A Study on the Classroom Teaching Mode of High School English Vocabulary Based on the Context Theory under the Activity View of the New Curriculum Standard

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Abstract. The English Curriculum Standard for General High Schools (2017 Edition Revised in 2020) puts forward the concept of the activity view of English learning and clarifies the important role of activity in English learning that focuses on playing the leading role of the teacher and respecting the students' dominant position, which indicates that the teaching mode of traditional classrooms in which students have no participation no longer adapts to the requirements of the new era. Given the fundamental role of vocabulary in English learning, this paper analyzes the shortcomings of the teaching process in the traditional classroom mode based on the context theory that fits the requirements of the activity view of the new curriculum standard and then puts forward the improvement suggestions of English vocabulary teaching in conformity with the requirements of the new standard to enhance the teaching effect of English vocabulary in high school.

Keywords: New curriculum standards, context theory, high school English, vocabulary teaching, activity view.

1. Introduction

The Activity View proposed in the English Curriculum Standards for General Senior Secondary Schools (2017 Edition Revised in 2020) (hereinafter referred to as the "New Curriculum Standard") makes English teaching in senior high schools face an urgent reform. The new curriculum standard is an important part of the deepening of the curriculum reform of the general high school, and its proposal makes English teaching face the change from "focusing on teaching" to "focusing on learning".[1] In particular, the new standard puts forward the activity view of English learning, which requires students to learn new knowledge and improve their core literacy in activities, and pays more attention to the main role of students in the classroom, which has changed the rigid teaching process of the traditional classroom in which "the teacher teaches and the students listen". The Activity View requires teachers to integrate the teaching content through six aspects: context, discourse, language knowledge, language skills, cultural skills, and learning strategies, which clarifies the main way to implement the curriculum objectives and is an important initiative in the history of China's English curriculum development.[2] This inspires teachers to create authentic situations and complete contexts in the teaching process and to carefully and skillfully design comprehension, application, and innovative activities, paying attention to the close connection with students' own knowledge and experience, and striving for comprehensiveness, relevance and practicability. The activity concept has high requirements for the integration of context into classroom teaching and points out the direction of the change of classroom teaching methods. This is in line with the context theory, which is an important theory in English teaching.

The teaching of English at the high school level has been elevated to a certain level of difficulty, and vocabulary teaching is again one of the most basic teaching contents, laying the foundation for the development of students' language application ability. High school English teaching aims to promote the comprehensive development of students' abilities in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and reading and is an important stage in the development of students' comprehensive language skills. High school students have longer learning time and richer learning experiences than primary and secondary students, their basic English knowledge and language skills are perfect, and they have higher demand and acceptance for rich teaching activities. Teachers' active guidance to help them develop their own unique and effective English learning styles is more likely than that of primary and secondary school

students, and at the same time, it can improve their communicative competence, overall grasp of the discourse, and cultural awareness. Especially in the teaching of vocabulary, in addition to the contexts presented in the text and the original listening text, if teachers can create new contexts according to the students' characteristics, then the students' acceptance of them will be higher, and their language application ability and core literacy will be more developed, which is exactly in line with the concept of the Activity View. In view of the fact that high school is the key period for developing students' English core literacy, the six elements advocated by the Activity View can be more compatible with the requirements of high school English learning.

The activity view requires that the teaching of the curriculum be the carrier. The design of activities in the classroom and the feedback from students can intuitively reflect whether classroom teaching is in line with the concept of the activity view of the new standards, so classroom teaching has a crucial impact on vocabulary teaching. The teaching of English vocabulary in high school mostly relies on the design of curriculum activities, and returning to the classroom is the embodiment of the activity concept's requirement of designing teaching activities in the classroom. In the classroom, teachers should be good at integrating the activity view in the design of discourse teaching. High school students reflect strong independence and profundity in discourse learning, and learning activities are manifested in both outward verbal activities and inward thinking and cultural recognition.[3] Teachers should pay attention to the integration of curriculum content and cultivate students' core literacy in activities.

Since high school English vocabulary teaching is facing important reforms under the new curriculum standard, this paper introduces the theory to analyze the shortcomings of the current situation of vocabulary teaching, to be able to guide the traditional vocabulary teaching classroom to make improvements and match the core concept of the activity view.

2. Theoretical Foundation: Context Theory

Context theory has gone through evolution and plays an important role in linguistics and language communication, which can help language users better express their thoughts and understand others' words. The theory has been developed to the present day and has been widely used in the study of English teaching, which has an important position in improving the quality of teaching.

2.1. Conceptual Evolution and Development History

Although many scholars at home and abroad have studied the theory of context and the theory has experienced a long evolution, they still have not reached a consensus on the concept of context.

Abroad, Malinowski is the first person to put forward the concept of context, and has put forward the concepts of "situational context" and "cultural context". The former refers to the specific situation in which the speech act occurs, while the latter refers to the cultural context in which the participants of speech communication are located.[4] This marked the beginning of the existence of situation and cultural context as important components of context, a view that is still shared by us today. Even if in the early stage of its development there were counter-arguments such as Saussure and other scholars suggesting that context is irrelevant to the external environment of language, with the views of scholars such as Lyons and others, extra-linguistic social factors still form an important part of the context theory, such as whether a language user is aware of his/her role in the overall linguistic activity, whether he/she can discern the degree of formality of the situation of the linguistic activity, and so on, all of which will affect his/her choice of the choice of linguistic expressions.

While the research on the definition of context is gradually enriched, the academics apply the theory to language expression and language teaching, and the research on it develops to a dynamic level. For example, Sperber and Wilson analyze the "cognitive context" with the correlation theory, which holds that any knowledge structure can only be internalized in the cognitive context of the learner if it enters the cognitive scope of the learner. With the gradual introduction of the theory into China, related studies have been developing in depth and breadth. On the one hand, the definition of context has

"increased in generality, accuracy and comprehensiveness" compared with the earlier one.[5] On the other hand, the applied research of context theory has also developed. One important contribution is the concept of the "gap-filling hypothesis" proposed by Wang Chuming, which suggests that teachers should create sufficient contextual knowledge of the target language and use it to create cognitive situations so that native contextual knowledge does not negatively affect the target language's linguistic expressions.[6] Although the research on context theory has been gradually deepened in recent years, the academic community has not yet reached a consensus on the concept of context.

However, by observing the current research on the context in the academic world, it can be concluded that "context is the characteristics of language itself, including phrases, sentences, etc., which can constitute a specific social background, cultural context, linguistic habits, grammatical rules, thus forming a linguistic environment".[7] Based on the many discussions on the concept of context, more scholars have begun to pay attention to the role of context in language expression. In the West, there has long existed the view that the form of language itself is the decisive factor in conveying information in communication, while Han Lide believes that there exists an antagonistic and united relationship of mutual influence, mutual constraints, and mutual prerequisites between context and language, which establishes that context and language are of equal importance. It is based on the clarification of the role of context from these perspectives that context theory has been widely used in language research. The cultivation and enhancement of communicative competence becomes impossible without a specific language environment,[8] and thus it has become one of the important theoretical bases in language teaching aiming at cultivating communicative competence.

2.2. Research Status: Applied to English Vocabulary Teaching

The role of context theory in English vocabulary teaching has been recognized both theoretically and practically. Teachers' reasonable application of context theory can not only effectively improve students' language expression ability, but also help them accumulate a large number of rich vocabulary. [9] Teachers should not only teach vocabulary in appropriate contexts but also help students learn vocabulary in context. In terms of theoretical basis, context theory can be applied to English teaching recognized by Sapir's language function theory, communicative approach theory, and Krashen's second language acquisition theory.[10] In terms of real practice, many studies have recognized the role of context theory in English vocabulary teaching to enhance its teaching effectiveness. For instance, the polysemy of English words does not create too much real ambiguity in communication. This is mainly because students learn to use words in certain contexts and specific contexts help to eliminate potential ambiguities in words.[11]

The contextual theory has been widely used in the teaching of English vocabulary in high school, but up to now, most of the research has been limited to a generalized elaboration of the classroom model and has not combined the context theory with the requirements of the new standards. For example, some studies have proved that English vocabulary teaching is ineffective when it is detached from the theory of sex. If the vocabulary teaching is out of context, the teacher will teach every word to the students all at once, which will undoubtedly increase the difficulty of the student's learning and aggravate the burden on the students. This will cause students to have a rebellious attitude and lose confidence in mastering vocabulary.[12] Throughout the domestic research on the application of context theory in vocabulary teaching, only a few scholars have linked the theory with the activity view under the new curriculum standard, and even fewer scholars have put forward suggestions for improvement of English vocabulary teaching in high schools based on the linkage between the two.

2.3. Conformity with the Activity View of the New Curriculum Standard

Although fewer studies analyze the context theory in conjunction with the activity view of the new standards, the two are compatible in terms of teaching tools and teaching objectives.

In terms of teaching methods, the teaching mode of context theory is to create context as a means to analyze the meaning of vocabulary through appropriate contexts and develop students' ability of "listening, reading and writing", and at the same time, to understand the existing cognitive context of

students through questioning, testing, and other ways, to break the situation that most of the students' cognition of vocabulary is only limited to its corresponding concepts in their mother tongue. At the same time, through questioning and testing, we can understand the existing cognitive context of students and break the situation that most students' knowledge of vocabulary only stays in the corresponding concepts of their mother tongue, to create a more suitable context for foreign language learning and prevent students from utilizing the knowledge of their mother tongue contexts to make up for the deficiency. Looking back at the research on the theme of teaching English vocabulary under the activity-based view, the focus is on linking vocabulary teaching closely to thematic contexts and discourse,[13] which coincides with the context theory.

In terms of instructional goals, both share the same expectations for core literacy, student agency, and cultural awareness.

Both focus on the core literacy centered on learning ability. Studies related to the application of context theory to high school English teaching have shown that high school English context teaching can provide appropriate thematic contexts for students' independent learning and improve their language learning ability.[14] The activity perspective emphasizes guiding students to develop their core literacy through independent learning, cooperative learning, and inquiry learning.[15]

Both focus on giving full play to students' subjective initiative. From the teachers' point of view, the context theory inspires teachers to fully respect students' cognitive subjectivity, i.e., to create more contexts conducive to students' meaningful communication, and to help students continuously construct and optimize cognitive contexts for language learning. From the students' point of view, the teaching model under this theory pays great attention to students' participation in the classroom, requiring them to "immerse" in the context created by the teacher, and naturally, they become the main subjects of the classroom. This corresponds to the goal of the new curriculum standard, which requires teachers not only to let students memorize the knowledge in books but also to cultivate students' ability to learn language knowledge actively and give full play to students' initiative,[16] which is also in line with the requirements of the activity view under the new curriculum standard.

Both emphasize the cultural context behind the language. Context theory not only focuses on the words or phrases before and after a language item but also pays more attention to the specific situation and cultural context in which the language activity takes place. Teaching students to learn to use and express words that have different meanings in different cultural contexts is one of the priorities of the teaching model under this theory. This requires teachers to pay full attention to the cultural context, to compare and contrast the differences between languages and cultures, and to help students understand and memorize vocabulary by combining their knowledge of linguistic and cultural differences. According to the requirements of the Activity View, in the process of language learning, teachers should help students understand the rational application of language knowledge in the cultural context by guiding them to establish cultural awareness,[17] which is in line with the requirements of the Context Theory to strengthen the inculcation of cultural awareness.

3. Analysis of the Present Situation: Modes and Shortcomings of High School English Vocabulary Teaching

According to the survey, many high school English teachers still use the traditional vocabulary teaching mode.[18] Although with the progress of multimedia technology, English vocabulary teaching supported by digital media has also entered the classroom, it has not changed much the nature of the teaching process.

3.1. Analysis of Teaching Mode

English vocabulary teaching in high school consists of three main stages of classroom teaching: before class, during class and after class, but its creation and utilization of contexts are obviously insufficient.

3.1.1. Preview stage before class

Before the class, isolated vocabulary memorization constitutes the main content of preview, and its completion is difficult to ensure. Even in the context of technological innovation, teachers assign vocabulary preview tasks through digital platforms, such as allowing students to follow reading and spelling. This change to the traditional model exists only in the vehicle of the preview activity, i.e., from a book to a digital platform. As a result, the essential process of preview is to assign vocabulary tasks in advance, with some teachers asking students to read the text and mark the vocabulary words, while others only ask them to look up the dictionary and memorize the meanings after reviewing the word list. In the former case, if the teacher does not ask students to guess the meaning of the vocabulary words based on the contextual clues before looking up the word list, the creation of the context is imperfect. Even if the teacher makes such a request, in the absence of a monitoring mechanism, it is difficult to ensure that the students complete the preview task perfectly according to the requirements. The latter does not connect word learning with discourse at all.

3.1.2. Interpretation stage in the lesson

During the lesson, the teaching process consists of the process of teachers' vocabulary leading and the explanation of word meaning, usage, and related word collocations. Although 47.2% of the teachers thought that the vocabulary was too much, they might still explain all the words indiscriminately.[19]

In the lead reading stage, teachers may explain the meaning of the words together with the pronunciation, but their specific ways still vary. 29.3% of the teachers explained the vocabulary words at once in the order of the vocabulary list, which is a mode of explaining vocabulary words completely out of the specific context, and it will make it more difficult for students to memorize the vocabulary words. Another 35.9% of the teachers chose to explain the vocabulary words in the context of reading the text,[20] but it is doubtful whether the teachers asked the students to understand the vocabulary words in the context and whether they explained the vocabulary words in the context of the text.

In the explanation stage, teachers analyze the meaning, usage, and collocations of vocabulary, mostly by choosing examples at random, ignoring the importance of cultural context, and taking the teacher as the main subject. In the process of analyzing vocabulary by borrowing example sentences, the teachers often use sentences at their fingertips,[21] most of which are irrelevant to the subject matter of the text, and it is doubtful whether the contextual analysis of the example sentences is sufficient. In particular, the study shows that only 10.6% of teachers pay more attention to explaining the cultural meanings carried by vocabulary.[22] From the current situation, it seems that not only teachers do not teach words in discourse with specific cultural coloring, but also some textbooks do not provide contexts that meet the requirements of vocabulary learning, for example, the selection of discourse without considering the relevance to specific cultural contexts. In terms of the teaching subject, whether it is the traditional "teacher talks and students listen" classroom or multimedia teaching, the teacher occupies the main position in the process, regardless of whether the teaching vehicle is a textbook or courseware. Specifically, the teacher presents the prepared words and example sentences to the students at one time, and the students are not able to participate in the deep processing process such as organizing the order of the sentences.[23] In this way, what students do in a lesson is only to move the words from the dictionary or the teacher's handout to their notebooks,[24] which is difficult to internalize into their cognitive structure.

3.1.3. After-class review stage

After class, the lack of context is caused by the dull homework and the lack of explanation. The vocabulary consolidation methods used by teachers are mostly boring recitation and copying.[25] For this kind of mechanical homework, the teacher hardly explains, and the problems of students in the homework are often ignored by the teacher. Although some teachers assign certain passages from the textbook, test papers, etc. for students to practice, teachers analyze fewer of the passages covered in the assignments and the contexts they contain. Due to the limited classroom time, it is common to

provide only answer cross-references without explaining or explaining only the discourse passages related to the text.

3.2. Deficiencies of the Teaching Mode

3.2.1. Insufficient creation of linguistic context for vocabulary teaching

According to the aforementioned summarization of the teaching model, the main deficiency in the creation of the context of vocabulary is the fragmentation of vocabulary phonology and morphology. At the present stage, teachers teach vocabulary phonetics by teaching the pronunciation of vocabulary alone, without placing it in specific sentences or parts of speech, ignoring the systematic nature of vocabulary learning, and failing to teach the three aspects of phonetics and morphology to the students as a whole, resulting in the students' understanding of vocabulary is also fragmented. In this mode of teaching, students can only practice with isolated words or phrases, which makes it more difficult for students to later incorporate the pronunciation of individual words into a discourse, and makes it unclear how to pronounce the sounds in a given sentence, and whether the semantics of the sounds change when they are placed in the context of a specific discourse. In the sentence "I want to use my memo to record some data", "record" is a verb, pronounced as [rɪˈkɔ:d]. In the sentence "He broke the record", "record" is a noun, pronounced as [ˈrekɔ:d]. Under the current teaching mode, teachers only tell students the two pronunciations and two-word forms of record, but they do not correspond to the pronunciations and word forms, nor do they put them in specific sentence contexts for students to analyze. They have deficiencies in the application of words, and students who learn under this teaching mode for a long time cannot inevitably use the language practically, and there is the phenomenon of "learning more is not beneficial".

In addition, in the current teaching model, teachers have inappropriate allocation of teaching time, which determines that it is impossible for teachers to create sufficient contexts to develop students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Moreover, most of the time is used to teach the pronunciation and surface meaning of words, and teachers do not inform students how to apply the expressions. When explaining vocabulary in class, teachers fail to develop corresponding teaching contexts around the teaching objectives, which is not conducive to the development of students' language expression ability and comprehensive literacy. After class, teachers rarely allocate teaching time to the contexts created for vocabulary in the explanatory exercises, and make insufficient use of students' homework.

3.2.2. The lack of mobilization of students' subject position

Under the current teaching mode, before class, some teachers only ask students to preview the word list, resulting in a passive state in which students lack sufficient understanding of the context in which the vocabulary is applied. During the lesson, indoctrination vocabulary teaching will make teachers unconsciously take themselves as the main body of the classroom and overemphasize their explanations and opinions, while students just passively accept the knowledge and lack the opportunity to speak and practice. After class, on assignments the teacher does not discover enough contexts, and students lack the awareness to analyze and learn from these contexts on their own, which may lead them to become dependent and lack the ability to think independently.

3.2.3. Lack of cultural context creation

The above teaching model shows that teachers create fewer or even no cultural contexts, resulting in students only mechanically memorizing word spellings and superficial Chinese interpretations in isolation. The different cultural backgrounds and language habits of the two languages may make some students memorize English vocabulary by using the pronunciation and interpretation of Chinese words.[26] They are unable to apply appropriate vocabulary in specific contexts or even use Chinese language habits to express English because they ignore the cultural background behind the vocabulary. For example, when faced with a compliment from a Westerner, most Chinese may habitually reply "No, no" to show modesty. However, foreigners want their appreciation to be recognized by the other party, so a more polite response is "Thank you". Nevertheless, in cases where these similar expressions

appear in the texts, the teacher may not emphasize their different usages in different cultural contexts. Also, in the explanation of after-class exercises, teachers do not pay much attention to the explanation of these issues.

4. Suggestions: Paths for Integrating Context Theory into Vocabulary Teaching

Because of the requirement of "linking vocabulary teaching closely with thematic contexts and discourse", it is necessary to make full use of the context theory in the vocabulary teaching classroom of high school English, and the specific paths of implementation are as follows.

4.1. Integrating Sentences and Texts to Create Vocabulary Teaching Contexts

Under the activity view of the new standard, high school English vocabulary teaching activities should prevent isolated and out-of-context vocabulary as the focus of learning, and should not be taught, learned, and practiced separately,[27] which will lead to the phenomenon of "narrowing the meaning of multi-meaning words". For example, when they see the phrase "break up", students usually only think of it as meaning "to break up, to break down". In the sentence "When will we break up this term?", the word is translated as "vacation". When explaining, the teachers should first guide the students to guess the meaning of the word by looking at the context before and after the phrase, instead of telling the whole meaning of the sentence directly. In other words, teachers need to establish the awareness that language and context are equally important and realize that the existence of context is to improve students' communicative competence. Therefore, teachers should be good at analyzing and exploring the content of the teaching materials, and the contexts created in vocabulary teaching should be integrated with sentences and texts to cultivate students' independent learning abilities.

4.2. Drill Words in the "Trinity" of Sound, Shape and Meaning

The teaching mode of directly instilling sound, shape, and meaning will make students feel bored and tedious, and weaken their motivation to learn. The purpose of vocabulary drilling is to strengthen students' recognition of words, and ultimately to master the sound, shape, and meaning of words. For instance, when explaining the word "accommodate", the teacher should first break down the syllables and phonemes of the word, explaining that the syllable "a" is pronounced as [a] and the syllable "com" is pronounced as [kom], etc. Then the students should observe the morphological features and word formation of the word, and teachers explain that the prefix "ac-" means "strengthen", the suffix "-date" is the causative suffix, "com" means "together" and "mod" means "by means", which leads to the meaning of the word "to provide accommodation". Then present example sentences and pictures, such as "The room is not big enough to accommodate all people", so that students can understand that the original meaning of the word can be extended to "hold".

4.3. Rational Allocation of Teaching Time

The English syllabus requires different levels of listening, speaking, reading, and writing for the words in each unit. [28]Teachers should prioritize when preparing lessons, which words students must master and use flexibly, and which words students can read without memorization requirements. Enough time should be left in the lesson to make clear the specific application of some key words in specific contexts. For example, in a forty-five-minute class, in addition to the introduction and summary time, for key words, about 25 minutes should be left to explain the words from three aspects of sound, shape, and meaning, combined with the text to analyze the example sentences, and give the students context-related exercises; for non-key words, the teachers can only use about 10 minutes to adopt a rapid teaching method, and briefly introduce their meaning and usage.

4.4. Fully Respecting the Dominant Position of Students

Sukhomlinskii once said that free time is a necessary condition for the development of students' personality. Only when students really have the time and space for independent learning in the classroom can they truly implement their main body status. Therefore, teachers should create a relaxed and pleasant teaching environment and a free communication environment to stimulate students' learning enthusiasm. Before the class, teachers can set up preview tasks to let students into the text context to guess the meaning of words. During the lesson, teachers should actively create contexts in various ways to attract students' attention and involve them in understanding the context of vocabulary use. At the end of the lesson, teachers should ask students to summarize the different applications of the words they have learned in the text and submit them in the form of homework.

4.5. Strengthening the Edification of Cultural Context

Teachers need to follow the teaching principle of "based on the vocabulary system, looking beyond vocabulary teaching", and pay attention to the cultural background behind the vocabulary. In terms of vocabulary, understanding the cultural context is helpful to strengthen the understanding and memorization of some vocabulary. For example, the word "black tea" is translated as "Hei Cha" by many students, but the correct translation is "Hong cha". Teachers need to tell the students that one of the reasons is that westerners pay more attention to the color of tea leaves, so they call it "black tea". In terms of the cultural context created by the text, students can learn about the specific use of vocabulary in a particular cultural context through appropriate texts. Teachers need to examine whether the context created by the text meets the requirements of vocabulary teaching, and if not, replace it with another text. For example, if the words to be learned in a lesson are related to a certain festival, and some of the words have special meanings in specific cultural contexts. Then the words should be linked together in a text, which is more conducive to students' memorization. Teachers continue to develop students' intercultural communication skills through the above practices.

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