



## Application of Reading Aloud in Middle School Oral English Teaching

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Received 11 April 2021; accepted 6 June 2021

Published online 26 June 2021

### Abstract

As is known, listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four basic language skills. Reading includes reading aloud and silent reading. Since the 1990s, with the popularity of Communicative Teaching Method, schools emphasize the cultivation of language application and communicative ability more and people pay less attention to reading aloud. Gradually students don't think reading aloud is important any more. However, reading aloud is not only the starting point in English learning but also the foundation of mastering the target language. Ignoring the teaching of reading aloud exacerbates the problem of the "dumb-Chinese English". Reading English aloud is very meaningful in oral English and it is also one of the effective ways to improve students' English language ability. This paper focuses on how to effectively apply reading aloud in oral English teaching from the following aspects: the relation between English reading aloud and language sense, the negative impact of ignoring reading aloud, the basic methods and the application of the skills in reading aloud.

**Key words:** Reading aloud; Oral English teaching; English teaching method

Wei, H. M., & Liu, Z. L. (2021). Application of Reading Aloud in Middle School Oral English Teaching. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 22(3), 60-66. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/12195>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12195>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In middle school English teaching, some scholars are holding such a view: English learning activity should follow the law of language learning that paying less emphasis to listening and speaking than reading and writing. However, in the actual class teaching, especially due to much teaching task, the phenomenon of neglecting reading English aloud appears. On the other hand, some students seldom read English aloud, which leads to the problem of reading difficulty, especially in rural middle schools in China. Various reasons bring about countless obstacles, influencing students' improvement of spoken English.

The situation of reading English aloud as an oral English teaching method in China is unsatisfactory. Many experts and scholars have showed their concerns. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are four basic language skills. In the past, reading aloud was considered as an effective way to learn to speak English as well as Chinese in primary and middle schools. However, with the development of English teaching and learning reform, volumes of new teaching patterns, taking communicative method for example, have taken the place of reading aloud in oral English learning. Teachers and students are forced to do more and more written tests or grammar exercises to face Monthly exam, Mid-term exam and Final exam. Reading aloud has been neglected since teachers have got tougher tasks on improving students' test scores which rely much on grammar or other silent reading skills, while students have no systematic instructions on reading aloud. Moreover, there are few examinations on reading aloud except the High School Entrance examination in Junior Three and the College Entrance Examination.

Many Chinese EFL teachers and learners believe that reading aloud is an effective way to enhance the language proficiency based on the effect of language sense and cognitive theory. This paper aims to examine the effects of reading aloud in English teaching instruction in oral English teaching and analyze the application of reading

aloud instruction in oral English teaching, expecting to arouse middle school English teachers' reconsideration of reading English aloud in oral English teaching, which is the traditional teaching and learning method for English native speakers.

## 2. SIGNIFICANCE OF READING ALOUD

Reading aloud is a creative activity which transfers words into vocal language. It is a reading method and can be called oral reading, which has been widely used in language learning in both native and foreign languages. By reading aloud, readers express emotional thoughts in the linguistic materials by using some reading skills, such as stress, rhythm and tone. When reading aloud, it means reading out the words, sentences or passages aloud and clearly, with eyes focusing on reading materials.

American educational psychologist Robert Mills Gagne (1987, p.213) suggests that learning process is a process of gradual accumulation and language learning should be strengthened more to accumulation. Reading English is not only one of the effective methods of input and accumulation, but also one of the important means to develop students' language sense. *The New Chinese Curriculum Standards* (2011) clearly states: to enable students to read adequately, to perceive the whole passage while reading, to comprehend the content in reading and to foster language sense in reading. Through reading process, students can not only feel the language in works, appreciate the works' momentum, but also explore the inherent meaning and emotion within the language. Reading is the process of language imitation and migration. A Chinese saying: "After reading up three hundred poems of Tang Dynasty, you can at least intone poems even you cannot write them" fully illustrates this truth. Similarly, if learners read more English articles and imitate the voice and intonation of the language, consequently, the fluency, rhythm, harmony can be formed naturally.

When reading aloud, the reader formulates the phonetic plan and converts it into vocal sound after the learner comprehends the text. Reading aloud has direct implications for understanding the sentence semantics, improve discourse comprehension. However, a considerable number of English learners despise reading, and thus lack the concept of the sense group, coupled with wrong pronunciation, which not only leads to their own stammer, but also the listener's misunderstanding. This increases the communication difficulties. In addition, on the basis of a large number of readings, English learners can form a good language sense. Language sense is an integrated language sensory ability which develops from a long term practice in associating certain language and culture with multi-angles. Language sense is very conducive to further language learning and communication.

Chinese phonetics research pioneer, Mr. Zhao Yuanren (Wen, 2001, p.24) said: "language itself, the texture of the language is the pronunciation. If the pronunciation is wrong, the grammar is not right, and the vocabulary not right. He emphasizes the importance of the phonetics in learning languages. English learning is vocal language learning, and then there is no doubt that reading aloud is indispensable. It is especially important for beginners to lay a good language base by practicing reading correct pronunciation, stress and sentence intonation. The pronunciation also relies on the flexible use of the sounding organs. Reading aloud does not only practice the flexibility of lip and tongue, but also train the sensitivity of listening and distinguishing various sounds.

Swain (1980, p.43) puts forward "comprehensible output hypothesis", which he thinks that output can cause learners' noticing of the language problem; through output, one can do hypothesis testing on the syntactic structure and language features of generated target language; output has a metalinguistic function; output promotes students' developing fluency and automaticity, and output enables students to transform declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge. Speaking is a vital form of language output. Students' speaking process is the transformation from internalization of language knowledge to the externalization of language skills. This transition process is under consciousness or unconsciousness "monitor", which tests internal language knowledge and application. In speaking process, students not merely use vocabulary and grammar rules to generate syntactic structure, but also perceive and inspect generated corpus, imitate to apply the corpus they have known. Students will unconsciously choose the correct syntax rules, beautiful words, use a variety of expressions, rhetorical devices, and apply various language skills. In this process, students tangibly or intangibly internalize learning vocabularies, grammar rules and other declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge, which has laid a solid foundation to improve their ability to use language and foster language sense, which is vital for oral English learning.

In order to train English language sense by reading aloud, a great deal of input language practice is indispensable. Much reading aloud is a way to increase students' exposure to English language materials, receive information and invigorate thinking and increase intelligence. It is a good way to improve comprehension ability and develop English language sense.

How can reading aloud training improve the quality of students' language competence?

Firstly, reading aloud training helps to stimulate and develop students' interest in speaking English, which is the key factor of learning a language well. Through various types of reading aloud activities, students can develop their interest of speaking English aloud. Interest can motivate students to release their full potential and improve learning efficiency, resulting in a huge impetus

to help students build self-confidence, develop good study habits and independent study ability. Reading aloud skillfully with rich feelings makes people enjoy the beauty of discourse since the original theme, emotion, artistic style and content are powerfully reflected through reading aloud. Listening and thinking ability are cultivated during reading aloud, which then improve students' enthusiasm of learning oral English, and enhance students' motivation of learning oral English.

Secondly, reading aloud enhances the proficiency of listening and writing English, which promotes oral English learning. If the English listener cannot distinguish certain features of English such as homophones, nearly syllable words, tonal and blasting, it will undisputedly affect the listeners' comprehension and understanding of the listening material. With quantitative of reading aloud, the acquisition of vocabulary, phrases, sentence structure and the comprehension of the article will securely stored in the mind. When English learners encounter the listening situation in the listening exercises or real life, they will reproduce quickly to extract useful information in mind to comprehend what they heard. Similarly, they will be able to output correct English words, phrases and syntax with the English speech habits when they are writing. Therefore, English listening and writing can be well served by reading English aloud. And oral English will improve accordingly.

Thirdly, reading aloud training helps students form a good pronunciation, intonation, stress, pause and weakening, which is helpful for English speaking ability. Many common sentences will unconsciously blurt out with "English thinking logic" after students reading aloud texts repeatedly. Reading aloud the same section of certain article will be bound to enhance the students' memorization. Reading aloud training is to create an English atmosphere by the learners themselves. With perseverance, English learners' oral English will improve a lot. Reading aloud training helps students memorize words, phrases which is crucial in oral English learning process. Reading aloud process goes through: reading words accurately --- then transmitted through the optic nerve to the brain nerve center --- brain nerve center direct articulator system to articulate. With this coherent, systematic and uninterrupted memorizing in reading, the visual ability to accurately capture word, accurate visual nerve conduction capacity, and regulatory capacity of the human brain pronunciation system are highly developed and improved.

Last but not least, reading aloud can consolidate learned knowledge as the text is consist of words, phrases and sentences involving pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, which demands comprehension of certain discourse. Reading aloud repeatedly helps students master the language. For instance, if students read these sentences "It is time to get to school. I want to get to school early today" aloud repeatedly, students will remember the sentential form "It' is time to do sth." and the usage of the verb phrase "want to do sth.", but not recite them

mechanically. Therefore, students can speak out right phrases and later right sentences in English.

### 3. PROBLEMS OF LACKING READING ALOUD PRACTICE

The defects of lacking of reading English aloud sweep all over English listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Lacking of systematic reading English aloud teaching and practice, students' English listening skill predictably will decline, which will do harm to English speaking. Without reading aloud, students always make wrong judgments while listening to English spoken tapes, videos, people due to the mistakes on nearly sound words, homophones, past tense of words, past participle of words or reading ellipsis if English learners do not read English aloud.

Lacking of systematic reading English aloud teaching and practice, it is hard for Chinese students to open their mouths and speak out English. Before English learners can speak out English, there is no doubt they must learn how to read words and sentences. Hence, reading English aloud correctly is the first step of speaking English. The "no reading English aloud" problem leads to large number of "dumb English". It is very common that many Chinese students fail to communicate with others in English though they are good at written exams. This phenomenon disobeys the spirit of education for all-round development in China. Furthermore, the unsatisfied result is bound to discourage students to keep up to learn English for they have lost the confidence of speaking English. They bury the bitter fruit of the influence of dumb English, which greatly affects their future English competence. It is hard for teachers to teach middle school students' oral English if students cannot read words out.

Good English writing skill help to improve English speaking skills because students who write well know the English syntax and will be able to speak out right English sentences. Reading English essay aloud plays an important role in the formation of correct English writing skills. Lacking an appropriate amount of reading training, students will enumerate words according to Chinese meaning in a Chinese logic, which does not go with English speech habits. The syntax of making a Chinese sentence is rather different from making an English one. During the internship in the middle school, the authors notice that students who read English aloud more are able to write correct sentences in their compositions than those lacking of reading English aloud. Students who read English aloud often have more language sense that they can write right sentences even though they do not recite all the grammar rules purposely. On the contrary, students who do not input much of English by reading aloud are affected by the negative transfer of mother tongue. The following examples are collected from the students' writings during the internship.

Form 1, Form 2 and Form 3 are the sample analysis of two students' writing excerpt. In a writing assignment, the students wanted to express the meaning "The children played computer games happily in the next room yesterday." Compare the different expressing ways of this meaning in English and Chinese, they are very different.

The children	Played	Computer games	Happily	In the next room	Yesterday
Subject	Verb	Object	Manner	Place	Time
谁	干	什么事	什么方式	什么地点	什么时间
Who	Do	What	How	Where	When
<i>Form 1</i>					
昨天	在隔壁的房间	孩子们	在高兴地	玩	电脑游戏
时间	地点	主语	方式	谓语	宾语
Time	Place	Subject	Manner	Verb	Object
什么时间	什么地点	谁	什么方式	干	什么事
When	Where	Who	Manner	Verb	what
Yesterday, in the next room, the children happily played computer games.					
<i>Form 2</i>					

According to the English syntax, in the sentence "The children played computer games happily in the next room yesterday.", "The children" is the subject, "played" is the verb, "computer games" is the object in the sentence, "happily" is the manner, "in the next room" is the place, "yesterday" is the time. So in English the right order of syntax is: "Who-Do-What-How-Where-When". However, in Chinese, to express the same sentence, the order is very different. The Chinese translation of the sentence is: "昨天, 在隔壁的房间, 孩子们在高兴地玩电脑游戏。" As it shows in Form.2, the order of syntax in Chinese is: "When-Where-Who-Manner-Verb-What". Students who do not have a good English language sense will probably directly translate the sentence as "Yesterday, in the next room, the children happily played computer games." even if they have learned certain English grammar rules. The following excerpts are students' original content in their writings.

Student A	The children played computer games happily in the next room yesterday.
Student B	Yesterday, in the next room, the children happily played computer games.
<i>Form 3</i>	

For middle school students, the grammar rules they learned are scattered fragments. In order to make a correct sentence, students should comprehend the sentence as a whole. As it shows in Form 3, Student B knows the grammar rules of the past tense by using "played" due to the time "yesterday". He knows the grammar rules but he did not put the words in the right order because he just translated the words in Chinese syntax rules according to Chinese speech habits. Student A, who has a better English sense, developed the sentence not only grammatically right, but syntactically correct.

Therefore, reading aloud is helpful for the acquisition of language sense which helps wiring. It is a good way to read the compositions aloud after finishing writing. Moreover,

reading essays aloud after finishing writing is an effective way to discover the spelling and grammar mistakes it is also effective to revise the wrong sentences. When teaching oral English, it is very helpful if middle school English teachers emphasize the benefits of reading aloud on improving English writing, to rouse students' attention to reading aloud.

## 4. EFFECTIVE METHODS OF READING ALOUD

### 4.1 Combination of Self-Reading, Group Reading and Collective Reading

This method encourages students to read aloud texts emotionally based on the content comprehension of the texts, which helps to fully mobilize their own language sense thinking and improve their language reasoning ability by students' tasting of the attractive language and deep meaning.

The following is a specific sample.

Title: Enjoy the Beauty of English through Rhythm

Grade: Seventh Grade

Objectives Through reading aloud instruction, students are able to discover the rhythm of the poem.  
 Students will be interested in reading English aloud in various ways.

1. Warm-Up: Play the audio of a poem

I loved you

By Pushkin

I loved you, and I probably still do,  
 And for a while the feeling may remain;  
 But let my love no longer trouble you;  
 I do not wish to cause you any pain.  
 I loved you; and the hopelessness I knew,  
 The jealousy, the shyness - though in vain;  
 Made up a love so tender and so true,  
 As may God grant you to be loved again.

2. Learn the new Vocabularies: rhythm, remain, hopelessness, jealousy, in vain, tender, grant.

Use pictures on PPT to introduce the words.

Students learn to pronounce the words correctly and read aloud clearly after the teacher.

Analyze the poem.

Learn the background information of Pushkin.

Learn the background knowledge of writing this poem.

Teaching Procedure Group Discussion: Discuss with your partners: What kind of characteristics have you found through the poem?

Students share their discoveries on the rhythm of the poem.

4. Present the poem again with the rhythm part bolded.

I loved you

By Pushkin

I loved you, and I probably still do,  
 And for a while the feeling may remain;  
 But let my love no longer trouble you;  
 I do not wish to cause you any pain.  
 I loved you; and the hopelessness I knew,  
 The jealousy, the shyness - though in vain;  
 Made up a love so tender and so true,  
 As may God grant you to be loved again.

Analyze the poem for the students to fully understand it.

6. Students try to read the poem aloud by imitating the sample reading audio.

Read the poems aloud in the group one by one.

Divide the whole class into four groups, hold a reading aloud game.

Volunteers present their reading aloud.

Homework: Recite the poem.

*Form 4*

Early input of listening and background knowledge of the poem offers the foundation of reading aloud emotionally. Poems, which need emotional reading skills, are different from just reading aloud words by words.

Self reading can help student compare with other students to discover their own problems, then rectify the problems. For the latter collective group reading aloud game can stimulate students' enthusiasm for reading aloud due to the competition atmosphere. Furthermore, this group activity can strengthen students' spirit of unity and cooperation in the process. In step 9, asking the excellent students to lead the reading aloud activity not only encourages the leader student improve himself or herself, but also improve the whole class's reading aloud proficiency. What's more, for the students who have difficulties in reading aloud, the teacher can tutor them after class, guide them to the right reading method. Teachers can also offer some peer help to those who are in trouble. Different reading aloud styles arouses students' interest of speaking English, which is rather effective for further oral English teaching.

#### 4.2 Implementation of Reading Aloud through Various Kinds of Extra-curricular Activities

Besides textbook oral reading practice in class, teachers can organize various extra-curricular activities to strengthen the reading ability of students. Extra-curricular activities like story-telling salon, speeches, poetry reading salon, English joke telling salon, twisters reading competition and other activities to strengthen students' oral reading ability.

For example, in Unit Two "Is your food and drink healthy?" Module 4 Healthy Foods in Grade one (Pages 22-23), Junior Middle School English textbook is talking about the healthy food and drink for children. Before class, the teacher gave an assignment to students: Surf the Internet and search the information of healthy and unhealthy food or drink, and what are the negative influence of unhealthy food and drink. Print or copy the interesting stories, poems and healthy eating proverbs of their favorite food and drink and give oral presentations in class.

The teaching material is as follows.

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Healthy food and drink for children but too much meat is not good for children.

1. Is your food and drink healthy? A lot of ice creams, hamburgers and cola are not healthy. Meat is healthy, but too much meat is not good for children. Cola and candy are very sweet, but too much sugar is bad for you.

2. Eat right food and be healthy. Carrots, eggs and sweet potatoes are good for your eyes. Milk, cheese and fish are good for your teeth. A bit tired? Have lots of delicious chicken soup.

3. It is important to remember: eat well, stay healthy, and don't get fat!

Eat noodles or rice, not hamburgers.

Have a good breakfast every morning.

Drink juice, water, tea and milk, not cola.

Eat lots of fruit and vegetables.

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Form 5

The teaching procedure is as follows.

Step 1. Play the audio document of this passage, giving students the general idea of it.

Step 2. Divide the class into three groups. Group One, Two, Three read Part 1, 2 and 3 of the passage respectively.

Step 3. Students read the passage aloud freely and finish the task by completing the table followed by.

Healthy food and drink	Unhealthy food and drink
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Form 6

Step 4. Students volunteers give speeches on the food or drink they research.

This sample excerpt is the first lesson of the unit. So the teaching aims at: After class, students are able to understand the general meaning of the passage. Doing research on the Internet can arouse students' interest on the topic, while giving speech in class on their favorite food or drink motivates them to practice reading English aloud before the class and the speech. Including the task-based reading practice in class, it is easier for students to comprehend the passage and acquire English knowledge like words, phrases, and English expressions on the topic of food and drink. It is very important to listen to the model audio when teaching oral English.

#### 4.3 Emphasis of the Skills of Reading Aloud

As an old Chinese saying goes "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." It's very important to lead students to read English aloud, however, it's more valuable to teach students' how to "fish" by themselves. Speaking too fast or too slow will affect the efficiency during speech communication. Therefore, when practicing how to read English, it is very important to learn the reading skills.

In each unit, there are several parts of the textbook are introducing the oral reading methods in Grade One, Junior Middle School English textbook. For instance, in Unit Two "Is your food and drink healthy?" Module 4 Healthy Foods in Grade one (pp.22-23), Part 7 and Part 8 are introducing the pronunciation and speaking of words and phrases. Skills of reading aloud are very important for students to acquire skills of reading aloud. Any skills develop through repeated practice. Oral reading ability also needs various practices. Where to stop, where to stress or where to use liaison are the skills students need to learn when reading aloud.

The following are some basic skills that students need in English reading aloud.

First, when you read a sentence, please pay attention to the sentence stress, liaison and the tones .

Second, please look at the sign of the liaison. Liaison means in a sense group, if the former word ends with the consonant sound and the latter word begins with the vowel sound, then link the two sounds together and read. The following phrases are some examples with liaison:

there  $\cup$ is , for  $\cup$ ever, a lot  $\cup$ of , put  $\cup$ on,  
not  $\cup$ at  $\cup$ all, fall  $\cup$ off, look  $\cup$ after

Third, intonation. Briefly speaking, intonation means the rise and fall of the pitch of the voice during speech. When reading an affirmative sentence, read it in a falling tone. When it is a general question, read it in a rising tone, and the answer in a falling tone. When it is an interrogative question, read the former part in a rising tone, and the latter in a falling tone. If it is a special question, read it in a falling tone. As for the imperative sentence, read it in a falling tone. For examples

- 1) She is a  $\searrow$  teacher.
- 2) He's not interested in playing tennis,  $\searrow$  either.
- 3) Is your sister good at  $\nearrow$  English of  $\searrow$  Chinese?  
Is there anything wrong with  $\nearrow$  you?  
She is  $\searrow$  nice,  $\nearrow$  isn't she?  
Please come here at  $\searrow$  ten.  
Would you like  $\nearrow$  tea or  $\searrow$  coffee?

Fourth, the stress of a sentence. Usually the stress falls on those words containing the information. For example, in the sentence "What are you doing?" the stress should be placed on "what" and "doing". Anyway, speakers can help others understand each other better by changing the stress in the sentence. Compare the following sentences:

Don't you know him? (It means that you should know him.)

Don't you know him? (It implies he is a famous person.)

#### 4.4 Diversity of the Reading Materials

Teachers can diversify the reading material for students to read at the premise of ensuring the time of text reading. Materials as short humorous stories, simple poems, twisters, simple English songs, proverbs and English drama are very effective in oral English teaching. However, the application of these extra oral reading materials should vary on the sufficient reading of the textbook due to limited time of students. Textbook is the main material designed by many scholars for students to learn after scientific research. Teachers can emphasize reading aloud by requiring students that they should be familiar with each passage, comprehend all the language points and be able to apply those language points.

#### CONCLUSION

For a comparatively long time, when middle school students study English, they pay more attention to grammar, vocabulary and silent reading comprehension, which directly contributes to written exams, but neglect the traditional language learning skill, namely reading aloud. Therefore, there occurs a serious problem that learners are short in oral English. Enhancing reading English aloud instruction plays an important role to mend the broken parts and defects of oral English language teaching in the past decades. Moreover, increasing

teaching tasks bring great pressure for the teachers. It is urgent to recall the status of reading English aloud in English teaching in middle schools.

How to improve the teaching of oral English in class has been the focus of methodological debate. Motivation in learning second language can be thought of as the incentive, the need, or the desire that the learner feels to learn the second language. Usually, the motivation for learning is external rather than internal. In spite of this, it is not easy to sustain long-term learning goals. Therefore, motivation is the best incentive for learning, and without it, the learning of the second language becomes quite difficult. In the same way, the motivation of learning oral English is of great necessity. Middle school English teachers should think about various ways to motivate students to read aloud, which is vital for oral English learning. Teachers can raise students' motivation and enthusiasm of learning English by selecting interesting activities. Playing games is an extremely valuable method for second language learning. It encourages thinking and creativity, enables students develop and practice new language and behavioral skills in a relatively non-threatening setting, and can create motivation and involvement necessary for learning.

Teachers need to assess how to use the oral reading appropriately in class. It is important and significant to choose appropriate time and apply proper types of reading aloud methods to involve students.

Teachers should make use of a variety of approaches, ranging from direct approaches focusing on specific features of oral interaction to indirect approaches, which creates conditions for oral interaction through group work, task work and other strategies. Oral English teaching needs variety, which requires us to choose the one based on our own teaching conditions such as textbooks and the English level of students.

How can teachers and learners use reading aloud properly in the process of learning English at different learning levels? This question needs further researching.

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