

An Investigation on English Reading Learning of Junior High Students in Wuhou Experimental Middle School

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Abstract

English reading is the core content of English learning in junior high school, which is not only an important way for students to accumulate vocabulary, understand grammar and improve their sense of language. It is also the key carrier to cultivate cross-cultural awareness and logical thinking ability. The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) clearly requires that junior high school students should be able to read simple English books. Among the students in the first grade of junior middle school in our school, some of them are weak in English reading. It is characterized by slow reading speed, low comprehension accuracy, lack of interest in reading, and difficulty in completing slightly difficult reading tasks independently. These problems not only affect the overall performance of students in English, but also may undermine their confidence in learning. The investigation aims to fully understand the overall situation of English reading of junior one students, including reading interest, reading habits, reading methods, reading material selection and difficulties encountered in reading. Based on it, the paper takes advantage of questionnaire, classroom observation, test and interviewing to analyze the reasons and put forwards some suggestions with teaching significance to help students improve their English reading ability. The investigation also shows many students lack of reading strategies, etc. Thus, through investigation students' reading situation and analyzing the potential reasons, it is helpful for students to improve their reading skills and abilities.

Keywords

English reading; current problems; suggestions; junior high students

1. Introduction

English reading, as a core component of second language acquisition, plays a vital role in enhancing students' language proficiency, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). For junior high school students, this stage is critical for laying a solid foundation in English, as it not only influences their academic performance but also shapes their long-term language learning attitudes.

Wuhou Experimental Middle School, located in a culturally diverse urban area, serves a cohort of students with varying language backgrounds and learning motivations, making it a representative case for exploring urban junior high school students' English reading practices. However, existing studies on adolescent English reading in China often focus on top-tier schools or rural contexts, leaving a gap in understanding the challenges and strengths of students in ordinary urban schools like Wuhou Experimental Middle School.

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the English reading habits, difficulties, and strategies of junior high students in this school. Specifically, it seeks to answer: (1) What are the current English reading habits of these students? (2) What main difficulties do they encounter in reading? (3) What strategies do they adopt to overcome these difficulties? The findings are expected to provide insights for teachers to improve reading instruction and help students develop more effective reading skills.

2. Current Situation of Reading Among Junior High Students

2.1. Introduction of Wuhou Experimental Middle School

Located in Chengdu's Wuhou District, Wuhou Experimental Middle School (WEMS) stands as a pivotal educational institution established in 2003 under the urban-rural integration policy, with an 80-million-yuan investment to provide equitable access to quality education for rural and migrant students. Serving over 3,000 students across 58 classes, the school uniquely caters to a diverse student body, where 81% are children of local land-expropriated farmers and migrant workers. This demographic composition reflects its role as a bridge between urban and rural educational resources, making it an ideal case for studying English learning dynamics in socioeconomically diverse contexts.

WEMS is renowned for its innovative educational framework. Guided by the philosophy of civilian-oriented education and experimental pedagogical principles, the school emphasizes holistic development through a robust curriculum. It offers over 50 elective courses, including AI programming, robotics, and traditional arts like calligraphy and pottery, integrating project-based learning to foster critical thinking. Notably, its dual-line integrated teaching model—combining online resources with offline instruction has been highlighted by the Ministry of Education for enhancing classroom efficiency and personalized learning, particularly in English. This approach aligns with Chengdu's 2024 English curriculum reforms, which emphasize vocabulary expansion (2,000+ words), reading strategies, and writing proficiency, mirroring international standards like IELTS.

The school's commitment to innovation is further evidenced by its recognition as a "National Smart Education Demonstration School" and its inclusion in the "China Teacher Training Base" network. With 60% of faculty holding senior or intermediate teaching credentials, WEMS prioritizes teacher professional development

through collaborative research projects, including national-level studies on big data-driven differentiated instruction. Despite serving a predominantly underprivileged student population, WEMS has achieved notable academic success, with students securing 17 national English competition awards and the school being named a "Sichuan Provincial Art Education Featured School".

However, WEMS faces challenges typical of urban-rural integrated schools, such as varying English proficiency levels and limited parental engagement. These factors underscore the urgency of investigating students' reading habits and difficulties to inform targeted interventions. By contextualizing its research within WEMS's unique educational ecosystem, this study aims to contribute practical insights for improving English literacy in similar urban-rural transitional settings.

2.2. Investigation methods and Contents

Questionnaire survey method: a questionnaire covering reading interest, reading time, reading materials, reading habits, reading barriers and other aspects was designed. A total of 96 valid questionnaires (45 from Class 13 and 53 from Class 3) were collected from all the students in Class 13 and Class 3, with an effective rate of 98%.

Classroom observation method: 6 English reading classes were selected. Students' concentration, reading speed, strategy use and reaction when they encounter difficulties in the reading process were observed. Record the relevant behavior.

Standardized test method: adopt the unified reading test paper (including short passages of different levels of difficulty, comprehension of details, summary of the main idea, reasoning and judgment the overall scoring rate of students and the distribution of wrong questions are counted).

Interview method: 20 students (covering different learning levels) and 2 English teachers were randomly selected for interview. Understand the real feelings of students in reading, learning confusion and problems found in the teaching process.

3. Investigation Results and Cause Analysis

According to the results of the survey, the reasons for the poor English reading ability of the students in the first grade of junior middle school can be summarized as follows:

3.1. Insufficient accumulation of foundation and low confidence in reading

Lack of vocabulary: Tests and questionnaires show that 70% of students say that "too many new words" are the main obstacles in reading. Most of the students have not mastered the effective vocabulary memory methods, and the basic vocabulary in the textbooks is not firmly grasped. When confronted with vocabulary beyond the syllabus, it is even more difficult to deal with, resulting in frequent interruption of the

reading process, unable to understand the main idea of the article coherently.

Weak grammar knowledge: 65% of the students feel confused when facing long and difficult sentences. Inability to accurately analyze sentence structure (such as not distinguishing between subject, predicate and object, not understanding the relationship between clauses). The vagueness of basic grammar (such as tense, voice, preposition usage) makes it difficult for students to understand the exact meaning of sentences. And then affect the overall grasp of paragraphs and articles.

Lack of phonetic foundation: Some students are unable to infer the meaning of words through pronunciation rules because their phonetic learning in primary school is not solid. It is also difficult to cultivate language sense through reading aloud, which leads to the fact that reading can only rely on visual word-by-word recognition, slow speed and superficial understanding.

3.2. Bad reading habits and lack of systematic reading thinking

Insufficient and fragmented reading time: More than 50% of students spend less than 2 hours a week reading in English. Most of them concentrate on the short time of completing homework and lack of continuous and autonomous reading arrangements. They are more inclined to choose recreational activities rather than English reading in their spare time, which makes it difficult to form a stable reading rhythm.

Lack of preview and review habits: 80% of students will not actively preview materials before reading class. After class, they seldom review and summarize the reading content. This makes it difficult for students to enter the state quickly in classroom reading, and the memory and understanding of the article remain on the surface. Unable to deepen knowledge absorption.

Relying on word-for-word translation and neglecting overall understanding: Most students are accustomed to translating into Chinese word by word and sentence by sentence when reading. Once the translation is not smooth, it stagnates and neglects the overall grasp of the main idea of the article and the logic of the paragraph. Reading efficiency is low, and it is easy to fall into the misunderstanding of "only see the trees, not the forest".

3.3. Improper reading methods and lack of strategies

Lack of scientific reading strategies: The survey found that only 20% of the students can skillfully use skimming, scanning and other methods. Most students, regardless of their reading purpose, adopt the same intensive reading method, which leads to waste of time when they need to get information quickly. They can't grasp the key points when they need to understand deeply.

Weak ability to guess words: When encountering new words, 75% of the students' first reaction is to consult the dictionary. Rather than trying to infer meaning through contextual, root, affix and other clues. This not only interrupts the rhythm of reading, but also makes students gradually lose the ability to solve problems independently,

forming an excessive dependence on reference books.

Lack of logical analysis and reasoning ability: In the test of reasoning and judgment questions, students generally have a low scoring rate. Most students can only understand the superficial information of the article, but can not analyze and infer the author's implicit intention and the logical relationship between paragraphs. Reading stays at the level of "word recognition" rather than "understanding".

3.4. Low interest in reading and lack of internal drive

Improper selection of materials: Some students think that reading materials are boring (for example, the content of textbooks is not relevant to life). Or the difficulty is too high (beyond their ability), resulting in the lack of fun in the reading process, and it is difficult to generate interest. However, the materials recommended by teachers sometimes fail to take into account students' age characteristics and interests, which further reduces students' willingness to read.

Lack of successful experience: Due to weak foundation and improper methods, students frequently encounter difficulties in reading, and it is difficult to obtain a sense of achievement. Long-term frustration makes students fear English reading, even regard it as a burden, forming "the more they fear reading, the worse they read." The vicious circle of "more bad reading, more afraid of reading".

The goal is not clear: Most students regard reading as the task of "completing homework" or "coping with exams". It is not a way to actively acquire knowledge and broaden our horizons. Lack of internal motivation leads to perfunctory attitude when reading, and it is difficult to invest enough energy and enthusiasm.

3.5. Insufficient support for teaching and environment and weak external support

Teaching methods need to be optimized: In the classroom, some reading teaching focuses too much on vocabulary and grammar explanation. Neglecting the systematic instruction and training of reading strategies; Lack of attention to students at different levels makes it difficult to teach students in accordance with their aptitude, resulting in students with poor foundation failing to keep up. Students with good foundation lack room for improvement.

Weak family reading atmosphere: More than 60% of the students said that there was a lack of English reading environment at home. Parents do not pay enough attention to English reading, and seldom take the initiative to buy English reading materials or accompany their children to read. The lack of family support makes it difficult for students to obtain sustained reading motivation and resources after class.

Insufficient utilization of reading resources: Although there is an English book corner in the school, the variety and quantity of reading materials are limited. It can not be updated in time according to the level and interest of junior one students. Students have a low level of understanding and utilization of existing resources, and lack con-

venient and appropriate access to reading materials.

4. Measures and Suggestions

In view of the above reasons, combined with the cognitive characteristics and English learning rules of junior one students, the following targeted improvement strategies are put forward:

4.1. Consolidate the language foundation and lay a solid foundation for reading

4.1.1. strengthen vocabulary teaching and improve accumulation efficiency

The "situational + multi-dimensional" vocabulary teaching method is adopted, which integrates vocabulary into the context of the text, life scenes or short dialogues. Help students understand the meaning and usage through pictures, actions and examples, so as to avoid memorizing words in isolation. For example, when explaining "delicious", combine "The cake tastes delicious. With cake pictures, students can intuitively feel the meaning of the words. Besides, the teacher should teach scientific memory methods, like introducing the root affix method (such as "un-" for negation, "-tion" for nouns), associative memory method (such as "'Sun" "moon" "star" associative memory), high-frequency repetition method (weekly repetition and consolidation through classroom games, dictation, sentence making, etc.) Learn vocabulary) to help students improve their memory efficiency. Then, it is important to establish a "reading book of new words" so as to encourage students to record the high-frequency super-syllabus words they encounter in reading, and mark the contextual meaning and usage. Arrange 10 minutes of group sharing every week to promote the active accumulation and use of vocabulary.

4.1.2. Simplify grammar explanation and pay attention to practical understanding

The model of "sentence pattern driving grammar" is adopted, which integrates abstract grammar rules into concrete sentence patterns. Through the steps of "example sentence perception-law summary-imitation and application", students can understand grammar in practice. For example, to explain the simple past tense, first present "He played football yesterday." Students are guided to discover the rule of "past tense of verbs", and then practice making sentences by replacing verbs. And it is helpful to focus on the core grammar points: the tenses (simple present tense, simple past tense) and sentence patterns (subject-predicate-object, Th.Ere be), etc., to reduce the explanation of complex terms. Use "time markers" (such as "often" corresponding to the simple present tense and "yesterday" corresponding to the simple past tense) to help students make quick judgments. And application. Besides, the teacher can also design "Long Sentence Disassembly" training and select the long

and difficult sentences in the text. Guide students to use the steps of "find the predicate verb-draw the trunk-complement" to disassemble (such as "The girl who is wearing a red dress is my sister.") "Is disassembled into" The girl is my sister. She is wearing a red dress. " It reduces the difficulty of understanding.

4.2. Cultivate good habits and build reading rhythm

4.2.1. Make a "ladder" reading plan to ensure the length of reading

Start with "short cycle and low goal": students are required to read English for 15 minutes every day (such as before going to bed or after class). Accumulate no less than 1 hour per week and gradually extend to 20-30 minutes per day. Teachers check the completion through the "Reading Card Form" every week, and reward the persisters with points (which can be exchanged for small stationery).

Distinguish between "task reading" and "free reading": divide the reading time into two parts. One part is used to complete the reading tasks of textbooks or exercise books assigned by teachers, and the other part is used for self-selected simple reading materials. Give consideration to both learning objectives and interest cultivation.

4.2.2. Implement the closed-loop of "preview-classroom-review"

First, provide clear preview requirements: Before reading class, assign the preview task of "3 minutes of quick browsing + marking 3 new words + guessing the main idea of the article". At the beginning of the class, it takes 2 minutes to spot check, so that students can enter the study with questions.

Second, intensive review after class: Students are required to "summarize the main idea in three sentences" or "draw a mind map to sort out the structure" after reading. Teachers randomly check and feedback to help students consolidate their reading gains.

Third, introduce "Text Structure Map": Instruct students to pay attention to "beginning (main idea)-middle (details)-end (summary)" when reading. Use symbols (such as " $\triangle$ " to mark the main sentence, " $\rightarrow$ " to mark the logical relationship) to mark the framework of the article. Weaken excessive attention to individual words.

4.3. Teaching reading strategies to improve reading efficiency

4.3.1. Systematic training of basic reading methods

The teacher should help students improve the ability to guess words and reduce the dependence on reference books. Meanwhile, it is useful to summarize "guessing-word clues". To summarize the common guessing-word basis of the context, such as synonymous substitution ("She is clever, that is to say, smart." "Smart" is synonymous with "clever"), causality ("It rained heavily, so the ground is wet." "In" may be infer to be "substantially" by "ground is wet"), by way of example (" I like fruits, such as apples," "Fruits" in "bananas and oranges." Can be understood through

examples) and so on, combined with examples to explain and let students practice in groups.

4.3.2. Strengthen logical analysis and reasoning ability

Design the discussion of "reasoning clues": select the passages containing implicit information, and ask the students to use "according to the sentences in the text". Infer that the sentence pattern of "× ×" shares the reasoning process (for example, from "He looked at his watch and ran to the bus stop." "He may have to catch a bus"), the teacher guides the students to pay attention to the relevance of details and conclusions. Then we can carry out "paragraph cohesion" training: give out the paragraphs out of order. Let students rearrange according to logical relationship (such as chronological order, causal relationship) and understand the internal relationship between paragraphs.

4.4. Stimulate interest in reading and enhance internal drive

4.4.1. Optimize the selection of reading materials

First, we can introduce "life-oriented themes": select materials related to students' life. Such as campus activity notices, star interviews, animated clips and lines, to enhance the intimacy of reading. For example, when learning the theme of "festivals", the English invitation letter of "Halloween Party Invitation" is introduced. Let students connect with reality in reading.

Second, it is a good way to share "Reading Stories". Some people improve their writing ability by reading English novels and others improve their writing ability by reading English novels through videos or teachers. Real cases such as "Instructions to Solve Life Problems" make students realize the practical value of reading, not just for examinations.

4.5. optimize external support and create a reading atmosphere

4.5.1. Improve teaching methods and implement individualized teaching

The first thing it to strengthen home-school coordination and strengthen family atmosphere. Issue "Family Reading Guide": explain the importance of English reading to parents and provide simple and feasible suggestions. Such as watching English animation with children for 10 minutes a week, discussing the plot and setting up an English corner at home to put simple reading materials.

Besides, we can also enrich reading resources and improving utilization efficiency. Like, upgrade the "English Book Corner": add comic books, sticker books, audio books and other interesting materials. According to the classification of difficulty and the marking of suitable level, the management of student volunteers is arranged. Students are encouraged to borrow and fill out a reading feedback card.

(record favorites).

5. Conclusion

The improvement of English reading ability of junior one students is a systematic project. It needs to work together from the aspects of foundation consolidation, habit cultivation, strategy guidance, interest stimulation and environmental optimization. Through targeted teaching improvement and home-school cooperation, students can gradually overcome reading barriers. Establishing a virtuous circle of "being able to read, being able to read, and loving to read" can not only improve the performance of English subjects. It can lay a solid foundation for their lifelong learning and cross-cultural communication ability. Teachers should continue to pay attention to students' reading performance and adjust their strategies in time so that English reading can truly become a driving force for students' growth.

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