



EFL teachers' and students' attitudes towards reading aloud

In order to understand EFL teachers' and students' attitudes towards the use of reading aloud, we interviewed some teachers and students in Chinese schools. We intended to find out if the use of reading aloud could bring about benefits to English teaching and learning in the EFL context.

The interviewees were eight teachers and 12 students in three middle schools and one college. Of all the teachers, six were L2 English teachers and two were L1 English teachers. All the teachers had taught English for more than two years, and were equipped with a wide variety of teaching experience. All the students (five males and seven females) were randomly selected from various types of classes in the four schools. They had learnt English for at least six years, and formed their own styles and strategies for EFL learning.

The results from the survey showed that all the interviewees did use reading aloud for one reason or another, and that they used it for different purposes. One of the major reasons for teachers to use reading aloud was to diagnose students' difficulty in pronunciation and intonation. This is reflected in what a middle school teacher said in the interview:

By listening to students' reading aloud, I can find out if there is anything wrong in their reading practice, and then I will be able to help them with accurate pronunciation and intonation.

– Middle school teacher

Another main reason for teachers to use this activity is that reading aloud can facilitate students' understanding of the reading passages. All the teachers, except one college teacher, argued that reading aloud helped students understand a text better. They all agreed that reading aloud could help students digest every word in a text, and that their reading comprehension could be greatly improved by such a practice. In addition, 75 per cent of the teachers appreciated the value of reading aloud for promoting fluent oral communication. They believed that sufficient practice in reading aloud had great value in enhancing students' automatic and fluent oral communication.

The final reason for teachers to use reading aloud is that it can create a relaxing classroom atmosphere and reduce students' anxiety in the classroom. Seven out of the eight teachers (88 per cent) admitted that reading aloud enabled their students to observe discipline, strengthen their cooperation and reduce their learning anxiety. Although it takes time for teachers to organise such classroom activities, they will find it worthwhile to do so once they get accustomed to the use of reading aloud.

The findings from the students also indicate that reading aloud has great potential and value for developing students' English proficiency. Ninety two per cent of the students reported that they were fond of using this technique because it enabled them to have a thorough understanding of what they were reading. 'When I come across a difficult sentence or paragraph,' one college student said, 'I would like to read it aloud repeatedly, and then the meaning of the sentence or paragraph will appear by itself.'

Like most of the teacher interviewees, more than two thirds of the students also stated that they felt relaxed and comfortable when they were engaged in reading aloud. A middle school student commented, 'As a shy girl in my class, I always feel timid when I am asked to answer questions. However, I feel at ease and confident when I am doing a reading aloud in class'.

Except for these shared values of reading aloud, 75 per cent of the students agreed that their English writing performance could be improved by reading aloud. One college student reflected in the interview, 'Reading aloud is an efficient way to familiarise ourselves with the useful sentence structure and phrases in a text. Once we need to use them in our writing, they will automatically emerge in our mind'. This function of reading aloud was also echoed by a middle school student who commented 'All the materials I selected for my reading aloud are masterpieces of English writing. After reading them aloud repeatedly, I can subconsciously employ the appropriate structures and beautiful expressions from the texts in my composition'.