

A Study on the Application of Situational Language Teaching in English Class of Primary School English

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Abstract. The implementation of high-quality education in elementary schools has led to changes in English teaching methods. To engage students and ensure effective teaching, innovative strategies are necessary. The situational teaching method provides students with relevant learning experiences but is not used routinely in Chinese elementary schools. Instructors often choose inappropriate contexts, resulting in students being overwhelmed and ineffective English learning. This thesis critically examines the challenges of situational teaching in elementary school English instruction and proposes practical recommendations. These include incorporating modern technology and improving instructors' situational assessment skills to enhance the effectiveness of situational teaching in elementary schools.

Keywords: Situational Teaching Method, Elementary English Teaching, English as Foreign Language.

1. Introduction

Under the background of quality education, primary school English teaching is paying increasing attention to the cultivation of students' core literacy skills in the English subject. English opens the doors to the world for students while being highly practical as well. Therefore, it is also essential to maintain students' interest in learning English for an effective English curriculum. Situational language teaching offers a more pragmatic approach to the English education at the primary school level.

In present-day society, primary school English instruction increasingly accentuates practical utilization. In the context of an English language classroom, educators have the ability to incorporate interactive models based on a variety of authentic real-world scenarios in order to enhance students' proficiency in expressing themselves linguistically and enable them to more effectively apply their acquired knowledge. This facilitation empowers students to genuinely grasp language application proficiency within simulated or genuine life scenarios. This study delves into the quandaries that ensue when instructors opt for contexts in the development of context creation exercises for primary English teaching in China, as evidenced through literature review and classroom analysis. Practical resolutions are posited with a view to enhancing the competencies of teachers in choosing suitable contexts, amplifying the capacity to employ multiple contexts in a cohesive manner, and advancing the amalgamation of modern science and technology with pedagogical methods of context creation. This paper aims to serve as a resource for faculty members of elementary education in China.

2. Application Status of Situational Teaching Method in Elementary School English Teaching

According to the English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education (2022), modern foreign language education places great emphasis on the process of language acquisition while prioritizing the practical application of language skills [1]. It emphasizes the importance of students encountering, experiencing, and comprehending actual language within its context, and learning and utilizing the language on this foundation. However, many studies on contextual creation within English education are limited to theoretical research. While simultaneously incorporating literary readings, some

scholars, such as Liu Yang, have conducted exhaustive research on a more detailed classification of situational pedagogy as it applies to college English teaching [2]. Her research culminated in six categories of situational pedagogy, namely, life scenarios, game scenarios, object scenarios, competition scenarios, performance scenarios, and music scenarios [2].

Long Yao has also explored the significance of contextual pedagogy within English education, elaborating on the concept and its applicability within elementary school teaching [3]. She posits that situational teaching encourages students to engage beyond the guidance of a single instructor, applying complex English theoretical knowledge in relevant teaching scenarios while stimulating their interests in language acquisition and honing their English language abilities [3]. Such methodology has a greater effect on improving the efficacy of instruction within elementary school English teaching [3]. Moreover, since English serves to unlock a world of possibility for students, maintaining their interest in learning the language is paramount to the program's success. In recent years, a multitude of researchers have discovered that contextual pedagogy is applicable to English learners across a broad age range. For instance, Lin Weng (2019) and her peers conducted an experimental study on preschoolers and discovered the effectiveness of situational pedagogy in developing spoken English skills [4]. Similarly, Lu Ling (2019) introduced situational pedagogy within the vocational and technical school English classroom, further underscoring the potential for practical application within different settings [5].

Research on the origin of authentic situational teaching can be traced back to the time of Socrates in foreign countries. Socrates created the teaching method of “maieutics”, in which he raised a series of questions by creating situations in teaching, to stimulate students' thinking and seek the correct answers. The history of situational language teaching can be traced back to the 1930s to 1960s. The British linguists Brown, Collin, and Duguid (1989) first introduced the concept of contextualized teaching, arguing that “knowledge can only have meaning in the context in which it is produced and applied and can never be isolated from its own context, and the best way to learn knowledge is in context.” [6]. To be specific, contextualized language teaching means that based on the theory of contextualized teaching, teachers construct contexts to achieve their teaching objectives. Hubbard et al. (1983) suggest that there are a large number of textbooks that have been written based on the situational approach. Some of these classic textbooks are still in use today [7]. The main features of this method are language teaching begins with speaking and is presented to students before written form; the target language is used in the classroom; new language knowledge is practiced by introducing it through situations; reading and writing begin to serve as teaching objectives only when students have some knowledge of vocabulary and grammar; and so on. In the teaching process, the teacher purposefully introduces or creates vivid and concrete scenes with a certain emotional color and with images as the main body in order to cause students to have certain attitudinal experiences. This helps students understand the teaching materials and enables the development of students' mental functions as a teaching method. American educator John Dewey (2001) believes that the fundamental reason for the failure of traditional education is that it fails to give students a “thought-provoking” situation during the teaching process [8]. Thus, he puts forward the idea of “Learning by doing and learning by playing” [8]. William Hurd Cobbler and other design pedagogy models suggest that the first step is to “create the situation”, which means creating a situation that can cause learning motivation [9]. In this situation, people feel friendly, novel, and focused. Besides, people are easily excited in this situation, which activates their imagination. This way, students can imagine richly and feel deeply, achieving a good educational effect [10].

In summary, researchers and educators both at home and abroad have emphasized the significance of context in education and argued for its incorporation into teaching. However, the strategies for integrating contextual teaching with information technology are not complete or clear enough regarding the profound connotation of contextual teaching in actual classroom settings, especially in today's smart classrooms. Further research is necessary to deepen our understanding of this integration.

3. Potential Issues in the Application of the Situational Teaching Method in Elementary School English Teaching

3.1. Situation Selection.

To begin with, it is evident that certain teachers fail to introduce innovative situations in their teaching methods. Consequently, students are not in a position to develop an interest, curiosity, or the motivation required for continuous learning. For instance, when teaching about vocabulary of vegetables and fruits, teachers commonly create a scenario where students pretend to buy these products at a supermarket. However, this simplistic shopping scene fails to captivate students and may even resemble previous vocabulary lessons on clothing and food. Unless the teacher extracts intriguing aspects from such situations, students will struggle to achieve an immersion learning experience. This is largely due to that novelty plays a vital role in eliciting emotions, as fresh situations tend to spark students' curiosity and eagerness to explore, leading to a more emotionally fulfilling experience. Furthermore, there are occasions when the situations crafted for teaching are detached from the text itself and the students' real-life experiences. In an attempt to cover the teaching time, certain teachers introduce unfamiliar concepts that students have never encountered before. For example, when teaching about the four seasons, some teachers unnecessarily delve into the activities associated with spring, such as working in the fields to cultivate the crops. This not only exceeds the scope of the curriculum but also fails to resonate with the urban lifestyle experienced by the majority of these children. Moreover, inadequate consideration is paid to the age appropriateness of the chosen contexts. In some cases, teachers prioritize the content of the text over the students' developmental stage, resulting in the creation of situations that are disconnected from their everyday lives. For instance, complex situations like the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict or the Paris Climate Change Conference are introduced, which go beyond the comprehension level of elementary school students. These specialized and academic scenarios are beyond their reach and inhibit their ability to effectively apply the knowledge they have acquired.

3.2. Classroom Application.

With the continuous advancement and enhancement of scientific and technological innovation, coupled with the progression of internet technology, contextualized multimedia and other teaching methods have become increasingly ubiquitous in primary English classrooms. However, for many elementary school English instructors, integrating situational teaching methods with information technology can prove to be a difficult and challenging endeavor. Indeed, it necessitates a significant time investment for the collection of materials such as pictures, videos, and other resources to design pedagogical content. Furthermore, educators may struggle with navigating the multimedia equipment, resulting in occasional technical issues that can lead to instructional delays and hinder effective teaching. Consequently, many elementary school English teachers only employ these methods in open classes, while some schools' multimedia equipment serves a purely decorative purpose, and daily teaching continued to center on one-way input from the teacher for knowledge transmission. As a result, the use of modern educational technology to develop scenarios to enrich the efficacy of English teaching in elementary school is often underutilized. Additionally, constraining activities to limited teaching time fails to take into account the entire class, rendering some introverted students disinclined to participate and ultimately unable to effectively internalize and apply newfound knowledge.

3.3. Student Reaction.

The instruction of English language in the primary school setting is troubled about varied challenges. These include the diverse character traits of pupils, with some students displaying high levels of energy and enthusiasm that are often directed towards non-teacher assigned tasks. As a result, teachers find it difficult to create opportunities for teaching in such situations. At the same time, introverted learners tend to shy away from being an active participant in classroom activities.

Nervousness and difficulties in vocalizing their thoughts is a challenge for these learners to answer questions and actively engage with the teacher, thereby creating further hindrances to effective teaching. It is noteworthy that the English language teaching context in primary schools often involves simulated language use scenes. Unfortunately, the lack of an appropriate language environment and limited practice in the use of English language causes learners to struggle with the language component of context creation. This limitation is further compounded by the persistent interference of the learner's mother tongue in the learning process, resulting in nonsensical utterances. The prevalence of Chinese output further hinders the teaching method, and learners gradually lose interest, leading to disengagement and boredom.

4. Strategies of Creating Situations in Elementary School English Teaching

New English Curriculum for Chinese Primary Schools state that the reform of the English language curriculum is centered on altering the existing curriculum, which excessively prioritizes the instruction of grammar and vocabulary while overlooking the enhancement of students' practical language skills. It emphasizes the necessity for the curriculum to be anchored in the students' own learning interests, life experiences, and level of comprehension. Moreover, the reform advocates for the cultivation of students' comprehensive language skills through various learning approaches, such as experiential, practical, participated, collaborative, and interactive modes, alongside task-based pedagogy.

4.1. Enhancement of Students' Speaking Skills through Role-Plays

Role-play activities can serve as an effective means for practicing English language communication skills and enhancing students' ability to apply and consolidate new knowledge. In elementary school English teaching, teachers are encouraged to employ role-play techniques, whereby students are assigned characters in English texts and engage in realistic dialogues that mirror the corresponding lines in the text. The envisaged teaching scenario provides such students with an opportunity to participate in authentic English conversations that enable them to better comprehend, master, and recall relevant language knowledge, while also honing their English language proficiency and flexibility. For example, in the sixth-grade Minjiao English textbook, students may simulate a doctor's appointment and role-play relevant conversations based on sentence patterns and vocabulary expressions learned in the prior lessons. Compared with mechanical memorization strategies, role-play activities motivate students to internalize and apply new knowledge by practicing and performing dialogues, a process that consolidated prior learning and leverages their previously acquired knowledge of the language. It is important to note that when selecting role-play scenarios, consideration should be given to the level of understanding of elementary school students, as well as their life experiences, as only those life settings that are familiar to them, such as celebrating festivals, visiting museums, and the like, have the potential to enhance their English language skills. To ensure that the scenarios employed are at par with students' understanding, teachers may conduct surveys or hold votes before class to gauge student interest, and hence select the most relevant and relatable situations that allow for the creation of concrete images in the students' learning environment. By creating such scenarios, teachers expose students to authentic English conversations that can deepen their comprehension of the language in a practical and experiential approach.

4.2. The Integration of Information Technology and Classroom Teaching

In the current age of rapid advancements in information technology, the traditional method of classroom teaching is no longer adequate to meet the demands of modern education. In response to this, China has implemented a series of curriculum standards and institutional reforms, encouraging educators to utilize new means and methods of teaching through information technology. This is done in order to transform students' thinking and concepts, as well as enhance the learning efficiency of primary school students. For instance, when teaching Unit 4 Time in the third grade of Minjiao

version English textbook, teachers can employ online resources to communicate with native English speakers during the final section of students' knowledge output. In this stage, the teacher can prompt the students to guess the time in various parts of the world. By capturing the students' attention and stimulating their interest, the teacher can then use apps such as italki or social media platforms to facilitate interaction between students and native English speakers. Through this interaction, students can practice asking about the time using the sentence patterns they have learned, while also visualizing the time difference. This real-life scenario is more conducive to authentic communication with others, improving students' ability to express themselves in English and boosting their self-confidence in speaking the language. Such classroom teaching not only enables students to use English in the most direct way possible but also leaves a lasting impression on them. In consideration of the unique characteristics and advantages of elementary school English teaching in the era of technological advancement, it is essential for teachers to enhance the utilization of situational teaching methods and information technology in order to create a personalized classroom environment. This approach can effectively promote the seamless integration of situational teaching methods with information technology. Furthermore, the use of modern information technology can facilitate the creation of contextualized situations, thereby enabling further exploration of the value and effectiveness of situational teaching methods in classroom practice. Additionally, it is crucial to enhance teachers' competence in utilizing information technology. This can be achieved through regular training sessions focused on developing their media skills. Moreover, fostering close communication between teachers and IT professionals is encouraged, as it allows for the identification of opportunities for improvement in multimedia software design based on practical classroom needs. IT engineers can also assist in addressing any inconveniences teachers may encounter while using multimedia technology by continuously upgrading and updating its features.

4.3. Stimulation of Students' Initiative in Learning by Various Situation Settings

In the context of primary school English instruction, it is imperative to integrate a range of teaching strategies, including physical demonstration, visual aids, role-playing, and other situational teaching approaches, to create an immersive and authentic language learning environment that enhances students' comprehension and retention of English knowledge. Furthermore, the utilization of diverse situational teaching modes can amplify the effectiveness of classroom instruction. For instance, in teaching the "Parts of the Body" unit, a teacher can integrate music into the lead-in session in the beginning of a class, with the use of the song "If You are Happy" accompanied by body movements such as clapping and stomping, to reinforce students' mastery of the vocabulary and introduce new concepts. The incorporation of multimedia resources, such as pictures depicting the five senses and other relevant body parts, can better facilitate students' comprehension and retention of linguistic knowledge. Moreover, teachers can employ game-based scenarios to stimulate students' interest and enhance knowledge output. The game "Assemble the Robot", which involves group work and promotes teamwork and competition, is a suitable example that can be utilized to consolidate the newly acquired knowledge. Ultimately, varied classroom activities can create a non-threatening learning environment in which students are fully immersed, leading to an elevated motivation for learning, deepened memory, and an overall enhanced learning experience.

5. Conclusion

In elementary English language instruction, the creation of appropriate teaching situation is essential to enhance instructional effectiveness. This pedagogical approach promotes student engagement with the subject matter, advances communicative competence, and supports the practical application of language skills. To cultivate an ideal learning environment, educators must encourage student participation and independent learning, thereby promoting a positive classroom atmosphere and increasing students' language learning ability. This presents an impactful direction for future English language instruction reform. Building English literacy, however, is a continuous process that

requires careful consideration of students' developmental needs and curriculum requirements. They must then design meaningful contexts that align with these objectives and difficulties and incorporate appropriate English language knowledge to realize effective contextualized instruction. In future research, context creation can be personalized to the interests, experiences, and daily lives of students, leveraging each student's unique learning style to provide tailored materials and methods that enable maximum learning efficiency and depth.

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