Education and Social Work
ISSN Print: 3079-515X
ISSN Online: 3079-5168
https://doi.org/10.63313/ESW.9110

A Study on Junior High School English Reading Teaching Using the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning

Run He
[1]China West Normal University, School of Foreign Language, Nan Chong, 637000, China
Email: 2733291893@qq.com

How to cite this paper: He, R. (2026). A Study on Junior High School English Reading Teaching Using the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning. *Education and Social Work*, 3(3), 21-32. ISSN Print: 3079-515X; ISSN Online: 3079-5168.
https://doi.org/10.63313/ESW.9110
Published: 2026-03-04

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Erytis Publishing Limited.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
CC BY 4.0

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to deeply explore the current situation of junior high school English reading teaching under the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning, and to analyze existing problems and their causes. This study identifies key issues in current teaching practices and explores feasible solutions. As an emerging approach to English teaching, Activity-Based Approach to English Learning plays a positive role in promoting junior high school English reading instruction and significantly improves the efficiency of reading teaching. However, various problems still exist in its practical application, making research on reading strategies based on this approach highly significant. The study finds that there are multiple problems in junior high school English reading teaching based on the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning, which are concentrated at both the teacher and student levels. These include teachers' insufficient in-depth study of textbooks, students' lack of interest in reading, and the uneven quality of the textbooks themselves. In response to these issues, this paper proposes reading teaching strategies based on the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning, aiming to improve the efficiency and quality of junior high school English reading instruction, promote innovation in traditional teaching methods, and meet the requirements of English curriculum standards.

Keywords

Junior high school English reading; Activity-Based Approach to English Learning; Teaching strategies; Teaching Efficiency; Teaching Problems

1. Introduction

Guided by the *2017 English Language Curriculum Standards for General Senior Secondary Schools*, the curriculum centers on integrating six elements. English core competence emphasizes the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning (ABA), which takes activities as the foundation for language learning to foster critical thinking, cultural awareness and learning abilities [1]. Wang & Hu (2017) note ABA

activities should be comprehensive, relevant and practical to enhance students' core competences [2].

(Zhou, 2023) said that ABA imposes new demands on junior high English teachers: integrating language development with skills, guiding students to apply language in authentic contexts, abiding by language use rules, and meticulously designing differentiated activities [3].

At the same time, Mei Deming (2024) said that the ABA is a learning philosophy for English curricula that aims to develop students' core competencies. Centered on learning and student-oriented, it positions teachers as guides, utilizing the fundamental activities of "learning-comprehension, application-practice, and transfer-innovation" grounded in learning objectives and pragmatic contexts as its primary vehicles [4]. This approach posits that language learning inherently possesses interactive and developmental characteristics, emphasizing the organic integration of cognitive engagement, practical implementation, and creative adaptation throughout the educational process.

Reading instruction is key in junior high English, but faces problems like superficial teacher text understanding, inconsistent evaluation, and low student interest—issues ABA can address.

Research purpose is to explore the ABA application in junior high English reading classes, identify problems, propose solutions to improve students' reading interest, performance and provide teachers with theoretical and practical guidance.

2. Core Concept

2.1. Activity-Based Approach to English Learning

The implementation of the *English Language Curriculum Standards for General Senior Secondary Schools (2017 Edition)* especially the basic concept of "practicing ABA and focusing on improving students' ability to learn and use English" emphasizes that teachers should design comprehensive, relevant, and practical learning activities [1].

Wang Qiang (2018) argues that English, as an extremely important language course in the education system, should promote the holistic development of students' cultural literacy through extensive reading activities and the integration of diverse regional humanities and disciplinary knowledge. This aligns with the core competencies emphasized in the new curriculum standards [5].

Wang Qiang (2022) pointed out in the article "English Learning Activity Approach – China's Proposition and Practical Solutions for Basic Foreign Language Education" that the ABA is a teaching philosophy and methodology that emphasizes students' integrated development in language, culture, thinking, and learning ability [6].

2.2. Reading Teaching in Junior High School

Based on current research, there has not been a clear definition of English reading

instruction in junior high schools. However, the discussions of related scholars on English reading teaching can be summarized from the relevant studies. These studies provide important references for the development of junior high school English reading teaching and the further development of theoretical research. Professor Wang Qiang &Hu Yalin (2017) suggests that reading teaching is aims to develop students' reading literacy, which includes reading ability and reading habits [2].

3. Theoretical Foundations

3.1. Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory was first proposed by the Swiss child psychologist Jean Piaget. Piaget, Jean (1978) defined it as a theory of knowledge and learning that emphasizes the construction of new knowledge based on the learner's pre-existing knowledge or experience, thereby enhancing the learner's understanding and internalization of new knowledge [7]. The core idea of constructivism is that knowledge is not passively accepted by students or acquired through repetition and reinforcement but is actively constructed by learners in meaningful contexts. At the same time, Piaget believed that knowledge originates from students' experiences and that students' experiences are a major factor in learning.

Vygotsky, a key figure in sociocultural constructivism, expanded this theory by introducing the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the gap between what a learner can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with guidance from more knowledgeable others. This framework highlights the critical role of social interaction and scaffolding in learning.

Briefly, Constructivism is a theory that emphasizes learner initiative and the constructive nature of knowledge and has had a significant impact on the field of education and learning. It promotes a student-centered approach to teaching and learning and stresses the importance of contextual learning and social interaction. By creating authentic situations and promoting collaboration among students, constructivism helps students to better understand and apply knowledge.

3.2. Cognitivist Theory

Cognitivism is a theory of pedagogy and psychology that emerged in the mid-twentieth century and emphasizes the internal psychological mechanisms involved in human thinking and learning, particularly the processes of processing, storing and extracting knowledge. Schoolar Wang Qiang (2006) stated cognitivism views learning as an active process of constructing meaning within the student, requiring the student to think rather than the student to engage in simple repetition and reinforcement [8]. At the same time, cognitivism believes that knowledge is stored in the human brain in a structured form. These structures are usually in the form of schemas or cognitive maps. Schemas are the basic units of cognitive

structures used to interpret and understand information. Cognitive maps, on the other hand, are more advanced and complex knowledge structures used to represent the relationships between various pieces of information. Moore (2013) argues that cognitivism emphasizes the active and constructive nature of the learner, who is not a passive recipient of information, but rather constructs information through his or her own prior experience, reflection, and analysis, and integrates and applies the new knowledge to his or her own existing knowledge structures [9].

4. Problems Using ABA in Junior High School Reading Teaching

There are numerous problems in the current junior high school English reading teaching under the guidance of the ABA, and at the same time the reasons for them are more varied, mainly coming from both the students and the teachers. Next, the author will carefully analyze the current problems in reading teaching.

4.1. Simplistic of Activity Design

Homogenization in junior high English reading activities refers to teachers using inflexible, simple methods. For example, introductory tasks are often simplistic and repetitive, reducing student interest and harming reading proficiency, skill development, and learning outcomes. This manifests in two aspects: First, teaching methods are homogeneous, primarily lecture-based. Teachers explain vocabulary, grammar, and text structure, while students remain passive recipients with few active participation opportunities. Secondly, activities are singular and lack interactivity. Students are isolated and passive, with reduced cooperation chances, hindering creative thinking, reading skills, and collaborative ability.

4.2. Lack of Transfer and Innovation Competence

The insufficiency of students' transfer innovation ability in junior high school English reading teaching under the ABA is reflected in various aspects. On the one hand, students in the reading activities have more shallow understanding of the reading text, without deep thinking, just a simple retelling of the text or role-playing, and it is difficult to produce their own ideas. On the other hand, it is difficult for students to transfer the newly learnt knowledge and skills to new contexts.

4.3. Fragmented Teaching Evaluation

In English teaching, evaluation is categorized as either process or summative. However, in practice, teachers often lack consistent evaluation due to heavy workloads. This failure to integrate evaluation throughout the learning process is manifested in two ways. Firstly, evaluation is often misaligned with teaching activities, as it is not incorporated during activity design. Secondly, evaluation

methods are homogeneous and rigid. Teachers tend to rely on fixed criteria, focusing primarily on knowledge retention and performance classification.

4.4. Unmeasurable Teaching Objectives

In junior high school English reading teaching, the teaching objectives are not expressed in concrete terms and lack the specificity and practicability required. Therefore, it is difficult for teachers to measure the degree of achievement of teaching objectives and the results of teaching. This, in turn, has a negative impact on students' comprehension and overall learning outcomes. Moreover, the teaching objectives adopted by teachers are more general, and it is difficult to reflect students' differences in the teaching objectives. Student-centered teaching objectives can promote students' learning in actual teaching and have a positive impact on teachers' teaching.

4.5. Superficial Text Interpretation

In junior high English reading instruction, teachers should guide students through text-based and extended activities across three stages: comprehension, practice, and innovation. However, many teachers lack deep text analysis, relying instead on a traditional bottom-up approach—teaching vocabulary, grammar, and sentences in isolation. This leads to superficial engagement and limited conceptual input.

Moreover, texts are often broken into separate parts—such as phonics, grammar, and writing—rather than taught as a coherent whole. This fragmented method hinders students' understanding of the text's internal structure and logical flow.

5. Causes Analysis

The problems of junior high school English reading teaching based on ABA are multifaceted and the reasons behind them are diverse. Ultimately, the reasons come from two aspects: teachers and students. The following sections will analyze these issues in detail, starting with student heterogeneity.

5.1. Students Heterogeneity

In middle school English reading instruction, significant individual differences among students pose a key challenge. These variations are evident in several areas.

First, students differ in physiological traits, developmental pace, and cognitive abilities at various learning stages.

Second, cognitive styles vary. Extroverted students may thrive in interactive settings, while introverted ones often prefer independent work. Reflective learners process texts carefully, whereas impulsive readers may respond quickly but with less depth.

Third, students' interest in English and attitudes toward teachers strongly influence engagement and performance in reading.

Finally, motivation plays a crucial role: intrinsically motivated learners generally

achieve better outcomes than those who study merely to pass exams or complete assignments.

5.2. Teachers Competency Gaps

Observations indicate that variations in teachers' professionalism significantly contribute to current issues in English reading instruction.

Firstly, many teachers have limited instructional design abilities and resist emerging pedagogies. They often teach texts mechanically without considering students' actual receptive or learning differences, leading to fragmented lessons that hinder knowledge absorption.

Secondly, some teachers maintain a teacher-centered approach, failing to shift to student-centered learning, which stifles creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative skills.

Thirdly, professional growth among some teachers is slow. Teaching requires continuous development, yet adherence to traditional methods—while neglecting modern technology and innovative strategies—impedes students' reading progress.

Lastly, inadequate mastery of modern information technology is problematic. While technology integration can offer personalized resources and boost engagement, many teachers have not effectively incorporated it into teaching practice.

5.3. Difficulties in Cultivating Critical Thinking

Based on the ABA in junior high school of reading, influenced by the traditional teaching mode and teaching methods, the concept of exam-centeredness is deeply rooted in people's hearts. Teachers provide lectures on the key points of the examination, such as phonetics, grammar, and vocabulary, to fulfill the teaching tasks, neglecting the development of reading skills and reading ability in reading teaching for students, and restricting the development of students' thinking ability.

The second point is that some schools are difficult to provide students with diversified teaching texts and English reading materials, which are insufficient to meet the needs of students in developing creative thinking skills. Students lack interest in single teaching materials, which affects their learning interest and motivation, and affects their learning outcomes.

5.4. One-Sided Interpretation of Discourse

In ABA reading classes, teachers' one-sided interpretation of discourse is a notable issue. First, some teachers focus narrowly on thematic or emotional elements, overlooking internal logic and deeper meaning, or emphasize surface information at the expense of context and deeper comprehension. Second, when guiding students through learning stages—understanding, practice, and innovation—teachers often fail to center on students, encourage out-of-box thinking, or explore problems and logic beyond the text. Instead, they may simply explain content briefly or conduct

one-off activities like role-playing, which undermines teaching effectiveness. Overall, various problems persist in ABA reading teaching, with multiple contributing causes.

6. Optimization Strategies for the ABA

Although there are many problems in reading teaching at present, junior high school English reading teaching based on the ABA help reduce teachers' instructional pressure while improving students' learning efficiency and interest. The following improvement strategies based on ABA are advocated.

6.1. Design Diversified Teaching Activities

In ABA English reading classes, reading activities are essential and are categorized into three types: Learning and Understanding, Application and Practice, and Transfer and Innovation.

Learning and Understanding Activities: teachers design discourse-based activities to develop students' skills in perception, information acquisition, and knowledge integration. This involves creating authentic thematic scenarios to activate prior knowledge, providing relevant linguistic and cultural background, and posing problems for students to solve. Key activities include predicting content from titles or images, perceiving phonology and vocabulary, answering text-based questions through structured questioning, and finally summarizing main ideas to form new knowledge structures.

Application and Practice Activities: this phase involves deeper discourse engagement through output activities. These include: Describing and Interpreting: Retelling texts or role-playing to consolidate understanding. Analyzing and Judging: Discussing the discourse to explore its deeper logic and meaning. Internalizing and Applying: Using exercises like quizzes or games to apply new language knowledge in similar contexts, with activities tailored to student levels.

Transfer and Innovation Activities: teachers guide students to go beyond the text through reasoning, critique, and creation. Reasoning and Arguing: Analyzing the author's intent and stance via Q&A sessions. Criticizing and Evaluating: Critiquing attitudes in the text to form value judgments. Imagining and Creating: Applying learned knowledge to new, real-world situations to develop problem-solving skills.

6.2. Situated Learning Environment Construction

Modern information technology can break through the limitations of time and space to provide students with diversified and personalized teaching resources to meet the individual differences of students. Secondly, teachers can use modern information technology to assist in teaching and create the appropriate situation for students, and make reading teaching more vivid and engaging, enabling them to better understand the content of the article.

In actual reading teaching, students' background knowledge and existing knowledge and experience play a crucial role. Therefore, teachers can use their own experience and students' experiences as teaching materials to develop personalized resources, thereby deepening students' understanding and internalization of the text through close integration with real life.

6.3. Integration of Teaching and Evaluation

Formative assessment, which is based on information collected in the classroom during the teaching process for the purposes of improving teaching and learning. As such, it is also termed classroom assessment.

For students, process evaluation positively impacts learning effectiveness and efficiency. By the cultivation of students' thinking ability and innovation ability, it can promote the overall development of students. and secondly, in practice, process evaluation assesses students' comprehensive growth while also motivating their learning.

For teachers, process evaluation can provide teachers with timely feedback on teaching, diagnosing teaching problems, and adjust teaching strategies and methods in a timely manner.

What's more, strengthening Home-School cooperation in junior high school English reading teaching based on the Activity-Based Approach to English Learning plays a significant role in promoting reading teaching. Home-school cooperation can provide a good learning environment for students, and parents and teachers work together to develop good learning habits for students. At the same time, home-school cooperation can strengthen the contact between parents and schools, communicate students' reading learning situation in time, and jointly promote the overall development of students.

6.4. Student-Centered Differentiated Teaching

Under the guidance of the ABA, it needs to act out the student-centered differentiated teaching for teachers, because it will guide teachers to illustrate the differences between students to implement various to meet the diverse needs for students.

Based on the lack of students' interest in learning, cooperative group learning can be used to enhance students' interest in learning. Group cooperative learning is conducive to the development of students' cooperation and communication skills. To a certain extent, it can stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in learning and improve learning efficiency.

In actual junior high school English reading teaching, under the guidance of ABA, teachers can better use teaching activities to promote students' learning. To address the current problems in reading teaching, reading teaching based on ABA can adopt a tiered teaching method to meet students' individual needs and better develop

student-centered reading teaching.

Tiered instruction meets the learning needs of diverse students. Because there are differences between groups of students and individual students in terms of physical, mental, and learning abilities and learning styles, instruction needs to be tailored to meet the needs of each student. Some students are faster learners and some are slower learners, and tiered teaching can categorize students into diverse levels and give different teaching activities and tasks to students at distinct levels. Teachers can give students with good grades some tasks or activities that require logical thinking skills, while students with poor grades can be guided to pay attention to language knowledge, such as phonetics, grammar, and vocabulary, thereby improving their interest in reading and their reading ability.

6.5. Cultivation of Critical Thinking

Teachers can promote the development of students' thinking skills through pre-class prediction and discussion activities as well as post-class reflection and evaluation mechanisms.

Pre-lesson's prediction and discussion activities can be effective in stimulating students' critical thinking and enhancing the quality of their thinking and logical thinking. Pre-lecture predictions can guide students in predicting the topic or content of an article through background information and headings. To a certain extent, this kind of prediction can stimulate students' interest in reading and enthusiasm for learning.

Secondly, discussion activities can make students think out of the box and think about the same problem from multiple perspectives, to broaden their horizons and develop the ability of dialectical thinking. Through pre-class prediction and discussion activities, students can strengthen their independent learning ability and transform from passive knowledge receivers to active learners. This transformation can be applied to the learning of other subjects and lesson types, thus promoting students' development and improving their critical thinking ability.

In the while-class stage, since students have unique needs and learning styles in the classroom, they require different questions based on the context. In the actual classroom teaching, layered teaching methods and questioning methods can be adopted to stimulate students' interest in learning and existing knowledge, thereby improving their participation and enhancing the teaching effectiveness of the classroom. By using layered questions and interactive activities, such as debate and role-playing, students can actively participate in the class and think actively in the class to improve their critical thinking.

Post-class reflection and evaluation play a vital role in enhancing students' critical thinking skills. In the post-lesson reflection stage, students need to reflect on their learning process and assess whether their logic and learning efficiency are sound and logical. Through this stage, students can have a more comprehensive

understanding of their own learning and thus improve their critical thinking skills.

Secondly, in this process, students can develop their metacognitive skills. By planning, monitoring, and regulating their own learning, students can positively adjust their attitudes and learning methods. By tracing the reasons why learning is not up to scratch, students can strengthen their independent thinking and problem-solving skills.

What's more, the post-course evaluation mechanism can promote students' evaluation of their own learning, which can be done through self-assessment and peer assessment. Teachers can establish diversified evaluation standards and mechanisms to promote students' self-evaluation, and they can also adopt portfolio assessment mechanisms to record students' progress, to stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning, recognize their own shortcomings and gaps, and thus strengthen the cultivation of their own learning and thinking skills.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, the author studied the problems existing in current junior high school English reading teaching, analyzed their causes and proposed teaching strategies aligned with the ABA. The research analyzed existing reading instruction practices, leading to the following conclusions.

There are many problems and reasons in current middle school English reading teaching, mainly focused on teachers, students and textbooks.

For the problems, firstly, the main problem is the simplification of the activity design. Secondly, students lack the competence of transfer and innovation. Thirdly, the fragmented teaching evaluation system hinders the participation of students. Fourthly, the unmeasurable teaching objectives cannot foster reading efficiency for students. Lastly, the superficial text interpretation for teachers hinders the reading teaching seriously.

On the other hand, for these reasons, students have diverse learning needs, styles, and competence so that teachers need to take the students' heterogeneity into account. What's more, teachers also need to pay more attention to their competent gaps in reading teaching. Moreover, students have some difficulties in cultivating critical thinking, they concentrate on the superficial texts rather than the connotations of the reading texts. Finally, teachers focus on the one-sided interpretation of the discourse.

At the same time, the author also studied the teaching strategy optimizations in this paper based on the ABA from the five dimensions. Firstly, design diversified teaching activities. Secondly, by constructing a situated learning environment and contexts for students. What's more, integrate teaching and evaluation for students to build their confidence and interest. Moreover, implementing the student-centered differentiated teaching plays a crucial role in reading teaching. Lastly, teaching needs to cultivate critical thinking for students from diverse activities in the

different teaching stages.

Overall, reading teaching based on the ABA can effectively improve students' reading teaching effectiveness and teachers' teaching efficiency.

In reading discourse, teachers should take the theme as the guide, rely on the discourse, integrate reading teaching content, guide students to delve into the discourse, and finally go beyond the discourse, to help students perceive language knowledge and cultivate cultural awareness in real learning contexts.

At the same time, putting students at the center, respecting their subject status, and placing them at the forefront of the classroom. Teachers should stimulate students' interest in learning and enhance their reading and learning efficiency by designing various interesting teaching activities that meet their learning abilities.

These reading inspirations are conducive to promoting teachers to actively apply new teaching methods and teaching concepts, thereby promoting the development of students' English subject literacy.

All in all, the reading teaching based on the ABA can foster the learning interest and build up the confidence for students and cultivate the awareness for teachers to act out various activities in the diverse teaching stages to improve the teaching efficiency in junior high school.

At present, relevant research focuses on theoretical research, and in the future, more investigation and empirical research can be conducted to enhance practical support for the application and promotion of the ABA through accurate experimental data. Although ABA is a new emerged teaching philosophy, lacking the practical usage and implementation in the school. the author hope that in the future there can provide more data and survey to improve the use of the ABA.

References

[1] Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. (2018). English curriculum standards for senior high schools (2017 edition). People's Education Press.

[2] Wang, Q., & Hu, Y. (2017). A study on English subject competence and its performance. Journal of Education Studies, (2), 61–70.

[3] Zhou, Q. (2023). A survey on the application of the view of English learning activities in junior high school English reading teaching [Master's thesis, South-Central Minzu University].

[4] Mei, D. (2024). English learning and the view of English learning activities oriented toward core competency development. Curriculum, Teaching Material and Method, 44(8), 86–90 & 98.

[5] Wang, Q. (2018). An analysis of the six major changes in the English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition). Foreign Language Education in China, 11(2), 11–19.

[6] Wang, Q. (2022). The Activity View of English Learning: A Chinese proposition and practical approach for basic foreign language education. Retrieved October 10, 2024, from https://www.sohu.com/a/539144269_650698.

[7] Piaget, Jean. (1978). Behavior and evolution (1st American ed.) [M]. New York: Pantheon Books.

[8] Wang, Q. (2006). A course in English language teaching (2nd ed.). Higher Education

Press.

[9] Moore, J. (2013). Tutorial: Cognitive Psychology as a Radical Behaviorist Views It. Psychol Rec 63, 667–680.