

Teaching Design of English Grammar in High School Based on the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

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Abstract: *The English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools (2017 Edition, Revised 2020) clearly points out that the Activity-based Approach to English Learning under the six components of integration is an important way to implement the English subject core competencies. To address the problems of teachers' single teaching method and students' lack of systematic learning in English grammar teaching, this paper takes the teaching design of a high school English grammar lesson as an example to explain how to carry out English grammar teaching based on the Activity-based Approach to English Learning, and puts forward three suggestions, insisting on the subjectivity of students; creating authentic learning situations and activities; conducting evidence-based evaluation of classroom teaching and learning.*

Keywords: *The Activity-based Approach to English Learning; Senior High School English; Grammar Teaching*

1. Introduction

Grammar plays a vital role in the success of mastering a language [1]. For a long time, the teaching of English grammar has suffered from the problems of a single teaching method and a boring teaching process. The boring teaching style, which leads to inefficient methods such as mechanical memorization and blind drills, has greatly increased the learning burden of students and not only led to the fragmentation of knowledge, but also failed to fundamentally raise students' interest in learning and develop their English subject core competencies.

The English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools (2017 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the New Curriculum) puts forward the Activity-based Approach to English Learning with practical guidance, which provides macroscopic theoretical guidelines for the development of English teaching activities. The Activity-based Approach to English Learning is conducive to changing the long-standing procedural teaching mode and inefficient quality of thinking in English teaching, making it possible to change the passive teaching of English to active thinking and inquiry. Therefore, in order to solve the long-standing problems of grammar teaching and promote the innovation of grammar teaching practice, this paper explores the model of grammar teaching based on the six levels of integration of cognitive goals and the Activity-based Approach to English Learning under the six components of integration.

2. Current Problems of Teaching English Grammar in High School

2.1 Single teaching style, lack of context creation

Traditional teaching only teaches grammatical knowledge as rules, and the basic model is: teacher explains → students take notes, recite notes → drill sentence patterns → do exercises. This over-emphasis on the role of grammar as a rule and the requirement for students to master grammar only in form neglects the context, ideational function and cultural awareness of grammar itself, resulting in students' mechanically reciting rules and ineffectively carrying out drills without the necessary activity experience and perception and the sublimation from knowledge to use [2]. In addition, teachers who teach grammar in isolation, without thematic guidance or contextual support, result in students' learning of grammatical knowledge being limited to the memorisation of fragmented knowledge points, which does not serve the

purpose of understanding and expressing the relevant subject matter in a particular context. The lack of contextualisation of grammar teaching does not only fail to promote the simultaneous development of language and thinking, but also leads to the production of fragmented memories, which greatly stifle students' interest in learning and their sense of creativity.

2.2 Non-systematic learning, lack of knowledge network

Students do not learn grammar in a systematic way, but simply complete their learning tasks in a step-by-step manner, and their fragmented grammatical knowledge is not effectively linked together. As a result, many students confuse grammatical concepts and produce a large number of “Chinglish” sentences according to their own understanding, which greatly limits the development and improvement of their reading and writing skills.

3. Ideas for Teaching Grammar Based on the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

3.1 The connotation and structure of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

The content of the English curriculum is the basis and carrier for the development of students' English subject core competencies, which consists of six components: thematic context, types of discourse, language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language skills and learning strategies, which are an interrelated organic whole. The New Curriculum for the first time introduces the concept of “the Activity-based Approach to English Learning”, making it clear that “activity” is the basic form of English learning, the basic form of organisation of English classroom teaching, and an effective way for learners to develop English subject core competencies. According to the New Curriculum, the six components of integrated English learning activities refer to a series of English learning activities that reflect the characteristics of comprehension, relevance and practice, such as perceiving and understanding, applying and practicing, and transferring and creating, based on existing knowledge, relying on different types of discourse, in the process of analysis and problem solving, to promote their own language knowledge learning, language skills development, cultural connotation, understanding, multiple thinking development. They also learn English based on their prior knowledge, rely on different types of discourse and, in the process of analysing and solving problems, promote their own language knowledge, language skill development, cultural connotations, understanding, multiple thinking development, value judgements and learning strategies. This process is not only a process of integrating and developing language knowledge and language skills, but also a process of increasing cultural awareness, improving thinking quality and learning ability[3].

The activities in the Activity-based Approach to English Learning include three types of interrelated and progressive learning activities, namely “learning and understanding,” “applying and practicing,” and “transferring and creating”, each of which contains three forms of activities[4]. Specifically, students acquire and organise their linguistic and cultural knowledge through learning and comprehension activities, form connections between knowledge based on the topic, and build structured knowledge; internalise their linguistic and cultural knowledge through application and practice activities, such as description and interpretation, analysis and judgement, and internalisation and application, to deepen their understanding of the topic and apply the language and knowledge they have learnt initially; and develop reasoning and argumentation around the topic and content through transfer and innovation activities. Through activities such as reasoning and critical evaluation, they develop their own perceptions and opinions, and then try to apply the language, knowledge, ideas and methods they have learnt in new contexts, solve real-life problems and express new cognitive attitudes and value judgements about the topics they have learnt in English.

As shown in Figure 1, in addition to the three categories of interrelated, cyclical and progressive learning activities at the first level, the framework of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning also contains three forms of secondary activities within each category, which provide specific pedagogical support for teachers to develop students' different English subject competencies. Within the activity structure of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning, the three types of first-level activities are not a linear series, but three levels that rise in a cycle of interaction.

The Activity-based Approach to English Learning provides guidelines for the design of English grammar teaching activities, which focus not only on the learning and understanding stage of grammatical forms, but also on the enhancement of cultural awareness and quality of thinking and the formation of English subject core competencies throughout the grammar learning process[5].

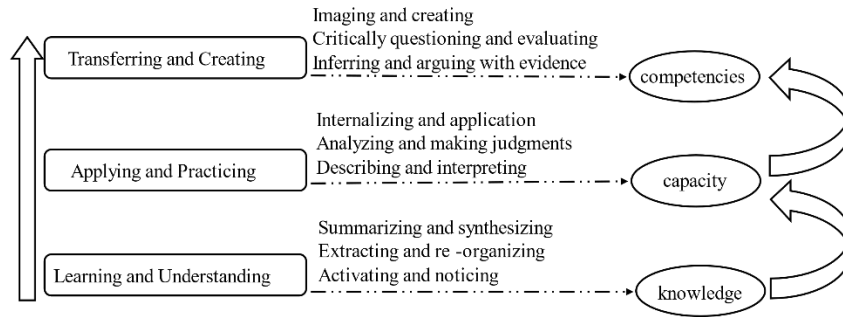


Figure 1: Framework of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

3.2 A model for teaching grammar based on the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

The intrinsic nature of the hierarchy of activities and the development of a lesson are coordinated. By combining the types of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning proposed in the New Curriculum with the six levels of Bloom's taxonomy, a model framework for grammar teaching guided by the Activity-based Approach to English Learning can be deduced. As shown in Figure 2, the three types of Level 1 activities in the Activity-based Approach to English Learning reflect the process of progression from construction to innovation in learning, and are integrated with grammatical knowledge as a “form-meaning-use” unity in language use. With the development of English subject core competencies as the end point, the development of core English subject literacy is exemplified through the logically organised and dynamic cycle of English learning activities in thematic contexts, ensuring that the act of language learning occurs effectively and facilitating the transformation of knowledge into competencies.

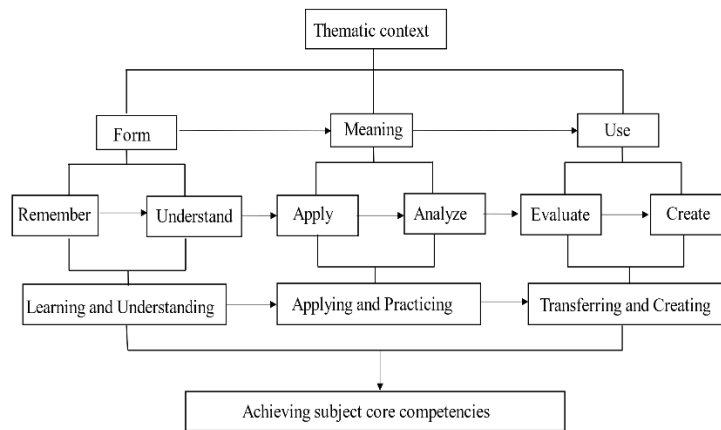


Figure 2: A model for teaching grammar based on the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

4. The Teaching Design Based on the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

4.1 Teaching Analysis

According to the model for teaching grammar based on the Activity-based Approach to English Learning, this paper takes the “discovering useful structures” block of Unit 2 “Wildlife Protection” in Compulsory 2 of the Senior High School English Textbook published by People's Education Edition as an example to design and practice grammar teaching.

4.1.1 Analysis of the Teaching Material

Theme: The theme of the activity in this section is “Report an ongoing event” and the target grammatical structure is the Present Continuous Passive Voice. Rare wildlife is being poached on a large scale, species are on the brink of extinction and rescue operations are underway.

Objective Structure: The grammar studied in this unit is the use of the Present Continuous Passive Voice, the basic composition and function of which can be found in the grammar notes in the appendix of the textbook. It differs in form, meaning and function from the active voice of the present progressive

tense, the active voice of the general present tense and the passive voice, and should therefore be distinguished in the process of language comprehension and expression. On the basis of their proficiency in the form and meaning of the passive voice in the present progressive tense, students will be able to use it correctly at the discourse level in order to make their language expressions more accurate and vivid.

4.1.2 Analysis of the Students

Senior 1 students are curious about new things around them and this is a crucial time to develop their interest and study habits. After studying in Book 1, students already have some knowledge of the English language and language skills and are better able to start discussions and express their opinions. Multimedia teaching can be used to create a teaching environment in which students actively participate by using videos and pictures and creating suitable contextual activities so that they can actively participate in the activities and express their views enthusiastically.

Students have the initial ability to obtain information from texts, but most of them need to develop their reading skills and lack the ability to understand and integrate knowledge and logical reasoning. In addition, it is easier for students to understand the content of the article if they have some knowledge of animal protection, but they need to learn to have a deeper understanding of animal protection and to increase their awareness of animal protection.

4.1.3 Teaching Objectives

Teaching Objectives are clear statements of what students will be able to do as a result of instruction, and mainly describe the changes in cognition, thought and behavior that students are expected to produce as a result of their learning.

After completing this lesson, students will be able to: firstly, understand and summarize the functions and structures of the Present Continuous Passive Voice through the analysis of study examples; secondly, use the Present Continuous Passive Voice accurately to report information about animal conservation and to express it orally and in writing through practice activities; thirdly, discuss the current progress in wildlife conservation, expand their scientific knowledge about wildlife conservation and think about reasonable ways of wildlife conservation. Thirdly, discuss the current progress in wildlife conservation, to expand scientific knowledge about wildlife conservation and to consider reasonable ways to protect wildlife.

4.2 Teaching Procedures

Step 1: Learning and Understanding

Lead-in: The teacher asks the students to watch the video, John and his grandfather are watching an environmental TV programme after lunch and starts a conversation as follows,

G (Grandpa): What is happening to the animals?

J (John): We human beings are killing the animals now. That's to say, the animals are being killed now by human beings.

G: What is going on?

J: Oh, my god! The air is being polluted.

G: How about the trees?

J: Oh, many trees have already been cut down.

G: Luckily, people have become aware of these problems. So far, a lot of measures to protect the environment have been taken.

J: Yes. Some songs have been created to tell people to save the earth.

G: Oh, this song is so sad. By the way, I heard that an important meeting will be held in Beijing next month.

J: You are right. During the meeting, the air quality will be watched closely by the local government.

The teacher then asks the students to discuss the content of the video and presents the sentences containing the passive voice. Finally, the students are asked to observe and analyse the characteristics of the verb forms in these sentences, so as to summarise the forms of the passive voice in the three tenses of the present progressive, present perfect and general future tenses, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Passive voice in three tenses

Tenses	Verb-forms	Adverbial of time
The Present Continuous	am/is/are being done	now, at the moment...
The Present Perfect Tense	have/has been done	already, recently...
The Simple Future Tense	will be done	next month, tomorrow...

Activity 1: The teaching of grammar is inseparable from the explanation of rules. Due to the complexity and abstraction of grammatical concepts, it is more difficult for students with weaker learning comprehension to assimilate and conform to the concepts. At this point, teachers should guide students to discuss and sort out their knowledge of language rules, which can be done by combining the present progressive and passive tenses to derive the formation of the present progressive passive voice (as shown in Figure 3), i.e. by abstracting a similar structural model from a series of similar language structures, allowing students to take the initiative to summarise the basic rules of the present continuous passive voice, cultivating their inductive generalisation skills and laying the foundation for the subsequent “applying and practicing” process.

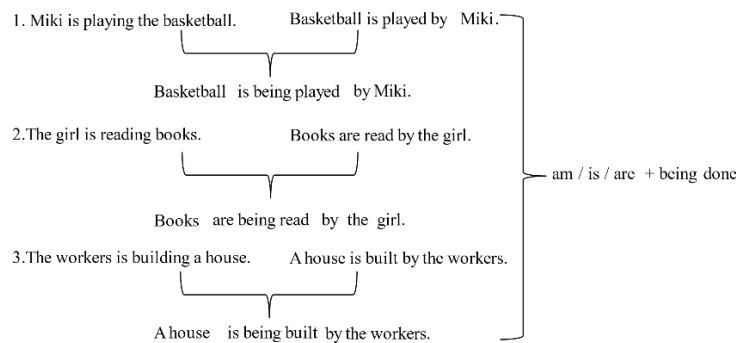


Figure 3: Derivation of the Present Continuous Passive Voice

Justifications: Teachers use a video to create a situation in which the target grammar is presented, and the dialogue content naturally migrates from the active to the passive voice with which students are familiar, thus activating students' knowledge schema and allowing them to observe, analyse and generalise the forms of the three tenses of the passive voice; through the method of independent exploration of grammatical structures, students achieve active exploration of knowledge, active discovery and active construction of the meaning of what they have learnt in discovery

Step 2: Applying and Practicing

Activity 1: After the exploration stage of grammar rules, students often remain at the level of mere knowledge but must also go through a lot of practical language activities, and practice is particularly important for English grammar. Practice should focus on motivating students to take the initiative to learn, moving from easy to difficult and building on the foundations of the discourse. By rewriting sentences using the passive voice in the present progressive tense, students can extract language points from the discourse and practise semi-controlled reconstruction of the language (as follows);

In the wetland of my hometown, there are many different kinds of animals, including wildbirds, fish, snakes, insects and so on. When I was in primary school, I often went there with my friends to watch the birds and study them. That was an interesting place for all of us. But things have begun to change in recent years. Small birds _____ (catch) with nets. Wild ducks _____ (sell) at food markets. Fish and snakes (kill) _____ for food in restaurants. And even worse, the wetland _____ (destroy). Some parts _____ (cover) with new houses. You can see rubbish everywhere. The wetland _____ (pollute) seriously every day. I am very worried about it. What can we do?

Activity 2: The purpose of the grammar application stage of language reconstruction is to teach students to use the grammar rules they have learned to construct accurate language expressions. In this example, students are asked “What is happening?” while showing a picture scene with multiple tenses, and are asked to try to describe the information in the passive voice of the present tense. This kind of activity, which moves from grammar to language, deepens students' understanding of grammatical points in terms of independent use, gradually internalises their knowledge of the language, facilitates the acquisition and transfer of new knowledge and automates language movement.

Justifications: The teacher first allows the students to practise the target grammar with the help of the discourse on the basis of generalising and sorting out the grammar, and then allows them to express and

communicate their ideas in real-life situations by bringing the language to life and putting it into context. This session consolidates the target grammar through the context of dialogue and discourse, synthesising specific forms of language in concrete contexts, which not only transcends the outdated model of mechanical memorisation and fragmented learning of language knowledge, but also contributes to students' sense of achievement in their learning.

Step 3: Transferring and Creating

Activity 1: After completing the activities in the application part, the teacher designs a role-play activity that simulates the organisation of a press conference. The activity is organised as follows: Suppose you are the spokesperson or journalist of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the journalist asks questions based on the phenomenon of nature being destroyed in this classroom, the spokesperson proposes solutions and makes a speech on wildlife conservation initiatives. Students identify their role (spokesperson or journalist) and ask or answer various questions using the grammatically constructed language they have learned.

Activity 2: Students use the grammar points in this lesson to write an environmental initiative letter on their own. The more important part of the writing process is to conceptualise what can be done to achieve a sublimation of parenting. Some of the writing is as follows;

Wildlife protection

Nowadays, the wildlife is being destroyed. _____

Luckily, this situation is being realized by more and more people. And some things are being done.

I think _____

Justifications: This session aims to get students to use the target grammar for communication and output by creating scenarios for discussion and oral expression. The activity in the previous scenario is an open-ended activity. When the teacher asks students to discuss current problems in China's environment, it is natural for them to use the passive voice. The oral expression activity in this session not only allows students to apply their learning, but also prepares them for the writing in the next session. This activity has made the transition from instructional to communicative grammar training and has deepened the students' understanding of the importance of environmental protection, thus achieving and sublimating the emotional goal of environmental awareness.

5. Reflections on The Teaching Design Based on the Activity-based Approach to English Learning

5.1 Insisting on the subjectivity of students

Students are the main subjects of language learning activities should be fully recognized by teachers. The process of learning English should be a process in which students take the initiative to construct meaning. Teachers should organise different forms of activities to activate and motivate students to participate in the exploration of the meaning, topic and discourse at different levels of thinking, and to promote students' interaction with the text, with their partners and with the teacher. Only through multi-faceted, multi-angle and multi-level interactive communication activities can students have the opportunity to understand and express thematic meanings based on the discourse[6]. This design reflects the learner-centred approach of the activity perspective.

5.2 Creating authentic learning situations and activities

Contexts should be created in such a way that they are closely linked to students' existing knowledge and experience, so that students can fully feel that the learning content is closely related to their own lives, thus stimulating their interest and desire to mobilize their existing experience, explore the meaning of the topic, independently construct, consolidate and transfer structured new knowledge, enhance their contextual and pragmatic awareness, and effectively use what they have learned. The contexts and tasks are real, direct, simple and effective, so that classroom teaching becomes a microcosm of life outside the classroom and language teaching can truly return to the basics and to life[7].

5.3 Conducting evidence-based evaluation of classroom teaching and learning

Classroom assessment refers to the evaluation of students' classroom learning behaviour, learning styles and learning performance. Teachers should keep abreast of students' learning processes, learning progress and learning difficulties in accordance with classroom objectives. Compared to knowledge teaching, it is very challenging for teachers to let go of student inquiry and respond to student' production under the Activity-based Approach to English Learning. In a generative classroom, teachers need to keep an eye on student participation and engagement, collect all types of evidence of whether student learning is taking place, and carry out dynamic assessment based on this evidence, while giving students targeted encouragement, guidance or advice to enhance teaching effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

The introduction of the Activity-based Approach to English Learning has provided an effective way to implement moral education and develop the English subject core competencies. The grammar teaching guided by the Activity-based Approach to English Learning carry out grammar teaching practices that aims at the development of the English subject core competencies from the levels of learning and understanding, applying and practicing, and transferring and creating, reflecting the nature of student subjectivity and language learning, and providing a new practical path for grammar teaching. In the process of doing these activities, students learn to understand, interpret, and evaluate the meaning of texts, express personal opinions, intentions, emotions, and attitudes, develop multiple thinking and critical thinking skills, and improve the ability to learn and use English. This practice reflects the core concepts advocated by the Activity-based Approach to English Learning under the six components of integration, and breaks the traditional situation of mechanical grammar teaching. Based on correct theoretical guidance, teaching and learning in English can be truly interlinked, positively influenced and mutually reinforcing.

Acknowledgments

This research study was sponsored by the 2021 Research Project of Humanities and Social Sciences in Colleges and Universities of Jiangxi Province (JY21125) and the 2021 Gannan Normal University "Curriculum Ideological and Political" Demonstration Course Project in Postgraduate Education.

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