

# Principles and Implementation of Reading Activities in Primary School English Class

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## Abstract

Reading is an important skill in learning English. However, reading class is not emphasized in some primary schools in China, and there are various problems with the reading activities, which inadequately just focus on teaching of words, sentences separately from texts. This paper aims to bring out a whole system of principles in designing flexible English reading activities to help students form a good reading habit, apply reading skills, use language learned pragmatically and be familiar with the cultures covered in read materials. At last, some examples are offered to demonstrate how to implement these principles so as to enhance reading for Primary school students effectively.

**Keywords:** reading in Primary school, principle, implementation

## 1. Introduction

Francis Bacon made that reading makes a full man. The purpose of reading is not only to help students learn, grasp certain language knowledge and structures, but also to guide and cultivate students good habits of reading strategies and skills, to be a full person. However, in the current situation of primary school English reading class, reading activity designing lack the systematic consideration of discourse, reading habits, variety of materials and so on. Only teachers master the principles of designing reading activities and implement them in the three stages of reading process, can students develop to be all-round development individuals.

## 2. Importance of Reading in Primary School

Huang (2005) holds that any language learning will be involved in a lot of reading, so does English leaning. Those who are good at English all have read extensively; in other word, those who read a lot can master English effectively. This sentence demonstrates the importance of reading from the perspective of an English expert, and it may be the agreement on reading from all the English teachers.

In China, there are a lot of research about reading in college and in middle school, and abundant accomplishments and findings have derived these years. However, research on reading in Primary school is scarcer comparative to the research above, and it is just starting, for English learning in primary school just started for almost 10 years with the teaching goal of “cultivating students’ interest in learning English, forming a good habit of pronunciation and getting to know the basic knowledge of English learning” shifting to a comprehensive one of language knowledge, language skills, leaning strategies, affect and awareness of culture (Lu, 2001).

Teaching vocabulary and sentences is closely related to reading and the reading process and it is an absolutely interactive process between the text and students, students’ understanding of the idea and reorganization of all the information in the texts (Li, 2014). In the reading class, students overall abilities are trained when deriving information from the texts.

## 3. Problems in Reading Class

*New Curriculum* has been revised in 2011, and the some adjustments have been done to Level Two (Grade 5-6): students are able to read simple stories and short texts with help of pictures, read according the sense group, and read aloud the stories and texts correctly. It also stipulates that the primary school students are supposed to read to the range 100,000-120,000 words, to foster students’ understanding of sentences on the basis of reasonable

pronunciation and words, to be familiar with discourse reading.

Without enough language input, this requirement is never to be met. A successful English language teaching is dependent on a great amount of language materials and language drillings (Wu, 2016). To the young students, listening and speaking come first, at which basis come reading and writing later, for English learning should be recycled and consolidated regularly. However, the mechanical repetition and reciting can not satisfy students' interest and curiosity, only by reviewing combined in a new context and discourse students can have the enthusiasm to learn English further.

### *3.1 Limited Materials*

Most of the reading materials are from the textbooks, which however, cannot satisfy students interest in time, for some of the topics and materials are out of date, or not in the range of students interest. In other words, schools always choose the materials from the perspective of teachers instead of students, which lead to that students are just pushed to read, without any curiosity. More, some of the materials are either too difficult or too easy for students, with too many new words or difficult structures. Primary school students have just acquired just a small amount of vocabulary, not familiar with certain grammatical structures. While there are too many strange words and complex sentences, students can not focus on the contents and read fluently.

### *3.2 Neglecting Function*

Some teachers just teach reading in order to train students how to grasp the main idea and certain information, without the awareness of helping students to use the words and structures to communicate efficiently. Thus, the reading class activities feature drilling of words and sentences without telling students that these words can be used to exchange information with different people. As a result, the useful language knowledge just exists in the textbooks and in the classrooms.

### *3.3 Emphasis on the Result*

Teachers just care about whether they can finish the teaching contents and whether students can finish the quizzes correctly. They can design the activities like multiple choice, blank filling and True or False questions, and so on. They can give some feedback, just limited to the explanation of the sentences and words, rushing ahead and complaining students can not answer the simple questions.

### *3.4 No Penetrating of Cultures*

The process of teaching reading should be combined with the penetrating of culture, with presenting some additional reading materials, videos with cultural differences and various interesting activities with fun. In this way, students can appreciate the beauty of language and the comparison of another culture different from that of China. However, all of these are replaced with exercises, searching for information and recitation of words, which force students to focus on the bits of information mechanically. As a result, the fun of reading class has disappeared from the very beginning of English reading, which is originally supposed to be fun.

## **4. Principles of Designing Reading Activities in Primary School**

### *4.1 Cultivation of the Sense of Discourse*

Discourse means texts not relative to grammatical structures, and can represent the whole meaning in a certain context(Zhu, 2008). So, in the process of teaching a text, a teacher can try to guide students to feel the whole story, when teaching a word, it should be in a context. Like fruit, teachers can present information by using pictures of a fruit shop or a fruit market, ask students what they can see, what they like; then in the post reading stage, students can work in pairs, and they are encouraged to make a dialogue of buying fruits with the help of sample dialogue from the teachers. In this way, students will have the realization that language learned in class can be applied in real life! And it varies in forms from a word, a phrase, a single sentence or even to a sense group and an article, a book. Teachers need to reflect the process of us learning to talk in childhood. As long as the language can transmit information, students are encouraged to use it to communicate appropriately. So teachers are supposed to create real and sensible context to teach words, sentences, or the texts, which will not only arouse students interest in learning English but also promote their reading efficiency.

### *4.2 Cultivation of Good Reading Habits*

Primary students are at the beginning but key stage of learning English, where a good reading habit will benefit their English learning in future. In the process of reading, new words are unavoidable, but it is not possible to refer to the dictionary at any time. Teachers need to tell students whether they can infer the meaning from the text, and then they can look up for the words in a dictionary. Once they know the meaning of the words, they can put them down to a vocabulary notebook for review in future. This can increase their vocabulary and at the same

time cultivate a good habit of accumulating words. For instance, when learning the words of rooms like bedroom, bathroom, sitting room, study, kitchen, it is a good idea to ask students to put these words in a notebook, and they can review and develop a sense of achievement after noting down a lot of words. Besides, many students do not have the habit of reading after class, partly due to several reasons like lacking for teachers' guidance, appropriate materials and level of the reading materials. consequently, students can read with reading strategies and reading after class should be proposed.

#### 4.3 *The penetration of Culture*

Language are abundant in special cultures of a nation, and so the process of learning English can not be separated from introducing cultures. Penetrating interesting cultural points can not only arouse students' curiosity but also help them understand the reading text better. There are some background of life styles, traditions of English countries, such as their capital, important holidays, symbols. If teachers introduce these points through pictures and video clips, students will be more glad to accept and read the texts (Li, 2014). For instance, when teaching *Happy Halloween*, teacher can show students some pictures and videos about how kids play on that day, what games they play, which are new to Chinese students, during which process, new words and cultural points are flexibly covered, which will be beneficial to reading.

#### 4.4 *Integrity of Comprehensive Abilities*

To cultivate students' comprehensive English capacity is one of the important aims in the *Curriculum Standards*, which consists of listening, reading, writing and speaking. Reading class should not be just limited to reading alone, instead, other skills should be integrated into the class, with reading focused. Teachers have to design more real tasks and activities to develop their involvement in reading and learning English with topics related to their life, interest, and daily life. But the first step should be around stimulating their confidence to learn English, and curiosity to speak English. Teachers can introduce a song, and transcript the lyrics into a passage, and students are encouraged to fill in the blank when listening to the song. Or, students are encouraged to write an Email after reading a text of letter. If teachers can be coached to design activities in this way, reading skills will be enhanced with the other skills trained.

### 5. Implementation

Reading activities can be divided into three stages, pre-reading, while-reading, post-reading. Teachers need to set different goals in each stage through tasks, implementing different reading strategies, cultivating students' fine reading habits. This paper here tries to demonstrate some effective approaches to realize the principles above with teaching samples.

#### 5.1 *Pre-reading: Arousing Interest in Reading*

One purpose in this stage is to introduce some background information, aiding students to know some messages about the texts, like new words, cultural points, and some other text-related questions. As interest is the best teacher, teachers are supposed to design activities based on students' real life and curiosity with strategies of leading in the necessary points. After students have acquired some background information of the a text and a reading story, teachers can make good use of this kind of schematic knowledge to help students predict, and these background information is good for reading (Nunan, 1989). The common methods are topics, questioning, making suspense, video or songs.

**New words:** when teaching *Unit 1 Module 3, Grade 5*, teachers can design some activities like following. The new words are hamburger, sausage, sandwich, fish and chips, and the structure is *what did you have for dinner yesterday?* Here is the text:

*Daming: Look, I've got an email from Lingling, It's about English food*

*Fanfan: What does it say?*

*Daming: Yesterday she had an English breakfast.*

*Fanfan: What did she have?*

*Daming: She had eggs and sausages*

*Fanfan: And what did she have for lunch?*

*Daming: She had sandwiches.*

*Fanfan: And what did she have for dinner?*

*Daming: She had fish and chips.*

*Fanfan: Fish and chips?*

*Daming: Yes, It's a traditional English dinner.*

*Fanfan: Does Lingling like English food?*

*Daming: Yes, she does. She says it's delicious.*

First, teacher presents words with pictures, arousing students' interest. Because students have learnt some other food, teacher can design activities to review the words by asking students what food they like, then playing a game "what's missing"; and ask students to question each other with the structure "what did you have for breakfast, lunch and dinner?" to consolidate the words in a lively atmosphere. In the activities above, the word activities are relative to students' real life, and they will be curious about the new words and then, the structure has been covered. So, it is a good presentation to the text.

**Cultural points:** since Chinese people seldom have food like sausage, sandwich, fish and chips as the westerners, teachers should help students have the awareness of what western people like to eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner. This stage is necessary for students to sense the cultures. Teachers can show a video or pictures of food in the restaurants in two countries to ask students to point out the differences in dining.

**Text-based questions:** one step to help students read efficiently is to help them predict, for this is one strategy people always use in searching information from the newspapers. About this text, teachers can ask students to guess: "what did Lingling have for breakfast and lunch? Did she like the English food? The students will be careful in reading to check their guesses.

### 5.2 While-reading: Guiding Students through Reading Tasks

This stage should focus on guiding students to read with skills and curiosity under the guidance of teachers. To get information is one of the necessary goal in reading, to be familiar with certain sentence structures and language points, to be curious about the discourse are the three basic comprehensive goals at this stage. Teachers need to design activities parallel to the reality, such as match, sequencing, blanking filling, question answering and so on.

**Reading for gist:** in this class, teacher asks students one question: "How many people are there?", and then find out three questions in this text. In this way, students can go through the text quickly to find out Daming and Fangfang, and then they can find out the three questions: "what did she have? what did she have for lunch? what did she have for dinner? Does Lingling like English food?". This step is to help students to feel the structure in this context, as well to explore the main idea of this text.

**Specific information:** it trains students the skill of scanning for information. After the activities done above, teacher asks students to fill a blank about what Lingling had for three meals. Students are required to fill the table by searching food in the text, which is the same as searching information from a notice, advertisement, etc., helping students develop the ability to find out information quickly.

The same way with the text of *Unit 2, Module 6*, the text is: *In July, Lingling went to Xinjiang with her parents. Xinjiang is in the west of China. She rode a horse. She climbed the Tianshan Mountain. She visited the Tianchi Lake. It was very beautiful. She had a lovely time there.* Teacher can also ask students to make a table by extracting the activities out, which is a good way to train students to organize information quickly.

Other ways could be drawing a person out according to the description when learning parts of body, putting the sentences taken from the book into the right order. Anyway, activities which can make students to read actively with doing tasks similar with the ones in daily life will be beneficial to their reading.

### 5.3 Post-reading: Consolidating and Extension of the Reading Text

Teachers need to guide and help students consolidate and try to apply the new information gained in the reading process through speaking and writing. This stage will involve some cognitive activities, enhancing students to use the language pragmatically, and activities can be role-play, text retelling, survey, debate, poster making, etc.

As to the first text above, one of the post reading activities can be: each student will have a survey about what other students had for breakfast, lunch and dinner yesterday. Here, teachers need to pay attention to the function of the structure and the pragmatics. They can offer students a sample about asking for information politely, for instance: Hello, can I ask you some questions. What did you have for breakfast yesterday? ... ok! And what did you have for lunch yesterday? ... Do you like...? Give students sufficient time, or leave it as an assignment.

Another step of this stage can be that students are encouraged to prepare a poster about what western people eat for breakfast, lunch and dinner, telling family members or other friends this culture. Or, they can do a role-play,

acting out the text. These activities not only help students focus on the functions of the language, and students can use it appropriately; they can feel that language learned in class can be applied in real life, which is of great fun.

## 6. Conclusion

According to the *Curriculum Standards*, the cultivation of reading ability should be stressed in the reading class, and consolidated after class. In other word, all of the other reading activities after class should be centered on the teaching activities in class, to promote students comprehensive ability through the additional materials and accumulating of words and skills. In-class activities should be designed specially to guide students to read with skills, which are good reading habits beneficial to future learning, great interest. Actually, in primary reading class, teachers can not separate each reading activity from other skills, the purpose of reading may be to help students to write a letter, or to introduce an interesting topic to classmates. Only understanding the interrelations of the comprehensive activities, can reading activities make sense in each class. A whole reading class should consist of three stages, with each embodying the progress of students' reading skills, the development of cognition, the abundance of culture and the sound promotion of an individual as a whole person.

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