

# Exploring the Status and Approaches for English Reading Teaching and Learning of Rural Junior High School Students in Shandong Province, China

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 20 Jul 2025; Received in revised form: 14 Aug 2025; Accepted: 18 Aug 2025; Available online: 21 Aug 2025 ©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>). <b>Keywords – Rural Areas; Junior High School; English Reading</b></p>	<p><i>Taking Shandong Province as an example, this research studies the current situation and cultivation of English reading ability of junior middle school students in rural areas. This study takes 203 students in grade two of one Middle School, a rural middle school in Jining, Shandong Province, China, as the research object. Using the research method of questionnaire survey, this research analyzes the current situation and problems of junior middle school students in rural areas, so as to better improve their English reading ability. The study found that the English reading ability of students in this area needs to be improved. Based on this, the study puts forward corresponding training measures to improve their English reading ability. It is hoped that this study can provide some reference for the current practice of English Reading Teaching in junior middle schools in rural areas.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

English reading comprehension refers to the ability to read English written materials and understand their contents. It is also the ability to systematically apply English knowledge. Recently, more and more attention has been paid to the ability of English applied knowledge in the stage of compulsory education, including students' English reading comprehension ability. However, the educational resources in rural areas are not as good as those in cities, which affects the improvement of students' English reading ability in rural areas to a certain extent. As we all know, the purpose of reading is to obtain information. There are two ways to measure reading comprehension: speed and accuracy. Therefore, to improve the reading

comprehension ability of junior middle school students in rural areas is to make greater efforts to improve their reading speed and the efficiency of obtaining useful information.

At present, many educators, scholars, experts and experienced teachers have discussed this problem and provided valuable experience. Based on them, combined with the current situation of English reading of students in rural areas, this paper will put forward corresponding training measures. Based on the previous research, this paper focuses on the current situation of English reading ability and interests of junior middle school students in rural areas, finds out their existing problems, and improves their English reading ability from the aspects of interest, vocabulary, grammar, reading

skills, extracurricular reading and psychological quality. The purpose of this study is to find the problems of junior middle school students in rural areas in English reading under the current situation of unequal educational resources, and put forward relevant measures to cultivate this ability combined with pre-service experience. In this process, we should not only cultivate their English reading ability, but also their interests in English reading and English learning. The results of this study can give more teachers and pre-service teachers more teaching guidance experience, and improve the overall English learning level of junior middle school students by cultivating their English reading ability in rural areas. In this way, middle school students in rural areas will not lag behind middle school students in urban areas in English reading, laying the foundation for their next stage of English learning and high school learning.

## II. ENGLISH READING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

In the current middle school English examinations in China, the proportion of reading questions is relatively large. The purpose is to test students' ability to comprehensively apply the language knowledge they have learned, including reading ability, comprehension ability, summarization and generalization ability, logical reasoning ability, as well as the ability to evaluate raw materials (Tian, 2000: 64). The main purpose of junior high school English reading is to understand the ideas expressed by the author. The purposes of reading teaching are fourthly: First, to cultivate and develop students' reading skills; The second is to learn language knowledge in the text. Third, understand information and enrich knowledge; The fourth is appreciation and enjoyment (Cheng, 2008). Excellent reading texts can broaden students' horizons, activate their thinking, increase their wisdom and cultivate their spirit (Zhao, 2015).

In the new era, basic foreign language education

shoulders the important task of cultivating people for the Party and talents for the country. It aims to foster a large number of high-level international talents with patriotic feelings, international perspectives, and comprehensive English language application abilities (Chen, 2018), and to tell and understand China's stories well in foreign languages. At the same time, they can also tell foreign stories well and smoothly in their native language (Wang, 2024). These foreign language talents with Chinese hearts play an important role in absorbing the outstanding achievements of human civilization, spreading Chinese culture, and building a community with a shared future for mankind (Liu & Zheng, 2018).

At present, many educators, scholars, experts and experienced teachers have discussed how to improve students' English reading comprehension and provided us with valuable experience (Kong, 2009; Zhang, 2012). To teachers, they should have a good understanding and implement the intention of the textbook compilation, effectively utilize various language materials and activity tasks provided by the textbook, constantly discover problems in teaching, conduct analysis and research, and find practical and feasible solutions, thereby helping students improve their English reading proficiency (Zheng, 2008). In conclusion, it is mainly the improvement of students' reading skills and reading speed. First of all, students should accumulate vocabulary and grammar knowledge at ordinary times, so as to improve their reading speed and master the main content of an article faster. Secondly, teachers should teach students some appropriate reading skills, such as skimming and searching, and use key words to master the important information in the text. Finally, cultivate students' interests in English reading. It is mainly achieved by increasing the amount of extracurricular reading. On this basis, this research will analyze the current situation of junior middle school students' English reading ability and interests in rural areas, find out their existing problems, and put forward countermeasures to

improve their English reading ability from the aspects of interests, vocabulary, grammar, reading skills, extracurricular reading and psychological quality.

### III. RESEARCH METHODS

The research questions of this research include two main aspects, consisting the problems in English reading of middle school students in rural areas and the measures to cultivate the English reading ability of middle school students in rural areas.

This study took 203 students in grade two of Beisu middle school, a rural middle school in Jining, Shandong Province, as the research object. It adopted the research method of questionnaire survey, which is adapted from the questionnaire in the previous research of Tian & Gao (2016). In order to ensure the authenticity and validity of the data, the questionnaire is anonymous. On May 25, 2025, it was

sent to the teaching director of the second grade of the school by e-mail and students filled out the questionnaire. Based on the survey data, this study analyzes the current situation of middle school students' reading ability in rural areas, and finds out the methods to adapt to the cultivation of middle school students' English reading ability in rural areas.

### IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Lack of Interests in English Reading

Interest is the teacher of learning. If students have no interest, they are easy to fall behind in English reading. Therefore, cultivating students' interests in learning is also a crucial point. Once students develop an interest in English, they will regard learning English as an inner need rather than a burden (Liang, 2011). This research investigates students' interests in English reading through questionnaires (See Table 4-1).

Table 4-1 Students' Interests in English Reading

Question	Answers	Proportion
1. Are you interested in English reading?	A. Very interested	26%
	B. Quite interested	37%
	C. Not very interested	30%
	D. Not interested at all	7%

From this data analysis, a large number of students are not interested in English reading. Of course, there are many reasons why students are not interested in English reading. There are reasons why students lose interests in English reading, but it

doesn't mean that they lose interests at the very beginning of learning. Then, by investigating the difficulties students encounter in English reading, we will explore the reasons why students lose interests in English reading (See Table 4-2).

Table 4-2 Difficulties Students Encountered in English Reading

Questions	Answers	Proportion
2. How difficult do you think the materials you usually read are?	A. Extremely difficult	14%
	B. It's rather difficult	16%
	C. Common	36%
	D. Relatively simple	18%
	E. Very simple	16%
3. What difficulties do you encounter in English reading?	A. The grammar is too difficult	24%
	B. There are too many new words	45%

C. I have no interest and  
can't get into it 31%

Basically, it is because they encounter difficulties in English reading. From this data analysis, except for lack of interests, most students have difficulties in English reading in terms of grammar and new words. And there is a situation that the difficulty of reading materials is inconsistent with their English reading level.

#### 4.2 Incomplete English Knowledge System

Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) (2022) points out that

teachers should be adept at using mind maps or information structure diagrams to teach students to establish connections between scattered information and new and old knowledge, and to summarize and refine new knowledge structures based on themes. English knowledge system includes students' vocabulary mastery ability and grammar mastery ability, which is directly related to students' understanding of the relationship before vocabulary, sentence and context (See Table 4-3).

*Table 4-3 Problems in Students' English Knowledge System*

Questions	Answers	Proportion
4. What are the manifestations of your vocabulary obstacles during the reading process?	A. There are too many new words, which affect the main idea and details of the article	22%
	B. The presence of new words does not affect the understanding of the main idea of the article, but it does affect the comprehension of the details	39%
	C. When encountering new words, one gets annoyed and loses interests and confidence in reading	39%
5. What are the manifestations of your syntactic obstacles during the reading process?	A. When encountering long sentences, one often gets confused about the sentence structure and finds it hard to understand the meaning	33%
	B. When encountering complex sentences, it is easy to cause comprehension deviations and it is very difficult to understand the meaning of the sentence	40%
	C. Various syntactic phenomena (such as omission, inversion, separation, etc.) have a significant impact on understanding sentence structure and meaning	27%
6. What are the manifestations of your semantic barriers during the reading process?	A. Failing to understand the semantic connection or logical relationship between the context	50%
	B. Failing to grasp the main idea of a paragraph or the entire text, and having difficulty understanding the meaning of the text	34%
	C. Only understanding the surface meaning without grasping the connotation makes it difficult to make inferences and judgments	16%

From this data analysis, students have common obstacles in vocabulary, syntax and semantics. These obstacles are caused by the incomplete knowledge system of English. In addition, these obstacles will directly affect their interests in English reading and even English learning.

#### 4.3 Insufficient Amount of English Extracurricular Reading

The strength of English reading ability is related to the amount of reading. If the amount of reading is enough, students can also learn relevant English knowledge from the reading materials, which is conducive to the next step of English reading. In addition to the reading materials taught by teachers in class, students should also carry out extracurricular reading for training. If the amount of

reading is insufficient, it will cause some reading disabilities. (See Table 4-4)

*Table 4-4 Students' Extracurricular Reading Volume*

Questions	Answers	Proportion
7. Where does the reading training that the teacher usually gives come from?	A. Textbook	34%
	B. Test Paper	49%
	C. Other publications or works	17%
8. How much time do you spend on extracurricular English reading approximately every week?	A. 0 to 1 hour	19%
	B. One to two hours	26%
	C. 2 to 4 hours	35%
	D. More than 4 hours	20%

From this data analysis, students' reading training mainly comes from textbooks and test papers, that is, students generally refer to English reading in class. In addition, students' extracurricular reading is obviously insufficient. These conditions are not conducive to improving their reading ability.

#### 4.4 Lack of English Reading Skills

Due to the limitations of conditions, it is very difficult for rural students to learn English, and

English reading teaching is even more challenging. How to teach students to learn to read by applying reading strategies has become a topic of common concern for English teachers (Zhang, 2012: 174). Different reading materials have different reading skills. The accurate mastery and use of reading skills can improve students' reading speed and efficiency (See Table 4-5).

*Table 4-5 Issues Related to Students' English Reading Skills*

Questions	Answers	Proportion
9. What reading style do you adopt when reading?	A. Skim and read the main idea	17%
	B. Read sentence by sentence	70%
	C. Look up the dictionary and translate sentence by sentence	13%
10. Can you summarize reading skills to improve your reading efficiency?	A. Often	41%
	B. Sometimes	45%
	C. No.	14%

From this data analysis, the students did not master all kinds of reading skills. In ordinary reading training, there is a situation of not paying attention to the use of reading skills. This reduces their reading speed and efficiency to a certain extent.

#### 4.5 Strong Willingness to Improving English Reading Ability

Where there is a will, there is a way. Positive English reading psychological quality can help

students overcome learning difficulties and make progress. When students no longer view English writing merely as a way to pass exams but closely integrate it with their daily life needs, it is bound to stimulate their subjective initiative in learning (Shen, 2020). There are many deficiencies in English reading, but as long as students are willing to improve and take action, they will certainly make progress (See Table 4-6).

*Table 4-6 Students' Willingness and Ways to Improving English Reading Ability*

Question	Answers	Proportion
11. Which of the following methods do you think can help you improve your English reading ability?	A. I have no intention of improving and am very satisfied with my achievements	0%
	B. Master some reading skills to improve English reading ability	39%
	C. Master more English words or grammar	38%
	D. Read more extracurricular English books	23%

From this data analysis, all these students have ideas to improve their English reading ability. This positive psychological quality of English reading is very beneficial to improve English reading ability.

## V. PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

### 5.1 Stimulating the Interests in English Reading

English teachers need to stimulate students' interests in English reading. In order to stimulate students' interests in English reading articles and enable them to form the initiative of reading articles independently, teachers can create reasonable and vivid scenes by means of game introduction, suspense setting, appreciation of albums, introduction of relevant background, comparison of text illustrations, etc. before reading, so as to stimulate students' interests in reading the text and finally guide students to read independently. In addition, the cultivation of English reading interests can also be realized by building a reading communication platform and giving play to the role of multiple evaluation. For example, the above teachers assign students to make an English tabloid about "protecting animals" after class, and evaluate and display excellent works in the window. Through these methods, students' love of reading is extended. Cultivating students' interests in English reading will constantly stimulate students' desire to read, and then push their reading taste to a higher level.

### 5.2 Developing a Solid English Knowledge System

Most rural students belong to left behind children. Due to the long-term lack of parental supervision, their learning consciousness and self-discipline are lack. With the increase of English learning knowledge in junior middle school and its weak foundation, students' English knowledge in vocabulary, sentence pattern and grammar is not solid. Influenced by the above factors, students' English reading has encountered great challenges. Thus, a solid knowledge of English language plays a vital role in developing students' English reading

ability. To solidly improve students' language knowledge, teachers need to seriously implement the word level and grammar level in their usual teaching, and do a good job in after-school tracking. In this way, we can clear the basic obstacles for students' text reading.

### 5.3 Increasing the Amount of Extracurricular English Reading

The amount of English reading determines students' familiarity with reading materials, and familiarity with reading materials will directly interfere with students' understanding of the text. Expanding students' reading capacity is an effective way to improve students' English reading ability. Teachers can encourage students to increase the amount of reading by borrowing books, e-reading, news and newspaper reading, parent-child reading, etc., in order to achieve the effect of qualitative change through quantitative change.

### 5.4 Strengthening Reading Strategy Training

Many people think that reading strategy training for students with strong reading ability is better, but the research data show that students with weak reading ability perform better in reading strategy training. Because students with strong reading ability can already use various reading strategies, the effect of targeted training on them is not so obvious. However, students with weak reading ability will use the learned strategies in English reading in training, so the effect is obvious. As rural junior middle school English teachers, they will face many students with weak reading level, and rural students know little about reading strategies. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to integrate strategic reading into daily teaching, and the training of reading strategies is urgent.

### 5.5 Enhancing Reading Psychological Quality

Students are the main body of learning. Therefore, the improvement of reading ability is also inseparable from students' own efforts. In daily English reading training, teachers should encourage

students to actively cooperate and participate in English reading teaching activities, advocate students to formulate effective reading goals, flexibly use English reading strategies in practice, and further enhance students' reading self-confidence, so as to improve their English reading ability.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study examined the status quo of English reading pedagogy among rural junior high school students in Shandong Province, China, identifying critical challenges and proposing evidence-based interventions. The analysis of questionnaire data from 203 Grade 2 students at Beisu Middle School reveals five salient findings: students are lack of interests in English reading, incomplete English knowledge system, insufficient amount of English extracurricular reading, lack of English reading skills but have strong willingness to improving English reading ability. Accordingly, this study has proposed some measures: interest stimulation, knowledge system fortification, reading volume expansion, strategy training, and psychological resilience cultivation—align with the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022).

By bridging pedagogical innovation with systemic support, this research provides an actionable framework for mitigating urban-rural disparities in English reading proficiency. Sustainable improvement necessitates collaborative efforts among educators, policymakers, and communities to transform rural EFL classrooms into incubators of confident, strategic readers.

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