased in amount obviously. Still she held the view that she should try her best to keep on.

(8) Student 8

This subject is a female student, who achieved ten correct items in the pre-test. In the first week, from Mar. 10 to Mar. 16, the female did some reading infrequently. And it seemed that she did not have the awareness to keep some records on her reading log. When suggested making a reading plan, she nodded in approval. As talking face to face again, the girl was excited to claim such a plan did much help to her. She could keep on reading everyday even though the time was short, 15 to 20 minutes or so. In the following week, the student went on to read and finish her reading log. It was found that the reading materials she finished were all about stories. From Mar. 31 to Apr. 6, the learner began to complain that she could not find any progress in her reading comprehension ability after a painful work. Then she was encouraged to taste different style of passages and extend her reading time for ten minutes longer. During the next two weeks, the sample student seemed to be used to reading every day. She could evaluate and analyze her reading weakness. To her great joy, she discovered a good skill to keep vocabulary in mind. A big problem, however, was that so far she had not made any use of reading resources from school reading room or library. When asked why, she explained that she never thought about it but she promised to have a try in the later weeks. Because of May Holidays, the young lady's reading plan was interrupted now and then. She felt sorry about it and said she would make up missed reading periods. In this case, she was advised not to stop reading daily, whatever the reason was. Instead, she should rearrange her reading time or reading assignments. In the coming two weeks, i.e. from May 19 to Jun. 1, everything went on smoothly. It's time for her to increase the reading amount. In the first three weeks of June, it was clear to see that the student's autonomy in extracurricular reading was strengthened. For example, she would choose some articles about science and technology, which she was tired of before. The duration of reading time was up to one hour a day, half of which was distributed to reading exercises. More often than not, she went to read English newspaper in the campus reading room. After the personal interview, the hidden reason showed itself up. It was

the coming CET 4 that gave her a great motivation for reading more out of the class. Nevertheless, she was satisfied with her work. In her own words, she said she had made some progress in reading learning such as more cultural background knowledge, expansion of vocabulary, improved reading comprehension ability, etc. Compared with the former three weeks, the learner's reading autonomy was weakened in the rest of days, also the final experimental stage. The main cause was that the final exam distracted her from reading activities. After all, it was the end of the semester and she had to prepare for all the courses. What merited attention was that she did not give up her routine reading at all. No doubt, she had formed such a good habit as reading regularly.

(9) Student 9

This case was a lovely girl and the number of the correct items she had won was nine in the pilot reading test. At the very beginning, she did a little reading at random. And the case was about the same in the following seven days. The learner knew well about her reading goals but never thought out a plan to make them fulfilled. Having realized this, she took action right away. Based on the detailed plan, the lady conducted reading on her own. Within two weeks the student finished a few English magazines she subscribed to last semester. No doubt, it was a great satisfaction to her. What merited attention was that she would go to library for reading materials such as the series of Oxford bookworm. As time elapsed, however, the subject student was found to be less autonomous than before. She even stopped reading for a long while during May Holidays. Being terribly sorry for that, the girl promised to make up missed periods. Everything went on smoothly until CET 4 was over. The subject reported her progress in comprehension ability with a great joy and claimed that she had got the awareness to read autonomously. When the semester was coming to its end, the student went on with her routine reading. But this time her reading amount and reading time was lessened greatly.

(10) Student 10

This sample was a female, too. Her reading achievement in the pilot test was nine correct items. She took part in the student union of foreign language department. Out of a passing whim the learner read a little at the start of the case study, with her reading log unfinished. Though a reading learning plan was advised to her, the girl felt stressful to carry it out. Not surprisingly, she did not perform well in the coming week, the third week. Her excuse was that too many student activities exhausted her spare time but she was guilty of the lost reading periods. According to this, some suggestions as to win a balance between students' business and reading time were provided. So from Mar. 31 on, the student tried her best to improve her reading level, but was often annoyed by the low marks in reading comprehension exercise. As a matter of fact, in addition to the school reading room and library, she was a subscriber for a certain English newspaper; she owned a computer to go online in the dormitory. However, her efforts in the past week were only made to finish exercise while neglecting the valuable resources around her. Under the instructor's guidance, the lady knew well about the problem, and she set about reading more to learn reading better. Then another problem came into being. It seemed that she did some reading without any purpose. Maybe that's why she could not find any progress in her reading job in the following two weeks. In this case, she was required to modify her reading plan. Because of May Holidays, the female student's reading process was hampered now and then. From May 19 to Jun. 1, it seemed that everything went on smoothly. During this time, the young lady learned to accumulate large vocabulary through reading. When CET 4 set in, the sample student displayed more autonomy in ER. Doubtlessly, the learner was also affected at the end of the semester. But she concluded that she had formed a reading habit more or less.

(11) Student 11

The subject was a young lady. She did not perform well in the pre-test with 8 correct items counted. Generally speaking, this sample student held a positive attitude

towards ER. She would spare time to take it up irregularly at the beginning of the case study. In the personal interview, she reported that she felt regret for the missed time in the previous semester. It was time for her to make a change now. In this case, she was encouraged to conduct reading with a detailed plan. Then the girl went to the reading room almost every day, but she admitted it was partly out of a sense of pressure. Increasingly, the learner was found getting into the reading world. She would keep up a daily reading and resorted to Internet besides school reading room. Moreover, reading exercise was done by her once a week. To her annoyance, however, the passages about science and technology were so difficult that she never took a look at them. Anyway she was advised to start with interesting topics on science and technology. Taking the advice, the lady moved on without interruption in the following days. What merited attention was that she did not give up daily reading but cut down on it during May Holidays. She believed that she had formed a good reading habit. From Jun. 2 to Jun. 22, the subject read harder. Of course, she also desired to pass CET 4 successfully. It was only in the final stage of the case study that the student was disturbed now and then. Nevertheless, she was full of confidence to continue with her reading goals. So far, she had achieved some progress in her reading learning such as the faster reading speed and more English vocabulary.

(12) Student 12

The student was a girl whose reading achievement was low. Based on the results of the pilot reading test, she got 7 correct items of the total number of 30. At first, the learner read only for homework. In her opinion, the ability of ER was very important but difficult to get enhanced. Hearing about making a reading plan, she hesitated firstly, then she nodded to have a try. One week later, the sample's reading plan turned out to be infeasible because it was more like a list of reading exercise. Having realized the great benefits of reading in a large quantity, the girl produced a new plan for her reading learning. A pity was that there seemed no obvious change on her. In the past week, she seldom take up reading, claiming that she could not find anything

interesting to have a taste. When asked why not have a try in the campus reading room or library, she was silent. From Mar. 31 to Apr. 6, the female student began to read more, but sometimes she would even forget to read. During the following two weeks, the student seemed to get into ER a little and so she was encouraged to keep it up. According to expectation, the young lady was disturbed easily by May Holidays. A good phenomenon, however, was that she was full of interest in looking through English newspaper even if she was uncertain how much help it would do. In fact, her pains justify itself. As another 14 days passed, she got her gains including a broadened vision, a faster reading speed and more practical vocabulary. As a result, the female made up her mind to read harder before CET 4 was coming. The reading time she spent per day was more than one hour. At last, during the rest of the three weeks, the learner cut down on reading and seemed tired of such routine work a little. Nevertheless, she still tried her best to hold on.

(13) Student 13

This case was a male student. His reading level was the lowest among the members of EG with only 2 correct items counted according to the results of the pilot reading test. He took part in some student club on campus. Similar to the other male of the same group, he did not read anything at all in the first week. He declared that his reading ability was so poor that he almost lost interest in ER. After a chat, the learner was convinced of making a change. Having the computer connected with Web in his dorm, the boy searched a few readable passages from China Daily, the well-known English newspaper at home when he was free. Besides, vocabulary learning skills also caught his eyes. In his opinion, the more English words and phrases he mastered, the better reading level he would have. In the following week, the sample still did some reading infrequently. Then a reading plan was recommended to him. Resorting to the plan, he performed a little better. When meeting again, however, the gentleman reported that he had his plan modified. From his reading log, it was noted that the reading materials he focused on were all from China Daily. The

paper version of English newspaper he subscribed to was actually put aside, let alone the reading resources of campus reading room and library. In this case, he was advised to try different reading resources available. From Apr. 21 to May 18, May Holidays, together with gymnastic contest greatly interfered with the subject student's reading process. Nevertheless, he finished one fairy tale book borrowed from the library. During the next two weeks, the learner persuaded himself to continue but he did not get his interest in reading enhanced. As an English major, the student also wished he could pass CET 4, for which he showed a positive attitude towards reading then. Facing the final exam in the last phase, the case hesitated as expected. He was not sure how far he could go on the way of reading autonomously.

3.4.3 Post-experiment stage

To have a further discussion, both the two groups took a reading test again as the case studies came to an over. The counting way of the test was the same as the pre-test. The results were analyzed and compared in two ways. Firstly, the comparison was made between EG and CG so as to highlight some distinction. Secondly, the comparison was applied within EG itself to capture any important changes that happened to their ER. At last, some conclusions and implications for the promotion of English major's autonomy in out-of-class reading were expected to be obtained.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

In the light of the research questions raised in the previous chapter, some findings were at hand and further discussion was presented as follows.

4.1 Research question one

The first issue to be examined in this thesis was the overall picture of English majors' autonomy in reading outside of the class in Jiangmen Polytechnic. To do this, a survey with a well-designed questionnaire was conducted.

4.1.1 Findings

In conclusion, the valid data was analysed in two ways. On the one hand, some satisfactory findings were explored. For instance, 95% of the students were fond of ER and nearly all of them (99.3%) had the desire to get it improved; over half of the learners (67.9%) were confident that they could make progress in reading learning through their hardworking, especially by reading a lot (92.1%); quite a few (61.4%) agreed that reading was for knowledge acquirement and enhanced comprehensive ability; most of them (52.9%) had mastered useful reading skills such as skimming, scanning, word guessing, etc. and could put them into practice very often. In addition, about half of the students attributed their lack of autonomy in extracurricular reading to the internal cause, that was, laziness. Last but not least, the majority knew well about many different kinds of reading resources and had a clear idea that what materials were readable for them.

On the other hand, the results were disappointing in a few areas. Firstly, a large number of English majors (76.4%) did not get any plans to improve their reading level. What's worse, so far 81.4% of them had not found a proper approach to learn to read. Secondly, less than one seventh of learners (12.9%) would voluntarily take advantage

of reading materials available after class. As for the time they spent on daily or weekly reading outside of the class, there were 11.4% of the students whose answer was zero. Although a majority (67.1%) declared that their extracurricular reading time every day was usually between half an hour and one hour, it was obviously contradictory with the result that over half of them (51.4%) spared no more than three hours on ER in one week, not counting the 'class hour. Since the questionnaire was required to finish anonymously, the most probable cause behind it maybe the students did not make clear the proposition of the question. Thirdly, there were only 32 students who would do autonomous reading outside the school even though they were not required to. Finally, the survey showed that most of the students did out-of-class reading of their own accord only when they were free and had nothing to do, or when they had to cope with the exams or assignments. And a passing whim was also the case.

4.1.2 Discussion

On the basis of the statistics and findings mentioned above, general impressions of the English majors could be highlighted. To be precise, the English majors held a positive attitude towards ER and far more than that, they had realized the real purpose of reading, the main way to improve it, and many reading resources available. Meanwhile, the students had mastered many practical reading skills. Thus the students had developed the reading ability to some degree. After all, they had learned English for over six years. They were likely to be proficient readers once their motivation was stimulated. A pity was that their overall level of autonomy in reading, especially out-of-class reading was low. This underlined the importance of taking time to explore the learners' real reading life after class and if necessary the teacher should make some instructions and offer help so as to promote these English majors' autonomy in reading outside the school.

4.2 Research question two

The second research question was focused on case studies with the purpose of exploring students' real reading life away from the class. What's more, the study was conducted to see whether the teacher's instruction and guidance made any sense to promote the students' autonomy in out-of-class ER. And if yes, to what degree would LA in ER be developed?

4.2.1 Findings

Before case studies, the pre-test of ER was completed by the sample class. On the basis of the reading results, EG and CG were founded respectively. The details of their reading achievement were shown in Table 4-1 and Table 4-2. It was easy to observe that the reading level of the samples was very poor. Of the thirty items, the number of correct ones on the average was only 9.5 including the biggest number, 17 and the smallest one, 2. In other words, the average correct number just accounted for 31.7%. And it was below the average level that there were up to thirteen students, half of the whole class. In addition, within the EG, the selected cases, there was no clear distinction of the members' reading level except Student 1 and Student 13, who were the extreme cases. Because the former student's reading achievement was near to the top of all the subjects but the latter one's reading level was at the bottom of the subject pool.

Table 4-1 The comparison of reading results among group students

Subjects		The number of correct items	
EG	CG	EG	CG
Student 1	Student 1	15	17
Student 2	Student 2	12	13
Student 3	Student 3	11	11
Student 4	Student 4	11	10
Student 5	Student 5	10	9
Student 6	Student 6	10	9

Student 7	Student 7	10	9
Student 8	Student 8	10	10
Student 9	Student 9	9	8
Student 10	Student 10	9	8
Student 11	Student 11	8	8
Student 12	Student 12	7	6
Student 13	Student 13	2	6

Table 4-2 The reading achievement of pre-test between two groups

Group	The average number of correct items
EG	9.5
CG	9.5

By the end of the semester, the post-test was also conducted among the subjects to verify whether there was any progress the EG had made in ER. Meanwhile, the results of the reading test were used to make a comparison between EG and CG to highlight the difference if there was any.

Table 4-3 and Table 4-4 showed the comparison of reading achievement within EG itself. On the whole, the cases' reading level was found improved. For example, the average number of correct items was increased to 15.6 with an increasing rate of 20.3%. It was noticed that Student 11, Student 12, especially Student 13 whose reading ability was relatively poor in the pre-test had achieved a great reading progress. Besides, an obvious disparity in the students' reading performance could be identified. To be precise, two of the group had the correct items that were less than ten, seven got the number which was between tens and twenties, and the rest of the subjects whose correct items were over twenty. At last, one phenomenon had to be explained was that three cases' reading ability was found to be weakened a little. One possible reason was the affection of other variables.

Table 4-3 The comparison of reading performance within EG

Reading test	The average number of correct items of EG
Pre-test	9.5
Post-test	15.6

Table 4-4 The details of reading results compared among EG members

Subjects of EG	The number of correct items in pre-test	The number of correct items in post-test
Student 1	15	12
Student 2	12	22
Student 3	11	13.5
Student 4	11	14.5
Student 5	10	8.5
Student 6	10	9
Student 7	10	11
Student 8	10	11.5
Student 9	9	12
Student 10	9	15
Student 11	8	23
Student 12	7	29.5
Student 13	2	21

According to Table 4-5, there was nearly no distinction of reading proficiency between EG and CG after the case studies was done. What merited attention, however, was that the CG also had their reading achievement improved greatly.

Table 4-5 The reading achievement of post-test between two groups

Group	The average number of correct items
EG	15.6

As for the case studies, more findings showed up. To a certain extent, the students displayed autonomy in ER outside the classroom. They had their reading goals even though they were too general. Infrequently they would read on their own, especially when they were free or come across readable materials. During the course of reading, they would utilize some reading skills consciously. And they could find out their reading weakness and progress. Nevertheless, the overall level of students' autonomy in out-of-class reading was quite low and uneven. Firstly, a feasible and detailed plan to carry out their ER was unavailable. The learners read only at random. Secondly, the intrinsic motivation could hardly be found among these cases. Instead almost each held an instrumental motivation. They read more autonomously mainly for requirements of teachers or the desire to pass examination like CET 4 successfully. What's more, most of the English majors could not take a good control of their reading learning and were often affected by the various internal or external factors such as the subjective moods, student activities, holidays, final exam and so on. As a matter of fact, it was because they lacked the ability to arrange and adjust their reading time appropriately and effectively. Finally, there were a large number of students who seldom enjoyed the reading resources around them including the school reading room, library, the Internet, and even the newspaper or magazines possessed by learners themselves. Fortunately, these negative reading behaviors of the cases were directed timely by the teacher. Students reported that they had formed a reading habit or awareness more or less.

Furthermore, with the help of the classroom observation, the students of EG turned out to be a little more autonomous in the class reading learning than ever before. They could read more actively and reflectively. Sometimes they even performed better, comparing with the learners of CG. For example, they knew more how to arrange and distribute their reading time in the classroom. They would like to share their feelings and ideas with others after reading.

4.2.2 Discussion

The reading results of the pre-test were too disappointing. The average number of correct items was only 9.5, which was less than one third of the total items. But the fact justified the findings out of the questionnaire and the case study above. That was, the English majors' autonomy in reading, especially out-of-class reading was rather low. Hence, it verifies the interaction between students' autonomy in extra-curriculum reading and their reading achievement.

There were two comparisons that were made in terms of the students' reading achievement in the post-test. The first comparison was conducted within the EG itself. Generally, the cases' reading level turned out to be improved, which explained that their autonomy in out-of-class reading was facilitated with the help of the teacher. In the students' words, they had formed a reading habit or awareness to some degree. And again the reading result proved the close relationship between extracurricular reading autonomy and reading performance. Resorting to the second comparison that was applied in the EG and CG, no clear distinction between them was discovered. It just justified the findings out of the case studies to a great degree. That was, the samples' autonomous reading ability outside the classroom was still low and needed to be strengthened. Moreover, it showed that it would be a hard job to promote HVC students' autonomy in ER.

The findings of the case studies implied that the teacher was indispensable to the development of HVC learners' reading autonomy. It was under the instructor's instruction and guidance that quite a few reading problems were discovered and dealt with during the course of the case study. More importantly, the cases' reading autonomy was facilitated to some degree. In other words, the teacher's instruction and direction did promote of the learners' reading autonomy out of the class.

According to the teacher's classroom observation, the students' out-of-class reading autonomy was not only developed but transferred positively to their reading learning in the classroom. It implied the close link between classroom reading and extracurricular reading.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Implications

This thesis has conducted case studies under the instructor's instruction and guidance so as to keep a close eye on students' reading activities after class. Some conclusions, implications, as well as limitations of the research are as follows.

5.1 Conclusions

On the basis of the two research questions and the results from the study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

(1) A majority of English majors can display their autonomy in extracurricular reading to some degree. A pity is that such autonomy is quite low and unstable.

(2) The teacher's instruction and guidance do promote students' autonomy in out-of-class ER. For example, the students have learned to read in a planned way and make a good use of reading resources available. More or less, they have developed their reading awareness or reading habits outside the class. And meanwhile, the learners' reading proficiency turns out to be improved according to their reading achievements between the pilot reading test and the post one.

(3) According to the students' feedback, they have benefited a lot from the interaction with the instructor during the case study. Thus, the promotion of HVC students' autonomy in out-of-class ER is a painful but significant work that requires the full participation of teachers and students within a long time.

5.2 Implications

Also there are many implications for the promotion of HVC students' ER autonomy after school.

(1) Teachers' direction is indispensable to the development of LA in out-of-class reading. To facilitate students' reading autonomy does not imply that the teacher simply leaves his or her students to their own devices, but that he or she should

encourage and help them, if necessary, to take charge of their reading by every means. This is especially true with HVC students, even if they are English majors. For example, teachers can keep a close eye on learners' reading process so as to capture any slight changes that may happen to their students. When there is some progress made by the student, encouragement from the teacher can be followed timely. If any reading weakness of the learner is found, teachers can choose to offer some assistance to him or her. To do this, students' reading profiles, teacher-student interviews, classroom observation and so on can be utilized well.

(2) The cultivation of reading awareness or habit is significant to promote students' autonomous reading after school. To some extent, to help learners form a good reading habit or awareness means to help them explore autonomy in ER. Once they get customary to a routine reading, their autonomy will be displayed. Therefore, HVC students should be encouraged even forced, if necessary, to keep a daily reading until it comes into their extracurricular life spontaneously. As for the reading time and reading amount, they are up to English learners themselves. After all, persistence makes a difference.

(3) Reading instruction should focus on the development of LA. As explained before, learning how to read is more important than being taught to read. In reading classes of HVC, more time and opportunities should be given back to students to practise autonomy. For English majors, they can select reading materials for themselves, decide the reading pace, time and amount on their own, solve reading problems they meet and evaluate their performance and so on. Step by step, all that the learners acquire in the classroom will be transferred positively to their autonomous reading out of the classroom. What's more, cooperative learning should be advocated in reading lessons. In this way, the students who can read more autonomously will set a good example for other students.

(4) Learners' intrinsic motivation for ER is a key element to achieve autonomy in out-of-class reading. So they should be advised to try every means to enjoy the reading resources available to find out their interest. Once they settle down to their reading job and witness any progress in a sea of print, it will be easier for them to take

up reading with more autonomy outside the class.

5.3 Limitations of the study

No doubt, there are certain limitations that should be noted in this thesis.

(1) Due to the lack of researches into LA in extra-curriculum reading, the author's understanding of reading autonomy is not thorough.

(2) The study is conducted in a natural class of Jiangmen Polytechnic, and it does not provide persuasive data.

(3) The duration of the case study is not long enough. It would be more informative and effective if the case study were continued at least one year.

5.4 Future study

In respect of the study in the future, more theoretical researches will be pursued at first so as to broaden the idea of LA and out-of-class ER. Then the related study should be extended to non-English major learners, and even students from different HVCs.

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Appendix 1

阅读学习情况调查

请根据自己的实际情况,从下列每题的选项中选择你认为是**最佳**的答案,并把相应的字母填在括号里。

注意:阅读在此问卷中是指英语阅读。

1. 你喜欢阅读吗?()

- A. 喜欢(95%) B. 不喜欢(5%)

2. 你想提高自己的阅读水平吗?()

- A. 想(99.3%) B. 不想(0.7%)

3. (1). 你认为凭自己的努力能否提高自己的阅读水平?()

- A. 能(67.9%) B. 不能(32.1%)

(2). 要提高阅读水平,你认为主要应()

- A. 课堂上认真学习(0.7%) B. 增加阅读量,从而积累各方面知识(92.1%)
C. 寻求老师和同学的指导与帮助(4.3%) D. 其他(2.9%)

4. 你对学习阅读和提高阅读水平有明确的计划和安排吗?()

- A. 有(23.6%) B. 没有(76.4%)

5. 目前为止,你是否已找到适合自己学习阅读和提高阅读水平的有效方法?()

- A. 是(18.6%) B. 否(81.4%)

6. 通过阅读,你最希望能够()

- A. 获得知识,增强理解分析能力(61.4%) B. 增大词汇量(10%) C. 学习语言、语法知识(3.6%)
D. 掌握阅读技巧(7.9%) E. 提高阅读速度(16.4%) F. 其他(0.7%)

7. (1). 你知道的阅读技巧有哪些?请列举:

略读、跳读、猜词义、找中心句。

(2). 阅读过程中你是否运用这些阅读技巧?()

- A. 经常会(52.9%) B. 有时会(42.1%) C. 很少会(5%) D. 从来不会(0%)

8. (1). 除了教材和老师提供的阅读材料外,你所知道的其他阅读资源有哪些?如英语阅读网站,英语书、报、杂志、期刊等。请列举它们的名称。

疯狂英语、中国日报、21世纪报、英语辅导报。

(2). 上学期,你会主动地利用课外时间去利用上述这些阅读资源阅读吗?()

- A. 经常会(12.9%) B. 有时会(53.6%) C. 很少会(32.1%) D. 从来不会(1.4%)

9. 你对什么样的阅读材料感兴趣?请列举:

故事性强,介绍英美文化、习俗的书等。

10. (1). 上学期,除了上课外,你每天给自己安排的阅读时间是多少?()

- A. 0小时(11.4%) B. 0.5—1小时(67.1%) C. 1—1.5小时(13.6%) D. 1.5—2小时(5.7%)
E. 2小时以上(2.1%)

(2). 上学期, 除了上课外, 你每周花在阅读上的时间是多少? ()

- A. 0 小时(11.4%) B. 1.5—2 小时(27.8%) C. 2—3 小时(23.6%) D. 3—4 小时(17.9%)
E. 4—5 小时(22.9%) F. 5 小时以上(12.1%)

11. 若老师没有任何要求, 课后你会主动地去阅读吗?()

- A. 会(22.9%) B. 偶尔会(70.7%) C. 不会(6.4%)

12. 若你很少或不会利用课外时间去阅读, 主要是因为 ()

- A. 兴趣不足(9.3%) B. 没人监督(10.7%) C. 懒惰(50.7%) D. 缺乏时间与精力(18.6%)
E. 对任课老师印象不好(0) F. 自身基础差, 阅读有困难(8.6%)
G. 其他(2.1%)

13. 什么情况下你会主动地去阅读? 请列举:

空闲无聊时; 遇到感兴趣文章时; 应付作业、考试、过级时; 心血来潮时。

THANK YOU!

Appendix 2

CET 4, June, 2006

Class _____ Name _____ Number _____ Marks _____

Part I Reading Comprehension (Skimming and Scanning) (15 minutes)

Directions: *In this part, you will have 15 minutes to go over the passage quickly and answer the questions on Answer Sheet 1.*

For questions 1-7,

mark Y (for YES) if the statement agrees with the information given in the passage;

N (for NO) if the statement contradicts the information given in the passage;

NG (for NOT GIVEN) if the information is not given in the passage.

For questions 8-10,

complete the sentences with the information given in the passage.

Highways

Early in the 20th century, most of the streets and roads in the U.S. were made of dirt, brick, and cedar wood blocks. Built for horse, carriage, and foot traffic, they were usually poorly cared for and too narrow to *accommodate*(容纳) automobiles.

With the increase in auto production, private *turnpike*(收费公路) companies under local authorities began to spring up, and by 1921 there were 387,000 miles of paved roads. Many were built using specifications of 19th century Scottish engineers Thomas Telford and John MacAdam(for whom the macadam surface is name[D]), whose specifications stressed the importance of adequate drainage. Beyond that, there were no national standards for size, weight restrictions, or commercial signs. During World War I, roads throughout the country were nearly destroyed by the weight of trucks. When General Eisenhower returned from Germany in 1919, after serving in the U.S. Army's first transcontinental motor *convoy*(车队), he noted: "The old convoy had started me thinking about good, two-lane highways, but Germany's Autobahn or motorway had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across the land."

It would take another war before the federal government would act on a national highway system. During World War II, a tremendous increase in trucks and new roads were required. The war demonstrated how critical highways were to the defense effort. Thirteen per cent of defense plants received all their supplies by truck, and almost all other plants shipped more than half of their products by vehicle. The war also revealed that local control of highways had led to a confusing variety of design standards. Even federal and state highways did not follow basic standards. Some states allowed trucks up to 36,000 pounds, while others restricted anything over 7,000 pounds. A government study recommended a national highway system of 33,920 miles, and Congress soon passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944, which called for strict, centrally controlled design criteria.

The interstate highway system was finally launched in 1956 and has been hailed as one of the greatest public works projects of the century. To build its 44,000mile

web of highways, bridge, and tunnels, hundreds of unique engineering designs and solutions had to be worked out. Consider the many geographic features of the country: mountains, steep grades, wetlands, rivers, deserts, and plains. Variables included the slope of the land, the ability of the pavement to support the load, the intensity of road use, and the nature of the underlying soil. Urban areas were another problem. Innovative designs of roadways, tunnels, bridges, overpasses, and interchanges that could run through or bypass urban areas soon began to weave their way across the country, forever altering the face of America.

Long-span, segmented-concrete, cable-stayed bridges such as Hale Boggs in Louisiana and the Sunshine Skyway in Florida, and remarkable tunnels like Fort McHenry in Maryland and Mt. Baker in Washington, met many of the nation's physical challenges. Traffic control systems and methods of construction developed under the interstate program soon influenced highway construction around the world, and were invaluable in improving the condition of urban streets and traffic patterns.

Today, the interstate system links every major city in the U.S. and the U.S. with Canada and Mexico. Built with safety in mind, the highways have wide lanes and shoulders, dividing medians or barriers, long entry and exit lanes, curves engineered for safe turns, and limited access. The death rate on highways is half that of all other U.S. roads (0.86 deaths per 100 million passenger miles compared to 1.99 deaths per 100 million on all other roads).

By opening the North American continent, highways have enabled consumer goods and services to reach people in remote and rural areas of the country, spurred the growth of suburbs, and provide people with greater options in terms of jobs, access to cultural programs, health care, and other benefits. Above all, the interstate system provides individuals with what they cherish most personal freedom of mobility.

The interstate system has been an essential element of the nation's economic growth in terms of shipping and job creation: more than 75 percent of the nation's freight deliveries arrive by truck; and most products that arrive by rail or air use interstates for the last leg of the journey by vehicle. Not only has the highway system affected the American economy by providing shipping routes, it has led to the growth of spin-off industries like service stations, motels, restaurants, and shopping centers. It has allowed the relocation of manufacturing plants and other industries from urban areas to rural.

By the end of the century there was an immense network of paved roads, residential streets, expressways, and freeways built to support millions of vehicles. The highway system was officially renamed for Eisenhower to honor his vision and leadership. The year construction began he said: Together, the united forces of our communication and transportation systems are dynamic elements in the very name we bear—United States. Without them, we would be a mere alliance of many separate parts.”

1. () National standards for paved roads were in place by 1921.
2. () General Eisenhower felt that the broad German motorways made more

sense than the two-lane highways of America.

3. () It was in the 1950 that the American government finally took action to build a national high way system.
4. () Many of the problems presented by the country's geographical features found solutions in innovative engineering projects.
5. () In spite of safety considerations, the death rate on interstate highways is still higher than that of other American roads.
6. () The interstate highway system provides access between major military installations in America.
7. () Service stations, motels and restaurants promoted the development of the interstate highway system.
8. The greatest benefit brought about by the interstate system was _____.
9. Trucks using the interstate highways deliver more than _____.
10. The interstate system was renamed after Eisenhower in recognition of _____.

Part II Reading Comprehension (Reading in Depth) (25 minutes)

Section A

Directions: In this section, there is a passage with ten blanks. You are required to select one word for each blank from a list of choices given in a word following the passage. Read the passage through carefully before making your choices. Each choice in the blank is identified by a letter. Please mark the corresponding letter for each item on Answer Sheet 2 with a single line through the center. You may not use any of the words in the blank more than once.

Questions 47 to 56 are based on the following passage.

El Nino is the name given to the mysterious and often unpredictable change in the climate of the world. This strange 47 happens every five to eight years. It starts in the Pacific Ocean and is thought to be caused by a failure in the *trade winds*(信风), which affects the ocean currents driven by these winds. As the trade winds lessen in 48, the ocean temperatures rise, causing the Peru current flowing in from the east to warm up by as much as 5°C.

The warming of the ocean has far-reaching effects. The hot, *humid* (潮湿的) air over the ocean causes severe 49 thunderstorms. The rainfall is increased across South America, 50 floods to Peru. In the West Pacific, there are droughts affecting Australia and Indonesia. So while some parts of the world prepare for heavy rains and floods, other parts face drought, poor crops and 51.

El Nino usually lasts for about 18 months. The 1982-83 El Nino brought the most 52 weather in modern history. Its effect was worldwide and it left more than 2,000 people dead and caused over eight billion pounds 53 of damage. The 1990 El Nino lasted until June 1995. Scientists 54 this to be the longest El Nino for 2,000 years.

Nowadays, weather experts are able to forecast when an El Nino will 55, but they are still not 56 sure what leads to it or what affects how strong it will be.

- | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------|
| [A] estimate | [B] strength | [C] deliberately | [D] notify |
| [E] tropical | [F] phenomenon | [G] stable | [H] attraction |
| [I] completely | [J] destructive | [K] starvation | [L] bringing |
| [M] exhaustion | [N] worth | [O] strike | |

Section B

Directions: There are 2 passages in this section. Each passage is followed by some unfinished statements. For each of them there are four choices marked [A], [B], [C] and [D]. You should decide on the best choice and mark the corresponding letter on Answer Sheet 2 with a single line through the center.

Passage One

Questions 57 to 61 are based on the following passage.

Communications technologies are far from equal when it comes to conveying the truth. The first study to compare honesty across a range of communications media has found that emails are automatically recorded—and can come back to *haunt* (困扰) you—appears to be the key to the finding.

Jeff Hancock of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, asked 30 students to keep a communications diary for a week. In it they noted the number of conversations or email exchanges they had lasting more than 10 minutes, and confessed to how many lies they told. Hancock then worked out the number of lies per conversation for each medium. He found that lies made up 14 per cent of emails, 21 per cent of instant messages, 27 per cent of face-to-face interactions and an astonishing 37 per cent of phone calls.

His results, to be presented at the conference on human-computer interaction in Vienna, Austria, in April, have surprised psychologists. Some expected e-mailers to be the biggest liars, reasoning that because deception makes people uncomfortable, the *detachment* (非直接接触) of emailing would make it easier to lie. Others expected people to lie more in face-to-face exchanges because we are most practiced at that form of communication.

But Hancock says it is also crucial whether a conversation is being recorded and could be reread, and whether it occurs in real time. People appear to be afraid to lie when they know the communication could later be used to hold them to account, he says. This is why fewer lies appear in email than on the phone.

People are also more likely to lie in real time—in an instant message or phone call, say—than if they have time to think of a response, says Hancock. He found many lies are *spontaneous* (脱口而出的) responses to an unexpected demand, such as: “Do you like my dress?”

Hancock hopes his research will help companies work out the best ways for their employees to communicate. For instance, the phone might be the best medium for sales where employees are encouraged to stretch the truth. But given his results, work assessment, where honesty is a priority, might be best done using email.

57. Hancock's study focuses on _____.
[A] the consequences of lying in various communications media
[B] the success of communications technologies in conveying ideas
[C] people's preferences in selecting communication technologies
[D] people's honesty levels across a range of communications media
58. Hancock's research finding surprised those who believed that _____.
[A] people are less likely to lie in instant messages
[B] people are unlikely to lie in face-to-face interactions
[C] people are most likely to lie in email communication
[D] people are twice as likely to lie in phone conversations
59. According to the passage, why are people more likely to tell the truth through certain media of communication? _____.
[A] They are afraid of leaving behind traces of their lies.
[B] They believe that honesty is the best policy.
[C] They tend to be relaxed when using those media.
[D] They are most practiced at those forms of communication.
60. According to Hancock, the telephone is a preferable medium for promoting sales because _____.
[A] salesmen can talk directly to their customers
[B] salesmen may feel less restrained to exaggerate
[C] salesmen can impress customers as being trustworthy
[D] salesmen may pass on instant messages effectively
61. It can be inferred from the passage that _____.
[A] honesty should be encouraged in interpersonal communications
[B] more employers will use emails to communicate with their employees
[C] suitable media should be chosen for different communication purposes
[D] email is now the dominant medium of communication within a company

Passage Two

Questions 62 to 66 are based on the following passage.

In a country that defines itself by ideals, not by shared blood, who should be allowed to come, work and live here? In the wake of the Sept.11 attacks these questions have never seemed more pressing.

On Dec. 11, 2001, as part of the effort to increase homeland security, federal and local authorities in 14 states staged "Operation Safe Travel"—raids on airports to arrest employees with false *identification* (身份证明). In Salt Lake City there were 69 arrests. But those captured were anything but terrorists, most of them illegal immigrants from Central or South America. Authorities said the undocumented workers' illegal status made them open to *blackmail* (讹诈) by terrorists.

Many immigrants in Salt Lake City were angered by the arrests and said they felt as if they were being treated like disposable goods.

Many Americans said those feelings were justified to a certain extent. "We're saying we want you to work in these places, we're going to look the other way in

terms of what our laws are, and then when it's convenient for us, or when we can try to make a point in term of national security, especially after Sept. 11, then you're disposable. There are whole families being uprooted for all of the wrong reasons," Anderson said.

If Sept. 11 had never happened, the airport workers would not have been arrested and could have gone on quietly living in America, probably indefinitely. And Castro, a manager at a Ben & Jerry's ice cream shop at the airport, had been working 10 years with the same false Social Security card when she was arrested in the December airport raid. Now she and her family are living under the threat of *deportation* (驱逐出境). Castro's case is currently waiting to be settled. While she awaits the outcome, the government has granted her permission to work here and she has returned to her job at Ben & Jerry's.

62. According to the author, the United States claims to be a nation _____.
[A] composed of people having different values
[B] encouraging individual pursuits
[C] sharing common interests
[D] founded on shared ideals
63. How did the immigrants in Salt Lake City feel about "Operation Safe Travel"?

[A] Guilty [B] Offended [C] Disappointed [D] Discouraged
64. Undocumented workers became the target of "Operation Safe Travel" because _____.
[A] evidence was found that they were potential terrorists
[B] most of them worked at airports under threat of terrorist attacks
[C] terrorists might take advantage of their illegal status
[D] they were reportedly helping hide terrorists around the airport
65. By saying "...we're going to look the other way in terms of what our laws are" (Line 2, Para. 4), Mayor Anderson means "_____".
[A] we will turn a blind eye to your illegal status.
[B] we will examine the laws in a different way
[C] there are other ways of enforcing the law
[D] the existing laws must not be ignored
66. What do we learn about Ana Castro from the last paragraph? _____.
[A] She will be deported sooner or later.
[B] She is allowed to stay permanently.
[C] Her case has been dropped.
[D] Her fate remains uncertain.

Appendix 3

Reading Log

Student name:

Date:

Title:

Duration:

Place where you read:

Reading problems/weakness:

Reading progress:

Appendix 4

CET 4, June, 2007

Class _____ Name _____ Number _____ Marks _____

Part I Reading Comprehension (Skimming and Scanning) (15 minutes)

Directions: *In this part, you will have 15 minutes to go over the passage quickly and answer the questions on Answer Sheet 1.*

For questions 1-7, mark Y (for YES) if the statement agrees with the information given in the passage;

N (for NO) if the statement contradicts the information given in the passage;

NG (for NOT GIVEN) if the information is not given in the passage.

For questions 8-10, complete the sentences with the information given in the passage.

Protect Your Privacy When Job-hunting Online

Identity theft and identity fraud are terms used to refer to all types of crime in which someone wrongfully obtains and uses another person's personal data in some way that involves fraud or deception, typically for economic gain.

The numbers associated with identity theft are beginning to add up fast these days. A recent General Accounting Office report estimates that as many as 750,000 Americans are victims of identity theft every year. And that number may be low, as many people choose not to report the crime even if they know they have been victimized.

Identity theft is "an absolute epidemic," states Robert Ellis Smith, a respected author and advocate of privacy. "It's certainly picked up in the last four or five years. It's worldwide. It affects everybody, and there's very little you can do to prevent it and, worst of all, you can't detect it until it's probably too late."

Unlike your fingerprints, which are unique to you and cannot be given to

someone else for their use, your personal data, especially your social security number, your bank account or credit card number, your telephone calling card number, and other valuable identifying data, can be used, if they fall into the wrong hands, to personally profit at your expense. In the United States and Canada, for example, many people have reported that unauthorized persons have taken funds out of their bank or financial accounts, or, in the worst cases, taken over their identities altogether, running up vast debts and committing crimes while using the victims' names. In many cases, a victim's losses may include not only out-of-pocket financial losses, but substantial additional financial costs associated with trying to restore his reputation in the community and correcting erroneous information for which the criminal is responsible.

According to the FBI, identity theft is the number one fraud committed on the Internet. So how do job seekers protect themselves while continuing to circulate their resumes online? The key to a successful online job search is learning to manage the risks. Here are some tips for staying safe while conducting a job search on the Internet.

1. Check for a privacy policy.

If you are considering posting your resume online, make sure the job search site you are considering has a privacy policy, like CareerBuilder.com. The policy should spell out how your information will be used, stored and whether or not it will be shared. You may want to think twice about posting your resume on a site that automatically shares your information with others. You could be opening yourself up to unwanted calls from *solicitors* (推销员).

When reviewing the site's privacy policy, you'll be able to delete your resume just as easily as you posted it. You won't necessarily want your resume to remain out there on the Internet once you land a job. Remember, the longer your resume remains posted on a job board, the more exposure, both positive and not-so-positive, it will receive.

2. Take advantage of site features.

Lawful job search sites offer levels of privacy protection. Before posting your

resume, carefully consider your job search objective and the level of risk you are willing to assume.

CareerBuilder.com, for example, offers three levels of privacy from which job seekers can choose. The first is standard posting. This option gives job seekers who post their resumes the most visibility to the broadest employer audience possible.

The second is *anonymous* (匿名的) posting. This allows job seekers the same visibility as those in the standard posting category without any of their contact information being displayed. Job seekers who wish to remain anonymous but want to share some other information may choose which pieces of contact information to display.

The third is private posting. This option allows a job seeker to post a resume without having it searched by employers. Private posting allows job seekers to quickly and easily apply for jobs that appear on CareerBuilder.com without retyping their information.

3. Safeguard your identity.

Career experts say that one of the ways job seekers can stay safe while using the Internet to search out jobs is to conceal their identities. Replace your name on your resume with a *generic* (泛指) identifier, such as "Intranet Developer Candidate," or "Experienced Marketing Representative."

You should also consider eliminating the name and location of your current employer. Depending on your title, it may not be all that difficult to determine who you are once the name of your company is provided. Use a general description of the company such as "Major auto manufacturer," or "International packaged goods supplier."

If your job title is unique, consider using the generic equivalent instead of the exact title assigned by your employer.

4. Establish and email address for your search.

Another way to protect your privacy while seeking employment online is to open up an email account specifically for your online job search. This will safeguard your existing email box in the event someone you don't know gets hold of your email

address and shares it with others.

Using an email address specifically for your job search also eliminates the possibility that you will receive unwelcome emails in your primary mailbox. When naming your new email address, be sure that it doesn't contain references to your name or other information that will give away your identity. The best solution is an email address that is relevant to the job you are seeking such as salesmgr2004@provider.com.

5. Protect your reference.

If your resume contains a section with the names and contact information of your references, take it out. There's no sense in safeguarding your information while sharing private contact information of your references.

6. Keep confidential (机密的) information confidential.

Do not, under any circumstances, share your social security, driver's license, and bank account numbers or other personal information, such as race or eye color. Honest employers do not need this information with an initial application. Don't provide this even if they say they need it in order to conduct a background check. This is one of the oldest tricks in the book – don't fall for it.

1. () Robert Ellis Smith believes identity theft is difficult to detect and one can hardly do anything to prevent it.

2. () In many cases, identity theft not only causes the victims' immediate financial losses but costs them a lot to restore their reputation.

3. () Identity theft is a minor offence and its harm has been somewhat overestimated.

4. () It is important that your resume not stay online longer than is necessary.

5. () Of the three options offered by CareerBuilder.com in Suggestion 2, the third one is apparently most strongly recommended.

6. () Employers require applicants to submit very personal information on background checks.

7. () Applicants are advised to use generic names for themselves and their current employers when seeking employment online.

8. Using a special email address in the job search can help prevent your from receiving _____.

9. To protect your references, you should not post online their _____.

10. According to the passage, identity theft is committed typically for _____.

Part II Reading Comprehension (Reading in Depth) (25 minutes)

Section A

Directions: In this section, there is a passage with ten blanks. You are required to select one word for each blank from a list of choices given in a word following the passage. Read the passage through carefully before making your choices. Each choice in the blank is identified by a letter. Please mark the corresponding letter for each item on Answer Sheet 2 with a single line through the center. You may not use any of the words in the blank more than once.

Questions 47 to 56 are based on the following passage.

Years ago, doctors often said that pain was a normal part of life. In particular, when older patients 47 of pain, they were told it was a natural part of aging and they would have to learn to live with it.

Times have changed. Today, we take pain 48. Indeed, pain is now considered the fifth vital sign, as important as blood pressure, temperature, breathing rate and pulse in 49 a person's well-being. We know that *chronic* (慢性的) pain can *disrupt* (扰乱) a person's life, causing problems that 50 from missed work to depression.

That's why a growing number of hospitals now depend upon physicians who 51 in pain medicine. Not only do we evaluate the cause of the pain, which can help us treat the pain better, but we also help provide comprehensive therapy for depression and other psychological and social 52 related to chronic pain. Such comprehensive therapy often 53 the work of social workers, *psychiatrists* (心理医

生) and psychologists, as well as specialists in pain medicine.

This modern 54 for pain management has led to a wealth of innovative treatments which are more effective and with fewer side effects than ever before. Decades ago, there were only a 55 number of drugs available, and many of them caused 56 side effects in older people, including dizziness and fatigue. This created a double-edged sword: the medications helped relieve the pain but caused other problems that could be worse than the pain itself.

A) result	I) determining
B) involves	J) limited
C) significant	K) gravely
D) range	L) complained
E) relieved	M) respect
F) issues	N) prompting
G) seriously	O) specialize
H) magnificent	

Section B

Directions: There are 2 passages in this section. Each passage is followed by some unfinished statements. For each of them there are four choices marked [A], [B], [C] and [D]. You should decide on the best choice and mark the corresponding letter on Answer Sheet 2 with a single line through the center.

Passage One

Questions 57 to 61 are based on the following passage.

I've been writing for most of my life. The book *Writing Without Teachers* introduced me to one distinction and one practice that has helped my writing processes tremendously. The distinction is between the creative mind and the critical mind. While you need to employ both to get to a finished result, they cannot work in

parallel no matter how much we might like to think so.

Trying to criticize writing on the fly is possibly the single greatest barrier to writing that most of us encounter. If you are listening to that 5th grade English teacher correct your grammar while you are trying to capture a *fleeting* (稍纵即逝的) thought, the thought will die. If you capture the fleeting thought and simply share it with the world in raw form, no one is likely to understand. You must learn to create first and then criticize if you want to make writing the tool for thinking that it is.

The practice that can help you past your learned bad habits of trying to edit as you write is what Elbow calls "free writing." In free writing, the objective is to get words down on paper non-stop, usually for 15-20 minutes. No stopping, no going back, no criticizing. The goal is to get the words flowing. As the words begin to flow, the ideas will come from the shadows and let themselves be captured on your notepad or your screen.

Now you have raw materials that you can begin to work with using the critical mind that you've persuaded to sit on the side and watch quietly. Most likely, you will believe that this will take more time than you actually have and you will end up staring blankly at the pages as the deadline draws near.

Instead of staring at a blank start filling it with words no matter how bad. Halfway through you available time, stop and rework your raw writing into something closer to finished product. Move back and forth until you run out of time and the final result will most likely be far better than your current practices.

57. When the author says the creative mind and the critical mind "cannot work in parallel" (Line 4, Para. 1) in the writing process, he means _____.

- A) no one can be both creative and critical
- B) they cannot be regarded as equally important
- C) they are in constant conflict with each other
- D) one cannot use them at the same time

58. What prevents people from writing on is _____.

- A) putting their ideas in raw form
- B) attempting to edit as they write

C) ignoring grammatical soundness

D) trying to capture fleeting thoughts

59. What is the chief objective of the first stage of writing?

A) To organize one's thoughts logically.

B) To choose an appropriate topic.

C) To get one's ideas down.

D) To collect raw materials.

60. One common concern of writers about "free writing" is that _____.

A) it overstresses the role of the creative mind

B) it takes too much time to edit afterwards

C) it may bring about too much criticism

D) it does not help them to think clearly

61. In what way does the critical mind help the writer in the writing process?

A) It refines his writing into better shape.

B) It helps him to come up with new ideas.

C) It saves the writing time available to him.

D) It allows him to sit on the side and observe.

Passage Two

Questions 62 to 66 are based on the following passage.

I don't ever want to talk about being a woman scientist again. There was a time in my life when people asked constantly for stories about what it's like to work in a field dominated by men. I was never very good at telling those stories because truthfully I never found them interesting. What I do find interesting is the origin of the universe, the shape of space-time and the nature of black holes.

At 19, when I began studying astrophysics, it did not bother me in the least to be the only woman in the classroom. But while earning my Ph.D. at MIT and then as a post-doctor doing space research, the issue started to bother me. My every achievement—jobs, research papers, awards—was viewed through the lens of *gender*

(性别) politics. So were my failures. Sometimes, when I was pushed into an argument on left brain *versus* (相对于) right brain, or nature *versus* *nurture* (培育), I would instantly fight fiercely on my behalf and all womankind.

Then one day a few years ago, out of my mouth came a sentence that would eventually become my reply to any and all provocations: I don't talk about that anymore. It took me 10 years to get back the confidence I had at 19 and to realize that I didn't want to deal with gender issues. Why should curing sexism be yet another terrible burden on every female scientist? After all, I don't study sociology or political theory.

Today I research and teach at Barnard, a women's college in New York City. Recently, someone asked me how many of the 45 students in my class were women. You cannot imagine my satisfaction at being able to answer, 45. I know some of my students worry how they will manage their scientific research and a desire for children. And I don't dismiss those concerns. Still, I don't tell them "war" stories. Instead, I have given them this: the visual of their physics professor heavily pregnant doing physics experiments. And in turn they have given me the image of 45 women driven by a love of science. And that's a sight worth talking about.

62. Why doesn't the author want to talk about being a woman scientist again?

- A) She feels unhappy working in male-dominated fields.
- B) She is fed up with the issue of gender discrimination.
- C) She is not good at telling stories of the kind.
- D) She finds space research more important.

63. From Paragraph 2, we can infer that people would attribute the author's failures to _____.

- A) the very fact that she is a woman
- B) her involvement in gender politics
- C) her over-confidence as a female astrophysicist
- D) the burden she bears in a male-dominated society

64. What did the author constantly fight against while doing her Ph.D. and post-doctoral research?

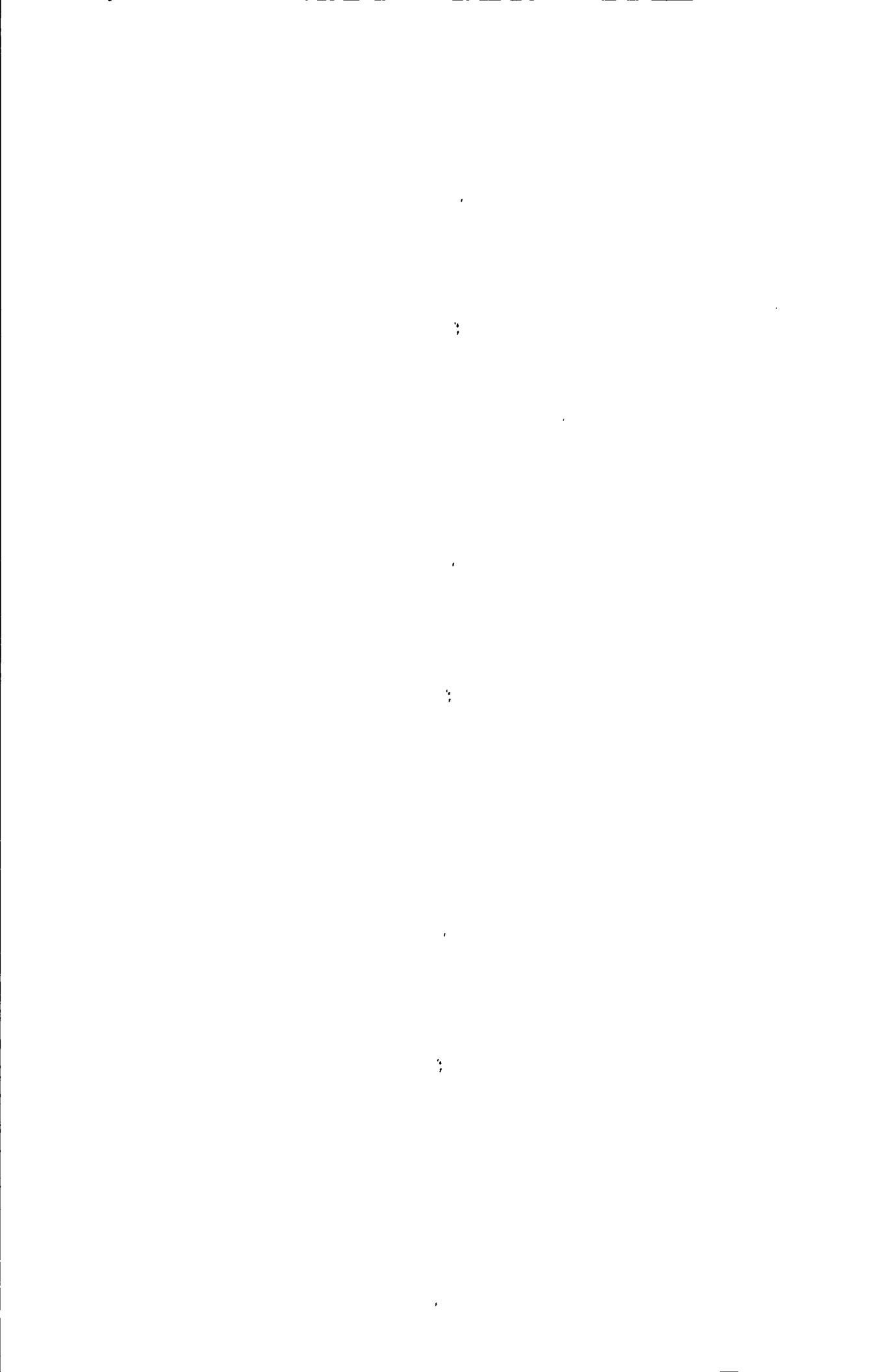
- A) Lack of confidence in succeeding in space science.
- B) Unfair accusations from both inside and outside her circle.
- C) People's stereotyped attitude toward female scientists.
- D) Widespread misconceptions about nature and nurtured.

65. Why does the author feel great satisfaction when talking about her class?

- A) Female students no longer have to bother about gender issues.
- B) Her students' performance has brought back her confidence.
- C) Her female students can do just as well as male students.
- D) More female students are pursuing science than before.

66. What does the image the author presents to her students suggest?

- A) Women students needn't have the concerns of her generation.
- B) Women have more barriers on their way to academic success.
- C) Women can balance a career in science and having a family.
- D) Women now have fewer problems pursuing a science career.



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