

# *Exploring the Improvement of Chinese Junior High School Students' English Capacities in Oral Speaking*

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**Abstract:** In today's globalized world, English language proficiency has gained significant importance. However, the emphasis on exam-oriented education in Chinese junior high schools has led to a neglect of students' comprehensive English communication skills, particularly oral speaking abilities. In this research paper, I investigate effective strategies and interventions to enhance English-speaking proficiency among Chinese junior high school students. Through synthesizing existing research, the study aims to identify successful approaches while highlighting gaps for future research. My literature review highlights the critical role of pronunciation in oral English learning. Despite its importance, English pronunciation is often neglected in Chinese education due to the prevailing focus on written test scores. Existing research has explored numerous ways to improve English pronunciation, including incorporating music and utilizing Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT) systems. Moreover, my paper addresses the challenges junior high school students face in developing English speaking skills, such as limited oral English classes and a lack of appropriate teaching materials. Students' lack of interest and anxiety toward verbal English learning further contribute to the problem. To address these issues, this study proposes two main interventions: utilizing music as an auxiliary method in teaching spoken English and employing dubbing apps in English teaching and after-class assignments. Additionally, role-playing activities are suggested to enhance students' enthusiasm for oral English learning. Through interviews with English teachers, this research aims to shed light on effective approaches to improve oral English proficiency among Chinese junior high school students and provide practical insights for language educators.

**Keywords:** spoken English, junior high school students, China, improvement

## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, people have subscribed to the belief that English language proficiency has gained significant importance in today's globalized world. As a language used worldwide, it has attained a prestigious position in its role within a diverse and multicultural context [1]. Due to the phenomenon that Chinese exam-oriented education hardly ever emphasizes students' comprehensive communication capabilities in English, this paper aims to investigate the possible strategies and interventions employed to improve oral speaking abilities among Chinese junior high school students. By synthesizing existing research, this paper seeks to identify effective approaches and highlight gaps for future research.

## **2. literature review**

### **2.1. Research findings on the influences of pronunciation in oral English**

The importance of pronunciation in learning English oral speaking can never be overstated, and a great deal of research about the importance of learning to speak in a second language has existed for a long time. According to Joan Morley, During the decades spanning the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, incorporating both the audiolingual methodology, originating in the United States, and the British approach of situational language teaching, the recognition of pronunciation's significance within English language teaching curricula has been well-documented in academic literature [2]. Accurate and proper pronunciation allows learners to effectively convey their intended message to others, which could enable them to be understood by native English speakers and facilitates smoother interactions.

Although early in English language education, there was a belief that including English pronunciation instruction was crucial not only for facilitating referential and interactional meaning but also for extending beyond mere oral word and sentence production [3]. However, especially in China, a country that places more emphasis on written test scores, teachers often aside brush the learning of English pronunciation. The existing challenge lies in the fact that most language instructors lack effective approaches to teaching pronunciation and are unfamiliar with suitable strategies to address specific difficulties encountered in this area. Over time, there has been research on pronunciation learning in Chinese education. To be more specific, in the context of ongoing research, there remains an essential necessity to continually advance pronunciation and speech activities, tasks, materials, methodologies, and techniques [4]. Besides, the use of Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT) systems for teaching English pronunciation also acts as a steppingstone, which emphasizes collaboration between language teachers and computer engineers, integration into the curriculum, and dissemination through online platforms [5]. Due to the strong link between English pronunciation and oral proficiency, it is crucial not to overlook the significance of teaching pronunciation and to actively seek methods to enhance Chinese students' English pronunciation in exam-focused education.

### **2.2. Research the problems of oral English learning and teaching among junior high school students in China**

As a result of the focus on grammar and vocabulary in Chinese junior high schools, many people go through compulsory education with extremely poor speaking skills, or what we often call "dumb English." The college English teaching system is recommended that while reading has to be reduced properly, listening and speaking should be increased in College English textbooks [6]. In fact, this is also a crucial need for junior high school students in China. While English grammar and vocabulary are building blocks of language acquisition, solely emphasizing written English is not recommended. Due to the teaching-to-the-test system, they acknowledge that they tend to prioritize grammar and language structure over speaking skills because of pragmatic considerations. This emphasis is influenced by the fact that the senior high school entrance examination primarily evaluates students' proficiency in language components like grammar and vocabulary rather than their communicative competence. Consequently, the high-stakes nature of this exam significantly impacts English instruction at the junior secondary level, resulting in a pronounced washback effect on teaching practices [7]. The intense pressure to excel in higher education has compelled the Chinese education system to neglect the evaluation of overall English proficiency, resulting in numerous schools and teachers disregarding the development of speaking skills entirely.

In addition to the education system, students often encounter various obstacles that impede their progress in developing English-speaking skills during the language-learning journey. Many students are aware of their shortcomings in speaking and may experience anxiety and other negative emotions when engaging in English-speaking practice. It is crucial for teachers to be attentive to these challenges and address them both within and outside the classroom setting, emphasizing effective English communication [8].

### **3. Analysis and Methods**

#### **3.1. Overview**

In this research report, I interviewed five junior high school English teachers from two schools in Shanghai and Wuxi, China. Regarding the teaching of oral English, they all shared their perspectives.

#### **3.2. Current problems**

There is a significant concern regarding the English oral skills of Chinese junior high school students, particularly in relation to the prevailing examination-oriented education system. Moreover, many schools and teachers are uncertain about how to conduct oral language teaching. This week, I interviewed two English teachers from Wuxi Shuixiu Middle School and three from Shanghai Xinzhuoyuan Middle School. Among them, three teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the current state of oral English education in junior high schools. After consolidating their viewpoints, I identified the following key issues:

1. Schools rarely offer oral English classes, and there is a lack of appropriate teaching materials. Typically, oral assignments consist of reciting textbook passages.
2. Students' English pronunciation is inaccurate, resulting in a reluctance to speak English voluntarily.
3. Students lack interest in oral English and possess resistance to it.

#### **3.3. Research on ways of improving students' spoken English**

One crucial aspect to address initially is the improvement of students' English pronunciation skills. This aspect significantly contributes to enhancing their comprehensive English abilities. During my interviews, English teachers in Wuxi mentioned that many students struggle with word recognition due to their inability to apply natural phonics when memorizing vocabulary. Therefore, allocating class time for pronunciation instruction is highly reasonable. Teachers can engage students in phonetics teaching more deeply in the English language environment by incorporating music or utilizing audiovisual materials from movies or television shows.

#### **3.4. Utilize music as an auxiliary method in teaching spoken English**

Stokes proposes the utilization of English songs as a pedagogical approach to facilitate language learning, with the potential to encourage the adoption of native speech patterns [9]. For instance, the study explores the significance of speech rhythms and prosody in promoting the idea that proper English language acquisition and pronunciation involve applying accents to certain words as a regular part of speech. By incorporating rhymes, chants, and songs, students can grasp the appropriate placement of stress and accents on syllables and words while enhancing the fluency and rhythm of the target language, English. An experiment conducted by Rais involving twenty-one third-grade students uncovered a positive influence on students' English pronunciation, and the classroom action research method consists of cycles of reconnaissance, planning, enactment, observation, and reflection. The findings indicate that using songs significantly enhances students' pronunciation skills

and boosts their confidence. Remarkably, even a timid student enjoys the lessons and demonstrates improved accuracy and confidence in pronouncing vocabulary [10]. Therefore, in Chinese junior high schools, they could imitate such practices. English songs can be utilized during fragmented time intervals, such as the initial five minutes of an English class, to immerse students in English songs, thereby aiding them in developing advanced pronunciation rules.

### **3.5. Use dubbing apps in English teaching and after-class assignments**

In the current Chinese app market, applications similar to "English Fun Dubbing" (EFD) can be found. Teachers can use such apps as post-class oral English assignments in their instructional practices. Unlike dull oral exercises, dubbing software creates vivid background settings that engage students in learning scenarios. The relaxed and enjoyable practice atmosphere facilitated by such software also allows students to approach oral exercises enthusiastically, reducing the fear and negative mentality that may arise from task-based assignments. According to the study conducted by Sihong Zhang, based on the feedback provided by the students, it was observed that they willingly sought information from other learning domains, which presented an unforeseen advantage of the "English Fun Dubbing" (EFD) application. Additionally, another unanticipated benefit was that, during the dubbing process, the students also improved their listening skills. As mentioned earlier, over 80% of the respondents reported listening to the original audio more than eight times before their dubbing tasks [11]. Moreover, the overall learning resources of these apps exhibit a lifelike quality. By imitating dialogues from cartoons and movies within the dubbing software, students can develop an intense sense of the English language while subtly absorbing the cultural essence behind the language. Students' English practice is a dual impact of visual and auditory stimulation, and their foundational understanding of English-speaking countries' cultural history and customs behind language learning lays the groundwork for better English communication.

### **3.6. Enhancing students' enthusiasm for oral English learning**

After acquiring specific teaching methods, we must also consider motivating students' enthusiasm for English oral language learning and encouraging them to speak English. Given the limited availability of English oral language courses in Chinese junior high schools, there is an opportunity to draw insights from various university-level English oral courses or specialized language programs to effectively assist junior high students in overcoming their reluctance to speak English. In the context of instructional practices, it was proposed that teachers provide corrective feedforward instead of feedback, delivered in an informative manner rather than instructive, while carefully refraining from employing indirect or direct ridicule or teasing of students through the use of irony or even sarcastic language [12]. Teachers may also organize activities resembling role-playing to foster students' willingness to speak English. By allowing students to choose their themes and roles, using their favorite films and television works as a medium, teachers can encourage students to engage in spontaneous English oral practice. This approach promotes self-directed English language learning among students. The conclusion of Xu Liu's experiment, which included a comparison between the motivation of orthodox oral English tests and role-play, contended that using role-play activities proves to be more efficacious in stimulating students' motivation to speak English than employing oral English tests [13].

## **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, my research paper has explored the pivotal issue of enhancing English oral proficiency among Chinese junior high school students within the context of exam-oriented education. To begin with, the integration of music as an auxiliary method in teaching spoken English, utilizing English

songs to improve pronunciation and fluency. On top of that, dubbing apps like "English Fun Dubbing" (EFD) are used to engage students in captivating and immersive language practice, thereby enhancing motivation and listening skills. Lastly, the promotion of role-playing activities to cultivate enthusiasm for oral English learning, granting students the autonomy to select themes and roles from their preferred media by emphasizing pronunciation, integrating music, and dubbing apps. In that case, educators can establish stimulating and efficacious learning environments for students. Mastering English speaking skills is crucial as it equips individuals with the ability to communicate effectively in the language, which is the fundamental objective of language learning. Furthermore, for junior high school students, developing English speaking proficiency is particularly important. By focusing on English speaking during this stage, they can enhance their overall grasp of the language, establish a solid foundation, and adequately prepare themselves for advanced English usage in the future. Overall, these findings and interventions presented in this study may stimulate further research and foster substantial reforms in the Chinese education system to bolster students' English-speaking aptitude and equip them for effective communication in the interconnected world.

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