

A Study of English Grammar Instructional Activity Design in Senior High School from the Perspective of Activity-Based Learning

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ABSTRACT. *In order to deal with the current problem of teaching grammar out of context and develop students' key competencies in grammar class, this paper puts forward English grammar instructional activity design from the perspective of learning. The perspective of activity-based learning advocates grammar teaching should design learning and understanding, practice and application and migration and innovation learning activities based on different discourses which has the same theme to promote the internalization of the grammatical system and cultivate students' key competencies. A relevant design is recommended to support teachers as they develop students' thinking quality.*

KEYWORDS: *Senior high school teachers, Activity-based learning, English grammar instructional activities*

1. Introduction

New Curriculum Standards for senior high schools put forward that the training aim of the English curriculum is to develop students' key competencies [1]. Linguistic competence is not only an important part of key competencies but also the basis for developing it. Learning grammar can help students develop their linguistic competence. How to design grammar teaching activities which meet the development of key competencies is a significant topic that draws a lot of English educational professors' attention [2]. Nowadays, There are a number of problems of English grammar teaching in senior high schools. Teachers spend too much time in explaining grammar rules and they tend to teach grammar out of context. Besides, they always ask students to do lots of mechanical and inefficient grammar exercises [3]. They devote themselves to teaching grammatical forms and paying less attention to the pragmatic aspects of grammar. Too many teachers seem to fail to take into account the fact that the perspective of grammar teaching mentioned in New Curriculum Standards, will lead to efficient learning in grammar lessons. English grammar instructional activity design in senior high school from the perspective of activity-based learning can integrate language form and meaning in a specific

context, improve the accuracy of language use, promote the internalization of the grammatical system and cultivate students' key competencies [4].

2. The Perspective of Activity-Based Learning and English Grammar Teaching in Senior High School

The perspective of activity-based learning means that students are guided by thematic meaning and it can promote the learning of language knowledge, development of language skills, the understanding of cultural connotation, the development of multiple thinking, the judgment of value orientation and the application of learning strategies in the process of analyzing and solving problems based on existing knowledge and relying on different types of discourses through learning and understanding, application and practice and migration and innovation learning activities which are integrated, relevant and practical. It is not only a process of integrating development of language knowledge and language skills, but also a process of continuously improving cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability [1].

The perspective of activity-based learning can provide some practical guidance for English grammar teaching in senior high schools. Teachers can use it in grammar teaching to deal with the existing problems. When designing learning activities, teachers can adopt the ideas which are advocated by the perspective of activity-based learning. Teachers should discard the original teaching methods that only focus on teaching grammar rules and grammatical knowledge points out of context [5]. Instead, teachers should more attention to communicative functions. According to the perspective of activity-based learning, when designing grammar teaching lessons, teachers should put grammar teaching in some related discourses which have similar themes. Instructional design based on the perspective of activity-based learning should be interlocking and focuses on the cultivation of key competencies [6]. It can closely link the three grammar teaching procedures which are grammar presentation, grammar practice and grammar application through learning and understanding, application and practice and migration and innovation learning activities. By guiding students to take part in these learning activities, it will help them improve their language skills and at the same time promote the simultaneous development of thinking quality and learning ability. Grammar teaching from the perspective of activity-based learning can not only make grammar teaching become more interesting and efficient but also promote the development of students' independent learning ability and thinking quality.

3. The English Grammar Instructional Activity Design from the Perspective of Activity-Based Learning

This paper will take a grammar lesson in senior high school to illustrate how to design English grammar instructional activity from the perspective of activity-based learning. The teacher will adopt guided discovery teaching method to help students master the target grammar. The grammar class will be further optimized through a

variety of learning and practical activities in the context. The material is from PEP Unit 4 Earthquake Book 1 (Learning about language). The main teaching content is to learn the attributive clause. It is mainly about the usages of the four relative pronouns: that, which, who, whose.

3.1 Analysis of the Teaching Material

In order to let this lesson be more interesting and make it easier to learn, it will give up the exercises which are given by the textbook and use three fairy tales to design learning and understanding, practice and application and migration and innovation learning activities. This lesson chooses three fairy tales which are Cinderella, Mermaid and Snow White to help students better master the target grammar. These interesting stories will make this grammar lesson become more relaxing and be easy to teach. Besides, the three fairy tales have the same theme which conveys to us the philosophy that under any irony, suffering and bullying, people should keep positive to bear sufferings and keep working hard. As long as you have infinite vision for a better future, you will eventually get a happy life. Designing learning and understanding, application and practice and migration and innovation learning activities based on the three discourses of the same theme can help students gain grammatical knowledge while understanding thematic meaning carried by the discourses and form correct values while acquiring language knowledge and language skills.

3.2 Analysis of the Learners

The learners are senior high school students who have learned the definition of attributive clause and some basic usages of the relatives in junior high school. But they still need to learn the attributive clause in a systematic way and sort out the usages of the four relatives. Therefore, in this class, it will adopt guided discovery teaching method to facilitate students to learn the target grammar. Besides, After studying some units of book 1, students have known how to cooperate with others to finish a certain task and they have mastered some cooperative skills. In this class, some group work will be arranged for students to learn the target grammar. High school students are active in thinking and they are eager to use English to communicate with others. In this class, the teacher will encourage students to use attributive clause to communicate with others and explore the thematic meaning of the three fairy tales. This activity will help students develop students' thinking quality and form corrective values. But the students have a relatively poor foundation in English especially in grammar and they are afraid of learning grammar and some of the students have low motivation or lose their confidence to learn grammar. The teacher should give students more chances to present themselves and give more encouragement and support.

3.3 Teaching Objectives

According to the New Curriculum Standards for senior high schools and analysis of the teaching material and learners, The teaching objectives are as follows: the linguistic competence is that students can master the usages of the four relative pronouns: whose, who, that and which and know how to use attributive clauses to express their ideas. The learning ability is that students know how to cooperate with others to finish a certain task and students can improve their abilities to conclude language points by drawing a chart which presents the usages of the four relatives. The thinking quality is that students can develop their inductive and deductive ability by finishing reading the three fairy tales and improve their creative thinking by exploring the thematic meaning of the three fairy tales. The cultural awareness is that students can form a correct value by discussing the thematic meaning of the three fairy tales.

3.4 Teaching Procedures

After choosing the proper discourses, teachers should carry out the learning activities from the perspective of activity-based learning. These activities should be related and the former learning activities should be the foundation of the following learning activities. These logical learning activities will better help students learn the target grammar and help develop their key competencies.

Part 1: Learning and understanding activities

In this part, the teacher will play guessing games with students and guide students to discover the usages of the four relative pronouns: whose, who, that, which. If necessary, some scaffolds will be given by the teacher to decrease the anxiety of learning grammar.

Step 1: Guessing games

The teacher plays a guessing game with students to attract their attention and help students have a perception of attributive clause. The teacher asks students to guess who they are by showing the three descriptive sentences one by one: She is the princess who has fish tail; She is a beautiful princess who has white skin like snow; She is the girl who wore the glass shoes for the prince' dance party (reference answer: Mermaid; Snow White; Cinderella). And then, the teacher asks students which is the antecedent, relative and attributive clause in the three descriptive sentences. Because students have learned some knowledge about attributive clause in junior high school, it is not difficult for them to find the right answer. This step is to help them review the basic knowledge of attributive clause.

The purpose of the design: The guessing game is to arouse students' interest and tell the students the names of the fairy tales by playing guessing games. Besides, the three descriptive sentences will help students have a perception of the target grammar.

Step 2: Guide students to find the usages of the relatives

At first, the teacher asks students to watch a clip of video about Cinderella to

attract students' attention. The movie is interesting for students to watch and students will be glad to finish the task which is related to the story of Cinderella. After watching it, the teacher shows the description about the story of Cinderella and guides students to draw a chart about the usages of the four relative pronouns: whose, who, that, which.

The story of Cinderella: Her name is Cinderella, she is a kind girl whose childhood is not happy. she is the girl that/who is forced to do a lot of chores day in and day out. she goes to a party which/that gives her an opportunity to meet the handsome prince. The prince wants to find the girl who/that he meets in the party by a glass shoe whose color is white. The prince discovers Cinderella is the girl who/that he wants to find.

After reading the story and having a discussion with their classmates, students can draw a chart to conclude the usages of the four relative pronouns: whose, who, that, which.

Table 1 the Usages Of the Four Relatives

Attributive clause		
relative	antecedent	component
which	object	subject/object
that	object/person	subject/object
who	person	subject/object
whose	person/object	attribute

The purpose of the design: With the help of the teacher, the students can conclude the usages of the four relative pronouns. This learning activities can not only help students better understand the target grammar but also develop their inductive ability and improve their cooperative and autonomous learning abilities.

Part 2: Application and practice activities

In order to facilitate students to practice and master the usages of the four relative pronouns. In this part, the teacher uses the story of Mermaid and Snow White to practice the usages of the four relative pronouns: whose, who, which, that. Students are familiar with the two stories so students will feel joyous to read the two stories and finish the task. At first, the teacher shows the story of Mermaid and asks students to choose the right relative to fill in the blanks and finish the story of Mermaid. And then, the teacher shows the story of Snow White and asks students to choose the right relative to finish the story of Snow White. After finishing the two fairy tales, students will better understand the usages of the four relatives.

Step 3: The story of Mermaid

The little Mermaid is a princess___voice is very good. When she loves a handsome prince, she decides to drink the potion___can make her fishtail become two legs. After getting two legs, she loses her voice___is important to her. One day,

her sister gives her a knife____can kill the prince and make her become mermaid again. However, She gives up killing the prince____she falls in love with. In the end, she turns into the water foam (reference answer: whose; which/that; that/which; which/that; who/that).

Step 4: The story of Snow White

Snow White is a very beautiful princess____has a extremely merciless stepmother. Her stepmother has a mirror____can tell who is the most beautiful lady. When the mirror tells her stepmother Snow White is the most beautiful girl, she hires a man____can help her to kill Snow White. But the man____is very kind does not kill Snow White.

Snow White escapes from the killing and discovers a cabin____is the seven dwarfs' home. Her stepmother does not be discouraged and she dresses up like an old witch____sells apples. After eating the apple____is poisonous, Snow White dies.

When a prince sees her lying in the glass coffin, He decides to try his best to save the girl____is really beautiful. With the help of the prince, she wakes up and looks at the prince____is very handsome. In the end, Snow White lives a happy life with the prince____loves her. (reference answer: who/that; which/that; who/that; who/that; which/that; who/that; which/that/; who/that; who/that; who/that)

The purpose of the design: Comparing with using separated sentences to practice, it uses discourses to help students better master the usages of the four relative pronouns. Besides, it will develop students' deductive ability by finishing the story of Mermaid and Snow White. These practice and application learning activities are helpful for students to use attributive clauses to do some creative tasks.

Part 3: Migration and innovation activities

In this part, there are two tasks about speaking and writing for students to migrate and innovate. A successful grammar lesson needs input and output about the target grammar. Migration and innovation learning activities belong to output activities. This stage can not only helps teachers evaluate the students' learning situation but also develops students' thinking quality.

Step 5: Speaking task

In order to promote students to use grammar in real situations and develop their thinking quality. The teacher can design a group activity. Group members should complete these two tasks: The first one is that students choose one story from the three fairy tales and use attributive clauses to describe the appearance of the characters in the story. The teacher can prepare photos of the main characters in the three stories in advance and stick them on the blackboard to help students better describe the characters. The second task is that the teacher should guide students to discuss the thematic meaning of the selected story with their group members and use the attributive clauses to express the thematic meaning of the story. This activity not only allows students to use target grammar, but also allows students to explore the thematic meaning of the story, which is conducive to develop students' thinking quality and form correct values.

The purpose of the design: This activity will facilitate students to use attributive clauses in real situations. What is more, this activity helps students form correct values through discussing the thematic meaning of the three fairy tales.

Step 6: Writing task

The activity of writing is an extended activity of the former learning activities. The former learning activities are to pave the way for migration and innovation activities. This activity should be related with previous learning activities. Besides, this activity should help students use the target grammar accurately and appropriately to express their ideas in the writing. The teacher can help students review the three fairy tales and analyze how to use attributive clauses to write a story. The three fairy tales can be analyzed from the text structure, text features and sentence patterns. Then, the teacher can ask students to use attributive clauses to write a fairy tale based on the fairy tales they have read in their daily life or encourage students to create a fairy tale through their imagination. This activity not only allows students to use target grammar in writing, but also develops students' writing skills and creative thinking.

The purpose of the design: This activity can help teachers to evaluate whether their students master the usages of the four relative pronouns or not. Besides, when students write the story from their imagination, it will develop students' creative thinking.

Step 7: Homework

In order to help students better master the target grammar after classes, two extended tasks are arranged for students to choose. The first task is to watch the movie about Cinderella and then write an introduction of the prince (about 100 words). The second one is to watch the movie about *Snow White* and then write an introduction of Snow White (about 100 words). The students will be required to use attributive clauses to introduce a person in real contexts when writing.

4. Teaching Reflection

The English grammar instructional activity design from the perspective of activity-based learning will better cultivate students' grammar awareness and build up teachers' the "form-meaning-use" grammar teaching view, which will also offer a new teaching path for the current grammar teaching. Unlike the traditional grammar teaching methods only focusing on the grammatical structures and isolating from a context, this grammar teaching not only allows students to master grammar knowledge points, but more importantly, explores the thematic meaning based on the discourses used in teaching while learning grammar knowledge points. Through a series of progressive grammar teaching activities, students are guided to develop their logical thinking ability in the process of completing grammar exercises. Teachers should improve their ability to integrate teaching resources and discover the value of the materials. Based on the value of the teaching materials, teachers are expected to design various teaching activities to guide students to learn language

knowledge, analyze problems, solve problems, and finally improve students' key competencies.

5. Conclusion

Grammar teaching based on the guidance of the perspective of activity-based learning offers a new grammar teaching practice path pointing to the development of key competencies. This article selects three fairy tales with the same thematic meaning, allowing students to learn the target grammar in the context and experience the grammar rules in the process of completing the task. Besides, it guides students to use attributive clauses to carry out listening, speaking, reading and writing language practice activities, allowing students to experience, explore, conclude, summarize the usages and finally master the target grammar, in the meanwhile students automatically have improved their comprehensive language ability. The purpose of analyzing and coding the above English grammar instructional activity design is to gain a better understanding of the practices of exploring the thematic meaning of the three fairy tales to develop students' thinking quality and also to compare the actual feedback to the author's design in an attempt to identify any possible underlying beliefs helping students form correct values and achieving the goal of strengthening moral education.

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