

# Research on Junior High School English Teaching in the Context of Educational Reform

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doi:10.56397/JARE.2024.01.07

## Abstract

The landscape of junior high school English teaching in China has evolved significantly due to educational reforms and changing global dynamics. This transformation aims to shift the focus from traditional rote learning towards practical language use and communicative competence. English proficiency is increasingly vital in a globalized world, demanding new strategies to prepare students for success. This research explores the multifaceted impacts of educational reform on English teaching, delving into curriculum changes, pedagogical shifts, assessment methods, and technology integration. It uncovers the challenges that educators face, including balancing traditional and modern approaches, inadequate teacher training, assessment-centered teaching, English proficiency variances, and technology accessibility. To address these issues, a set of strategies is proposed, to enhance the quality of junior high school English teaching in China and align it with the goals of 21st-century education.

**Keywords:** educational reform, pedagogy, teacher training, parent engagement, English proficiency variances

## 1. Introduction

The realm of English teaching in junior high schools across China has undergone significant transformations over the years. These changes have been driven not only by advancements in teaching methods but also by the broader educational reforms implemented by the Chinese government.

Historically, junior high school English teaching in China often centered on rote memorization, grammar, and vocabulary. While this approach effectively laid the groundwork for language skills, it was often criticized for its limited focus on practical communication. Students might excel in written exams but falter when it came to

spoken English or real-life applications of the language.

However, with evolving educational philosophies and China's increasing global integration, there has been a paradigm shift in the teaching of English. The focus has gradually expanded from rote learning to practical language use, emphasizing communicative competence and the ability to engage in real-life conversations, write effectively, and comprehend English as it is used in authentic contexts.

These changes have been in response to China's growing role on the global stage, where proficiency in English has become a valuable

tool for international communication, business, and diplomacy. As such, junior high school English teaching has shifted to equipping students with the skills needed not just for language proficiency but for success in a globalized world.

## **2. Current Junior High School English Teaching**

The journey of English teaching in junior high schools in China is marked by a series of profound transformations. These changes have not only been influenced by advancements in teaching methods but have been significantly shaped by the broader educational reforms initiated by the Chinese government.

Traditionally, junior high school English teaching placed a strong emphasis on rote memorization, grammar rules, and vocabulary. While this approach effectively built a foundation for language skills, it was often criticized for its limited focus on practical communication. Students who excelled in written exams frequently struggled with spoken English or applying the language in real-world situations.

However, as educational philosophies evolved, there was a paradigm shift in the teaching of English. The focus gradually expanded from rote learning to practical language use, emphasizing communicative competence. This shift was prompted by China's increased global role, where English proficiency is recognized as a vital tool for international communication, business, and diplomacy. Junior high school English teaching has adapted to equip students with the skills needed not just for language proficiency but for success in a globalized world.

The shift towards communicative competence in junior high school English teaching in China is a positive step, but it comes with its set of challenges. Teachers now face the task of balancing traditional language instruction with the development of practical language skills. This can be particularly challenging in a context where standardized testing heavily emphasizes traditional language knowledge.

Another significant challenge in the current state of junior high school English teaching in China is the integration of technology. While technology offers numerous advantages, including interactive learning platforms, access to authentic language materials, and

opportunities for self-directed learning, it also demands that teachers adapt their pedagogical approaches. This often requires additional training and resources.

One of the driving forces behind the reforms in English teaching in China is the recognition of English as a global lingua franca. In the 21st century, English has become the language of international business, diplomacy, academia, and popular culture. Proficiency in English is viewed as an essential skill for personal and professional success in China.

This recognition has prompted Chinese educational institutions and the government to prioritize English language education. English is no longer just a subject in school; it is a gateway to opportunities on the global stage. As a result, the goals of English teaching in junior high schools in China extend beyond language proficiency; they encompass preparing students to be effective communicators and global citizens.

In this context, junior high school English teaching in China is tasked with equipping students with the language skills they need to engage with the world. This includes not only linguistic competence but also cultural awareness and the ability to navigate cross-cultural interactions.

The current state of junior high school English teaching in China is marked by these dual challenges and opportunities. It is a field in transition, adapting to the demands of the 21st century while navigating the complexities of educational reform. To understand the nuances of this evolving landscape, it is crucial to examine the specific issues and challenges faced by educators, students, and policymakers in China.

## **3. The Impacts on Junior High School English Teaching in the Context of Educational Reform**

The landscape of junior high school English teaching in China is profoundly shaped by the broader educational reforms taking place within the nation. These reforms bring about changes and challenges that influence not only the content and methodology of teaching but also how students' progress is assessed. In this section, we will delve into the multifaceted impacts of educational reform on junior high school English teaching in China.

### *3.1 Shifts in Curriculum and Learning Objectives*

One of the most conspicuous influences of educational reform on junior high school English teaching in China is the transformation of curricula and learning objectives. Educational reforms are designed to align curricula with broader educational goals, such as nurturing critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and digital literacy. Consequently, English classes are evolving from the traditional approach of rote learning of vocabulary and grammar rules to encompass higher-order thinking skills.

These reforms advocate for new learning objectives that prioritize real-world language use. Students are expected not only to understand and produce English but also to apply it effectively in practical contexts. This shift underscores the importance of communicative competence, including the ability to engage in conversations, write proficiently, and comprehend English as it is used in authentic situations.

### *3.2 Changing Pedagogical Approaches*

The impact of educational reform on pedagogical approaches within junior high school English teaching in China is profound. Traditional methods of instruction, which often centered on memorization and teacher-centered learning, are now giving way to student-centered, interactive approaches.

Educational reforms encourage the implementation of innovative teaching methods that promote active engagement. These methods encompass project-based learning, collaborative activities, and the integration of technology. These approaches not only make learning more enjoyable but also align with the notion that students should acquire not only language skills but also essential 21st-century skills like teamwork, critical thinking, and adaptability.

The role of teachers is undergoing a transformation. Educators are now expected to be facilitators of learning rather than the primary source of knowledge. They guide students in exploring topics, solving problems, and discovering language for themselves. This requires continuous professional development and training to adapt to the evolving educational landscape.

### *3.3 Assessment Techniques and Accountability*

Educational reforms often usher in changes in assessment techniques in junior high school English teaching in China. The traditional model

of high-stakes, summative assessments is gradually being replaced by formative assessment methods. These formative assessments provide ongoing feedback to teachers, students, and parents, enabling a more nuanced understanding of students' progress.

The use of formative assessments, including quizzes, peer evaluations, and portfolio assessments, contributes to a shift in accountability. Instead of focusing solely on test scores, accountability is now more distributed. It involves evaluating not just what students know but what they can do with their knowledge. This aligns with the broader goal of preparing students for real-world challenges where problem-solving, creativity, and adaptability are vital.

### *3.4 Resource Allocation and Technology Integration*

Educational reform necessitates a reconsideration of resource allocation within junior high school English teaching in China. The introduction of new teaching methods, learning materials, and assessment techniques demands investments in resources, including textbooks, technology, and teacher training.

One of the most significant impacts of reform is the integration of technology into the classroom. Technology provides an array of resources for language learning, from interactive language apps to online databases of authentic materials. However, effective integration necessitates that teachers be proficient in using these tools and adapting them to their teaching goals.

Technology integration raises questions about access and equity. Schools and students must have equal access to technology resources to ensure that reform efforts benefit all students, regardless of their background or geographical location.

### *3.5 Inclusivity*

Teachers must consider the needs of English language learners (ELLs), students with varying proficiency levels, and those from diverse cultural backgrounds. This necessitates differentiated instruction and support services, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and multicultural education.

Educational reform often emphasizes inclusivity and equity, making it vital for teachers to address the needs of all students. This impact is further accentuated in regions where English is not the first language, as it demands a balance

between promoting English proficiency and valuing students' native languages and cultures.

### *3.6 Professional Development and Teacher Training*

To effectively implement the changes prompted by educational reform, professional development and teacher training are of paramount importance. Teachers need the knowledge and skills to adapt to new curricula, pedagogical approaches, and assessment techniques.

Reforms often include provisions for ongoing teacher training to ensure that educators are well-prepared to enact these changes. Training might involve workshops, seminars, or even advanced degrees. It represents an investment in the teaching workforce to ensure that they can meet the evolving needs of students.

Teacher training also addresses the use of technology in the classroom. This includes learning how to incorporate educational software, digital resources, and online learning platforms into lessons effectively. The ability to navigate the digital realm is increasingly important, both for teachers' professional development and for students' preparedness for a technology-driven world.

### *3.7 Parent Engagement*

Educational reforms typically encourage greater involvement of parents and the community in the educational process, which directly affects junior high school English teaching in China.

Engaging parents as partners in education means that they become aware of curriculum changes, assessment techniques, and learning objectives. They can support their children's learning and become more active participants in the educational journey.

The impacts of educational reform on junior high school English teaching in China are far-reaching and multifaceted. Changes in curriculum, pedagogical approaches, assessment techniques, resource allocation, technology integration, inclusivity, teacher training, and community engagement collectively contribute to a transformed educational landscape. Junior high school English teaching in China is no longer solely about language knowledge but encompasses a broader set of skills and competencies. In the following section, we will delve into the specific issues and challenges that educators face as they navigate this evolving terrain and propose strategies for improvement

in response to these challenges.

## **4. Issues and Challenges in Junior High School English Teaching in the Context of Educational Reform**

The educational reform landscape in China has introduced significant changes in junior high school English teaching. These changes have led to a set of complex issues and challenges that educators must navigate. In this section, we will explore these challenges in depth to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of junior high school English teaching in China.

### *4.1 Balancing Traditional and Modern Teaching Approaches*

A fundamental challenge in junior high school English teaching in China is striking a balance between traditional teaching methods and the demands of modern pedagogical approaches. While educational reforms emphasize interactive and student-centered learning, traditional methods, often rooted in rote memorization, still persist. This poses a challenge for educators who must navigate these contrasting approaches to meet curriculum requirements while fostering meaningful learning experiences.

Educators find themselves at a crossroads, needing to prepare students for standardized exams that often emphasize traditional language knowledge. This emphasis on exams can deter educators from fully adopting the modern communicative teaching methods encouraged by educational reform, as it may seem risky and less likely to ensure top exam scores. As a result, the current educational climate forces teachers to balance the long-standing emphasis on language knowledge with the contemporary focus on practical language use and critical thinking skills.

### *4.2 Inadequate Teacher Training*

The shift in pedagogical approaches and the integration of technology necessitate continuous professional development and teacher training. However, a significant challenge in junior high school English teaching in China is the inadequacy of such training.

Many teachers, especially those who have been in the profession for an extended period, are less familiar with modern teaching methods and the effective use of technology in the classroom. In addition, some regions face a shortage of



qualified English teachers, and existing teachers may not receive the necessary support and training to adapt to the changing educational landscape.

The lack of professional development and teacher training programs poses a considerable hurdle in effectively implementing educational reforms. It results in educators being ill-prepared to employ innovative teaching methods and incorporate technology into their lessons. As a result, students may not benefit fully from the intended changes in junior high school English teaching.

#### *4.3 Assessment-Driven Teaching*

The examination-oriented culture in China, largely due to the importance of the Gaokao (the National College Entrance Examination), has led to a pervasive issue in junior high school English teaching – teaching to the test. This challenge is not unique to China, but its impact is particularly significant given the stakes involved in Gaokao performance.

Educational reforms emphasize formative assessments and a more comprehensive view of students' progress. However, the deeply ingrained practice of rote learning and preparing for exams at all educational levels, including junior high school, continues to exert a strong influence.

As a result, educators often focus on teaching the content they believe will be assessed on standardized exams, leaving little room for the development of critical thinking skills, practical language use, and effective communication. This undermines the broader objectives of educational reform and challenges educators to find ways to balance exam preparation with holistic learning experiences.

#### *4.4 English Proficiency Variances and Linguistic Diversity*

English language learners (ELLs) require additional support and tailored instruction to develop their language skills. At the same time, more proficient students may need opportunities for advanced learning to prevent disengagement and to foster continued progress. This diversity necessitates differentiated instruction, but this is challenging to implement due to large class sizes and limited resources.

In regions where English is not the first language, educators are confronted with the delicate task of promoting English proficiency

while respecting students' native languages and cultures. This challenge involves striking a balance between recognizing the cultural backgrounds of students and preparing them for effective communication in English.

#### *4.5 Technology Accessibility and Equity*

The integration of technology in junior high school English teaching brings about a challenge of accessibility and equity. While technology offers numerous advantages, including access to authentic language materials and interactive learning platforms, not all students and schools have equal access to these resources.

In urban areas and well-funded schools, students often have access to advanced technology and resources that enhance their learning experience. However, students in rural and underfunded schools may lack these advantages, leaving them at a disadvantage.

This technology gap exacerbates educational inequality and makes it challenging to ensure that all students benefit equally from educational reforms. Educators must address this issue by adapting their teaching methods to accommodate students with varying access to technology resources.

#### *4.6 Classroom Management in a Technology-Driven Environment*

The increased use of technology in the classroom also brings about challenges in classroom management. Teachers must not only deliver content effectively but also ensure that students use technology appropriately for educational purposes.

Managing a classroom in a technology-driven environment requires educators to monitor students' activities on devices, ensure they remain on task, and address issues such as cyberbullying and the inappropriate use of technology. This added responsibility can be overwhelming, particularly for educators who may not be well-versed in technology management.

Additionally, the use of technology introduces the need for cybersecurity and data privacy measures to protect students' personal information and ensure a safe learning environment. These complexities add an extra layer of challenge to classroom management.

#### *4.7 Engaging Parents and the Community*

While parental involvement is encouraged by

educational reform, it also presents challenges. In many cases, parents may lack awareness of the changing educational landscape and the role they can play in supporting their children's learning.

Some parents may have different educational expectations, which can create tension with educators. Bridging this gap and ensuring that parents are partners in the educational process while aligning their expectations with the reforms can be a challenging endeavor.

In conclusion, the issues and challenges in junior high school English teaching within the context of educational reform in China are multifaceted and nuanced. These challenges arise from a combination of traditional teaching approaches, inadequate teacher training, assessment-driven teaching, English proficiency variances, technology accessibility and equity, classroom management in a technology-driven environment, and the need to engage parents.

## 5. Strategies for Improving Junior High School English Teaching in the Context of Educational Reform

Navigating the challenges posed by educational reform in junior high school English teaching in China is a complex endeavor. To address these challenges effectively, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders must consider a set of well-defined strategies aimed at improving the current state of English teaching. In this section, we will delve into these strategies, focusing on how they can enhance the quality of education and contribute to the broader objectives of educational reform in China.

### 5.1 Comprehensive Teacher Training and Professional Development

Addressing the challenge of inadequate teacher training requires a robust commitment to professional development. This entails:

- **Modern Pedagogy Training:** Provide teachers with in-depth training on modern pedagogical approaches, including student-centered learning, project-based learning, and technology integration. This training can help educators transition from traditional methods to innovative, effective teaching strategies.
- **Technology Proficiency:** Equip teachers with the skills to effectively integrate technology into their classrooms. This

includes training on the use of educational software, online learning platforms, and tools for creating interactive learning materials.

- **Continuous Learning:** Promote a culture of continuous learning among educators. Encourage teachers to participate in workshops, seminars, and online courses to stay updated with the latest developments in education and teaching methodologies.
- **Mentoring Programs:** Establish mentoring programs where experienced teachers can guide and support newer educators. This can facilitate the transfer of knowledge and best practices within the teaching community.
- **Professional Learning Communities:** Create communities of practice where teachers can collaborate, share resources, and exchange ideas. This encourages peer learning and ongoing professional development.

By investing in comprehensive teacher training and professional development, China can ensure that its educators are well-prepared to implement modern teaching methods and effectively incorporate technology, all while balancing traditional and modern teaching approaches.

### 5.2 Balanced Curriculum Design and Assessment Practices

To address the challenge of assessment-driven teaching, curriculum design and assessment practices must be rebalanced. Strategies to achieve this include:

- **Curriculum Review:** Regularly review and update the English curriculum to align with modern educational goals. Ensure that the curriculum emphasizes not only language knowledge but also practical language use and critical thinking skills.
- **Formative Assessment Integration:** Encourage the integration of formative assessment techniques. This includes regular quizzes, peer evaluations, and portfolio assessment, which can provide a more comprehensive view of student progress.
- **Teacher Autonomy:** Allow teachers more autonomy in developing

assessments that suit their teaching methods and students' needs. This can foster a more diversified approach to assessment.

- **Assessment Literacy:** Offer training to educators in assessment literacy, enabling them to design and implement effective assessments that align with curriculum objectives.

Balancing the curriculum and assessment practices can lead to a more holistic approach to education that supports the development of critical thinking, practical language skills, and lifelong learning.

### *5.3 Inclusive and Differentiated Instruction*

To address the challenge of linguistic diversity and English proficiency variances, strategies for inclusive and differentiated instruction should be implemented. These strategies encompass:

- **English as a Second Language (ESL) Programs:** Establish ESL programs to support English language learners. These programs should offer specialized instruction to help students develop their language skills.
- **Multilingual Education:** Promote multilingual education that values students' native languages and cultures. This can be achieved through cultural awareness programs and recognition of students' linguistic backgrounds.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Encourage teachers to differentiate their instruction to cater to students with varying proficiency levels. This involves providing advanced learning opportunities for more proficient students while offering additional support to those who require it.
- **Small Group Instruction:** Implement small group instruction to address individual learning needs effectively. This can enable teachers to provide more personalized support to students.
- **Collaboration with Language Specialists:** Collaborate with language specialists, bilingual educators, and cultural experts to support diverse student populations. These specialists can assist in tailoring instruction and resources to meet specific needs.

By adopting inclusive and differentiated instruction, educators can ensure that all students receive the support they need to thrive, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds or proficiency levels.

### *5.4 Bridging the Technology Gap and Ensuring Equity*

To address the challenge of technology accessibility and equity, strategies must be employed to bridge the technology gap and ensure all students have equal opportunities. These strategies involve:

- **Equitable Resource Allocation:** Ensure that schools, especially those in rural and underfunded areas, receive the necessary resources to integrate technology effectively. This includes providing access to computers, internet connectivity, and educational software.
- **Mobile Learning:** Promote the use of mobile devices, such as tablets, which can be more affordable and accessible in areas with limited resources. Mobile learning can help bridge the technology gap.
- **Educator Training in Technology Integration:** Provide teachers with training in technology integration, ensuring that they can effectively use available technology resources in their classrooms.
- **Online Learning Opportunities:** Develop and promote online learning opportunities, especially in remote areas. This can provide students with access to high-quality educational content.

By addressing the technology gap and ensuring equity in access to resources, China can create a more level playing field, where all students can benefit from the advantages of technology in education.

### *5.5 Classroom Management in a Technology-Driven Environment*

Managing classrooms in a technology-driven environment can be facilitated by:

- **Digital Citizenship Education:** Implement digital citizenship education programs to teach students responsible and safe use of technology.
- **Robust Internet Filters and Monitoring Tools:** Equip schools with robust

internet filters and monitoring tools to ensure students use technology responsibly and to prevent issues like cyberbullying.

- **Professional Development for Classroom Management:** Offer professional development opportunities for teachers to learn effective classroom management strategies in a technology-rich environment.
- **Parental Involvement:** Involve parents in the process by educating them about the technology being used in classrooms and how they can support responsible technology use at home.

By addressing the challenges of classroom management in a technology-driven environment, educators can create safe, productive, and effective learning environments.

#### *5.6 Fostering Parent Engagement*

To address the challenge of engaging parents and the community, strategies should include:

- **Regular Communication:** Establish regular communication channels between schools and parents to keep them informed about curriculum changes, assessment methods, and educational goals.
- **Parent Workshops:** Organize workshops for parents on topics such as how to support their children's learning, understand modern teaching methods, and encourage responsible technology use.
- **Parent-Teacher Associations:** Encourage active participation in parent-teacher associations, where parents and educators can collaborate on school improvements and learning initiatives.

By fostering parent and community engagement, educators can create a supportive and informed educational ecosystem that aligns with the goals of educational reform.

#### *5.7 Research and Continuous Evaluation*

Continuous research and evaluation of the strategies employed are essential to ensure their effectiveness. Strategies should include:

- **Research on Best Practices:** Conduct research to identify best practices in modern pedagogy, technology integration, and assessment methods.

- **Evaluation of Impact:** Continuously evaluate the impact of strategies on students' learning outcomes, teacher effectiveness, and overall educational quality.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish feedback mechanisms that allow teachers, students, and parents to provide input on the strategies' efficacy and suggest improvements.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Be prepared to adapt and modify strategies based on research findings and the changing educational landscape.

By conducting research and continuous evaluation, China can make informed decisions about the effectiveness of its strategies and refine them as needed.

In conclusion, improving junior high school English teaching in the context of educational reform in China is an intricate process that requires a multi-faceted approach. These strategies are designed to enhance teacher preparedness, curriculum and assessment practices, classroom management, and technology integration. They also aim to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment that actively involves parents and the community, while remaining adaptable to the ever-evolving educational landscape. With a dedicated commitment to these strategies, China will overcome the challenges posed by educational reform and provide its students with a high-quality English education that aligns with the goals of the 21st century.

## **6. Conclusion**

The journey of exploring the multifaceted challenges and dynamic strategies for improving junior high school English teaching within the context of educational reform in China has been illuminating. This research has delved into the evolving landscape of education in China, where educational reform is steering the course towards a future that demands a balance between tradition and innovation.

This conclusion summarizing the key takeaways from the preceding sections. It highlights the significance of the issues faced and underscores the strategies required to lead China towards educational excellence in junior high school English teaching.

Junior high school English teaching in China is



no longer confined to the traditional classroom setup; it extends into the digital realm. It's about equipping students with language skills, cultural awareness, and the ability to navigate cross-cultural interactions. It's about fostering creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability. Junior high school English teaching is not a solitary journey. It's a collective effort that involves educators, parents, communities, and policymakers. It's about shaping the future, one classroom at a time.

In conclusion, junior high school English teaching in China holds the key to a future where students are not just language learners but global communicators, where the challenges of reform are met with the resilience of educators, and where the strategies outlined here pave the path to educational excellence. It's a future that recognizes that teaching is not just about imparting knowledge; it's about shaping minds and preparing the leaders of tomorrow.

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