

# Study on the Application of Long-distance Education in Middle School English Reading Teaching

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**Abstract:** The important characteristic of modern distance education is to develop various kinds of teaching activities in the network environment. English is the language of the information age. It is the obligation and responsibility of English teachers to construct and perfect English teaching model of network environment by taking advantages of Internet teaching. This thesis mainly discusses the function and characteristics of net—work teaching, the main teaching procedures of long-distance English reading education and the countermeasures that middle school English teachers must take in order to improve the quality of long-distance English reading teaching.

**Keywords:** Network environment, Long-distance education, Middle school English reading, Teaching, Countermeasures.

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## 1. Introduction

The long-distance education is an education form that mainly depends on kinds of media ways to carry on the teaching system with the correspondence relationship between students and teachers, students and education organizations, and is a way to send students' curriculums to the outside campus. The long-distance education possess three essential factors: students, teacher sand the network environment, which have close relationship and indispensable. Also, long-distance education is the one that major in distance education and secondary with conventional education and teaching by correspondence or self-study. The main characteristic of long distance education is the communication at real time or virtual time between teachers and students across space, which is also the notable difference and advantage. In addition, because of the features of Internet—openness and sharing, long-distance education can take advantage of the abundant resources on Internet and inspire the enthusiasm and creativeness of all the teachers and students to involve in teaching activities as much as possible.

With the development of computer technology, information technology, long-distance communication technology and network technology, computer network has become an irreplaceable advantage, comparing with the traditional classroom teaching. Especially in present-day society which emphasizes the change of the education from "examination-oriented education" to "quality education", long-distance education plays an increasing important role. The long-distance English language education is one that works on the network environment which accounts for a pivotal position. The traditional English education is always for collective instruction (teacher-centered) and limits the contents of textbooks, which cannot bring the initiative, enthusiasm and creativity of students into full play, and in some degree it limits the amount and area of the students to get knowledge. Today, the development of multimedia and network provide an more efficient way for English language education --- long-distance English education. Modern long-distance English education is a new type of education with the modern development of information technology, and mainly through computer network and multimedia, such as modern information technology. It uses "learn-based" teaching

method, and put a variety of multimedia integration of teaching methods to students to create a good learning environment, in which students are able to improve listening, speaking, reading, writing and other language applications.

On the one hand, the use of modern long-distance English education is a wealth of teaching resources which are able to change the English teachers' concepts, and optimizes the teaching methods. It can broaden the horizons of students and stimulate their interest in learning English and also improve the efficiency of English learning and facilitate the developments of English teaching of schools.

This thesis will be divided into three chapters. Chapter one is the overview of long-distance education, and chapter two is about the necessity and advantage of long-distance education, and chapter three is to analyze the application of long-distance education used in English reading teaching.

## 2. An Overview of Long-distance Education

Long-Distance education, or distance learning, is a field of education that focuses on the pedagogy, technology, and instructional systems design that aim to deliver education to students who are not physically "on site". Rather than attending courses in person, teachers and students may communicate at times of their own choosing by exchanging printed or electronic media, or through technology that allows them to communicate in real time and through other online ways. Distance education courses that require a physical on-site presence for any reason including the taking of examinations is considered to be a hybrid or blended course of study.

### 2.1. Definition

The latest study conducted by the IGNOU (Indian Gandhi National Open University) has thrown light on the fact that Long-distance Learning or Distance Education has come of its age. Due to rise in need of higher education and evolution of communication technology, it has become a household name.

Long Distance education is an education process wherein students are supplied the course material at long distance places from the respective school. They need not be

physically present at the Education centre for lectures, though sometimes weekly or monthly sessions are held but these, again, are not compulsory. For students staying far from the educational institute of their interest and who cannot physically partake the courses offered due to various reasons, long-distance learning is a boon.

The roots of long – distance learning can be traced to correspondence courses. Here the study material i.e. books, notes, curriculum etc. was supplied via post or courier. In today's ICE age (Information, Communication and Technology), education has adopted the fast pace to keep abreast of changing times. Today the technological advancements have changed the face of Distance learning in terms of convenience, speed, costs etc. E.g. E-learning are a rage nowadays, so much so that a school in the US has introduced 'physical training' online. Its an ironical example, but depicts the extent of adaptation of this trend. Submissions, exams, curriculum, lecture notes etc. can be shares via e-mail and on the Internet.

To overcome the handicap of 'no classroom learning', technology has discovered the concept of 'Video-conferencing'. It's a technique wherein the student has to visit a local base that supplies the facility, logon to the website at that particular time allotted and directly 'attend' the classroom where the professor is lecturing live.

## 2.2. History

Distance education dates back to at least as early as 1728, when "an advertisement in the Boston Gazette...[named] 'Caleb Phillips, Teacher of the new method of Short Hand'" was seeking students for lessons to be sent weekly. Modern distance education has been practiced at least since Isaac Pitman taught shorthand in Great Britain via correspondence in the 1840s.]The development of the postal service in the 19th century led to the growth of Commercial correspondence colleges with nation-wide reach.

The University of London was the first school to offer distance learning degrees, establishing its External Programme in 1858. The Society to Encourage Studies at Home was founded in 1873 in Boston, Massachusetts. In Australia, the University of Queensland established its Department of Correspondence Studies in 1911. Another pioneering institution was the University of South Africa, which has been offering Correspondence Education courses since 1946. In New Zealand, university-level distance education or extramural study began in 1960 at Massey University. The largest distance education university in the United Kingdom is the Open University founded 1969. In Germany the FernUniversität in Hagen was founded 1974. There are now many similar institutions around the world, often with the name Open University (in English or in the local language), and more than a dozen of them have grown to become 'mega-universities', a term coined to denote institutions with more than 100,000 students.

Charles Wedemeyer is considered the father of modern distance education in America. From 1964-1968 the Carnegie Foundation funded Wedemeyer's Articulated Instructional Media Project (AIM) which brought in a variety of communications technologies aimed at providing learning to an off-campus population. According to Moore's recounting, AIM impressed the British who imported these ideas and used them to create the first Open University, now called United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) to distinguish it from

other open universities which have emerged. UKOU was established in the late 1960s and used television and radio as its primary delivery methodologies, thus placing it in the forefront of applying emerging technologies to learning. It is fair to say that all "open universities" use distance education technologies as delivery methodologies.

In the twentieth century, radio, television, and the Internet have all been used to further distance education. Computers and the Internet have made distance learning distribution easier and faster. Private, for-profit Phoenix University, which is primarily an online university, now has two hundred thousand students and expects to serve five hundred thousand by 2010, yet little is known about student success or lack of success in such a fast-growing institution. The method of Independent Study Option (ISO) was created in 1978 which provides the opportunity and flexibility for both school-age and adult learners to study a wide range of compulsory optional print based distance education courses from Grades 7 to 12. This form of distance education also provides students with support by email or phone. The Independent Study Option also offers several courses in French. In the event that a student leaves the province on a temporary or permanent basis, the ISO also provides the opportunity for continuing the study of Manitoba curriculum en route to receiving a Senior Years graduation diploma.

In 2006 the Sloan Consortium reported that more than 96 percent of the largest colleges and universities in the United States offered online courses and that almost 3.2 million U.S. students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2005 term.

Nowadays, Teacher Mediated Option (TMO) supports the delivery of distance learning courses that are scheduled within the school day and use a variety of technologies to assist students including: instruction twice a school cycle for 40 minutes per class by audio teleconference, recording of classes as required for use up to five days after the class has occurred, and corresponding with an instructor between classes by email or phone. These courses are available to students almost everywhere.

## 2.3. Technologies Used

The types of available technologies used in distance education are divided into two groups: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous technology is a mode of online delivery where all participants are "present" at the same time. Requires a timetable to be organized. Asynchronous technology is a mode of online delivery where participants access course materials on their own schedule. Students are not required to be together at the same time.

### 2.3.1. Synchronous Technologies

- Telephone
- Videoconferencing
- Web Conferencing

### 2.3.2. Asynchronous Technologies

- Audiocassette
- E-mail
- Message Board Forums
- Print Materials
- Voice Mail/fax
- Videocassette

There are also Learning Management Systems or Learning

Management Content Systems which can be used for both Synchronous and Asynchronous learning. (LMS is not so much a learning tool as a framework for an instructor to better administer the classroom.)

### 3. The Application of Long –distance Education Used in English Reading Teaching

Reading plays an important role in the process of English learning. In the modern society, teachers can apply the long-distance technology to assist the reading instruction. On the basis of the research of scholars in this or relevant field, this chapter centers on the application of long-distance education in English reading teaching, by taking some examples and comparing with the traditional classes.

#### 3.1. Material

The Internet provides us with authentic and real

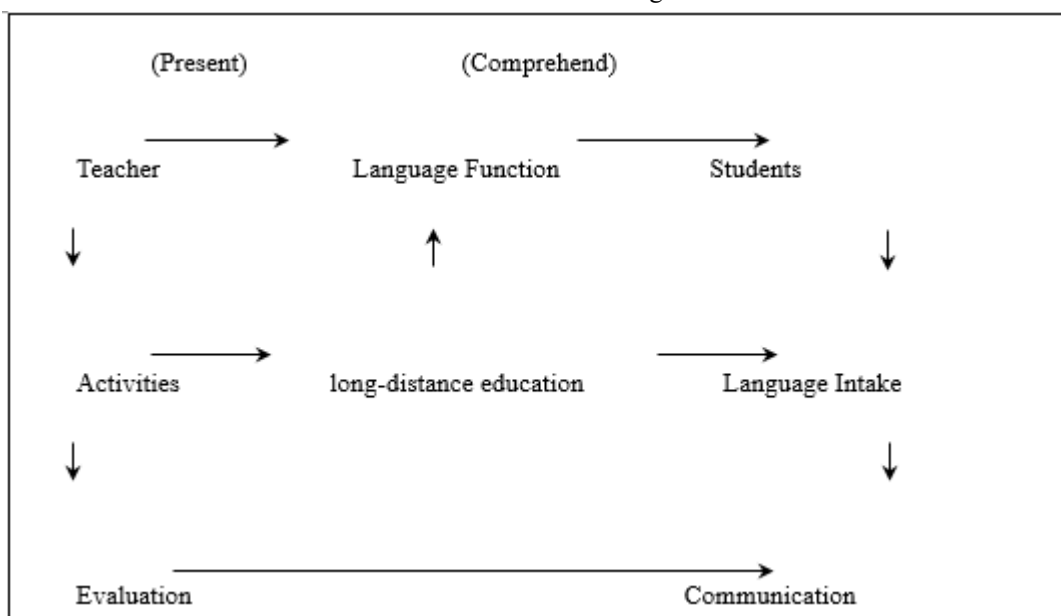
communicating English. That’s much better than those that are especially designed for textbooks.

#### 3.2. Teaching and Learning Mode

We use the PCs in class for reference, project work, or to follow up or prepare for classroom activities. With the computer, we present the students a combination of text, audio, pictures and video, which makes English learning class more lively and attractive. The students are motivated and interested.

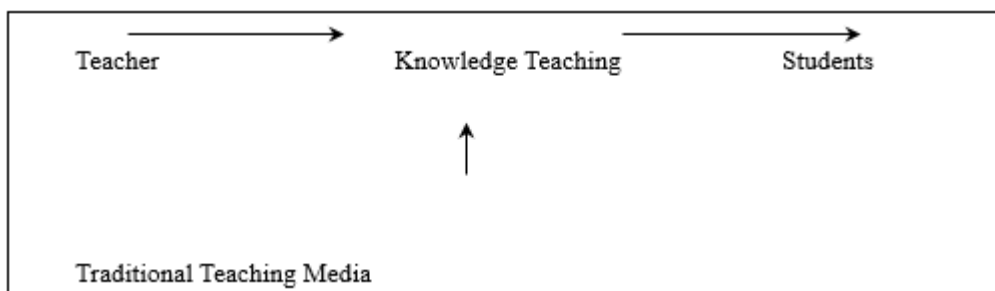
We have our tradition task, for example, vocabulary, grammatical rules, and sentence structures to cover. The objective goal that lies ahead of us is the college entrance exam. We cannot put the textbooks aside and just do whatever we like on the Internet. So, we also arrange the grammatical points. The teaching and learning mode we’re experimenting is as follows:

Table 1. Traditional teaching mode



From the table above we can see that it’s quite different from the traditional teaching mode:

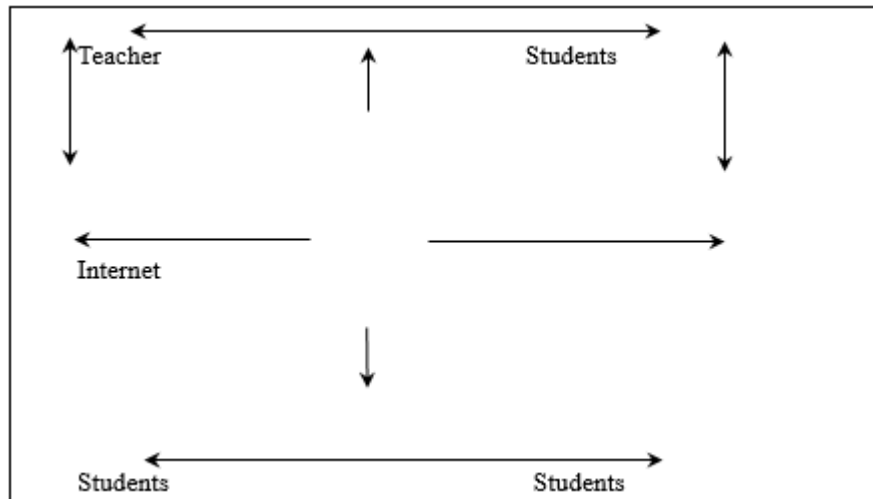
Table 2. Traditional Teaching Media



We adopt the task-based approach in our English learning class, which can be illustrated as follows:

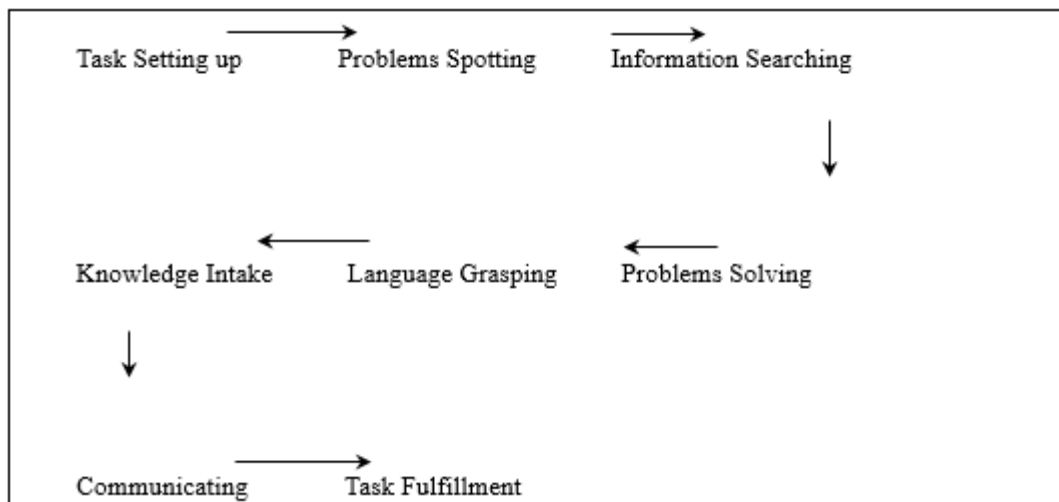
Teaching and Learning Mode:

**Table 3. Teaching and Learning Mode:**



Teaching and Learning Procedure:

**Table 4. Teaching and Learning Procedure**



### 3.3. An Teaching Example

we prepare and have the classes in this way:

Students need to read many materials in English reading class, so as to cultivate their abilities of understanding, analysis and expansion. According to the characteristics of reading and combined with the subject, the students are divided into two groups. Then each group report their results. The members of each group communicate by E-mail, QQ, blog and BBS to discuss the results and report by PowerPoint presentation and answer the questions from teachers and classmates. Assessment criteria should be a clear, coherent, concrete and fair principle. Individual evaluation is from the participate in the discussion, summing up the reflection, reading comprehension, information technology, collaborative cross and presentation. The evaluation is divided into initial, development, completion and modal four level score. Group evaluation are from time, supporting materials organize ideas,

presentation production, oral expression, creativity, innovation, group collaboration, comments and suggestions, and other aspects. It is divided into general, good, very good and excellent four Level score.

This kind of activity involves authentic language, authentic information, and the use of real-world skills in retrieving the information. The teacher is no longer presenting the language. She is setting up a situation in which students practice elements of language in a stable, but not predictable situation.

The use of the long-distance education supports the shift from the traditional teacher-centered classroom to one in which the students are in the center. Students are motivated by using computers and talking live to others. Without being conscious of it, the students will no longer consider learning a language a boring enterprise. They will be encouraged to learn more. Also, students will learn social skills and as such the Internet can be seen as an agent for socialization.

Topic:	Earthquakes
Aims:	What the students are expected to learn is: (1) to talk about earthquakes with passive voice where necessary; (2) to understand and interpret written and spoken English on earthquakes; (3) some basic knowledge about earthquakes.
Time:	two periods (80 minutes)
Focus:	Reading comprehension of the passage and words and expressions for talking about an earthquake; Revise Lesson 26 and Lesson 27;
Pre-class task:	What earthquakes have you ever heard of or been in? How do you feel about them? Why are there earthquakes? (1) Revision: Revise the expressions and the passage in Lesson 26 and Lesson 27 and the passive voice; (2) Elicitation and presentation: Present ways of describing an earthquake, especially the expression in passive voice; Show the students how to search the information related to earthquakes online;
Procedure:	(3) Group Tasks: a. Group one go to the web site <a href="http://www.exploratorium.edu/faultline/index.html">http://www.exploratorium.edu/faultline/index.html</a> read the articles and pictures about an earthquake; Students take down the key information and use them to prepare a brief report about an earthquake; b. Group two go to the web site <a href="http://www.exploratorium.edu/faultline/index.html">http://www.exploratorium.edu/faultline/index.html</a> read the articles and pictures about why an earthquake happens; Students take down the key information and use them to prepare a report about why an earthquake happens; (4) Classroom Activity: Form different groups and students exchange their reports; Students vote for the best report; (5) Summary: The winners read aloud their passage;
Post-class task:	Students write a short passage about either of the two topics according to the information they have got from the Internet.

### 3.4. Some Tips about Long-distance English Reading Teaching

Communication is one of the greatest advantages that the long distance English reading teaching has brought to us. So we put communication the top priority in our plan.

Firstly, the teachers can make web pages that can be accessed by the students and the teachers. The teachers then put materials connected with the textbooks there, including: related web sites, exercises, reference materials and assignments for the students.

Then, the teachers encourage the students to use the E-mail, BBs, QQ. Both the teachers and the students will have a list of everyone's E-mail address the students will email their assignments to the teachers.

If possible, the teachers encourage the students to communicate with people abroad on the Internet, for example, through ICQ or E-mail.

Thus, the long-distance English reading teaching will act as output tools to help students practice their English language.

There're problems of vocabulary for the senior middle school students. The students' vocabulary is very limited. To help them understand the articles better, we have loaded the dictionary, Power Word, for example, in the computer and the students can read its Chinese or English explanation when they come across some very difficult words.

Also, students' computer-operating skills need improving and practicing. Finally, teachers' instructions should be clear and brief. Teachers should show the students one example about how to search the information and how to fulfill the task.

## 4. Conclusion

Through the combination of long-distance education and English reading teaching integrated model, I have got the following conclusions:

Firstly, The combination of long-distance technology and English reading teaching is in favor of highlighting the integration of the main body of study and improve students' cultivation, the independence thinking, initiation, and the ability to innovate and practical. The entire learning process is almost operated independently by the students, thinking, summing up, which strengthen the students to participate in the process of knowledge formation.

Secondly, the combination of long-distance education and English reading teaching is truly conducive to the implementation of individualized teaching, which is both for all and individual.

Thirdly, on-line collaborative learning groups cultivate a spirit of cooperation and the sense of competition.

Fourthly, the multimedia learning environment which is interactive and lively and colorful has stimulated the enthusiasm of students, tapped their potential of self-study, and put the initiative back to the students.

Long-distance education is becoming increasingly popular in English reading teaching as a means to motivate students in their learning and to provide them with many ways to express their ideas and display their information. It also allows teachers the flexibility to present their curriculum in an innovative manner. In the future, with the lapse of time, the development of long-distance education will become better to serve the English reading teaching. This new teaching method

will receive a very positive result and has enabled students in the class to develop skills that will make them in an active position in learning and in line with the demands of the 21st century organizations.

In a word, long-distance English reading education method belongs to computer-aided instruction in substance, and we can heighten efficiency substantially, which is a kind of trend. We should make best use of its advantages and bypass its disadvantages. Of course it can't replace all other teaching methods and we can apply several methods together in one class. Only under the background of quality education can we use advanced educational theory and we can fulfill the target of English teaching by utilizing modern education technology reasonably.

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