

Explore the Teaching Design of English Listening and Speaking from the Perspective of Activity-based Approach

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Abstract: Teachers' professional competence is the key to the effective implementation of the English curriculum and teaching reform. Teachers should profoundly understand and apply the principles specified in the English Curriculum Standards. The activity-based approach provides a powerful platform for integrating curriculum content, carrying out in-depth teaching, and fulfilling the overall goal of the curriculum (The Ministry of Education, 2020). Taking Section A 1a -2d, Unit 1 *How Can We Become Good Learners?* Grade 9, Go for it by People's Education Press as an example, this study explores how to promote the development of students' English subject core competencies in junior high school English listening and speaking class based on the concept of activity-based approach, aiming to provide practical enlightenment for activity-based English teaching in junior high school and useful data for theoretical research on activity-based approach.

Keywords: Activity-based Approach; Subject Core Literacy; Listening and Speaking Class in Junior High; Teaching Design.

1. Introduction

Teachers' professional competence is the key to the effective implementation of the English curriculum and teaching reform. Teachers should profoundly understand the principles, goals, and requirements specified in the English Curriculum Standards, always bear in mind the goal of developing the students' English subject core competency, continuously optimize teaching methods, improve teaching quality, implement the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, and promote professional development in parallel with curriculum reform (The Ministry of Education, 2020). And several suggestions on teaching are presented in the New English Curriculum Standards for Chinese Senior High Schools (2020ed), among which "Adopting the activity-based approach to English learning and promoting the cultivation of core competencies" requires teachers to re-examine the logic and effectiveness of classroom teaching from the perspective of the activity-based approach to English learning, synthesize curriculum content, optimize teaching methods, and design contextualized, hierarchical, and effective English learning activities for students. Taking Section A 1a -2d, Unit 1 *How Can We Become Good Learners?* Grade 9, Go for it by People's Education Press as an example, this study explores how to promote the development of students' English subject core competencies in junior high school English listening and speaking class based on the concept of activity-based approach, aiming to provide practical enlightenment for activity-based English teaching in junior high school and useful data for theoretical research on activity-based approach.

2. Activity-based Approach

The English Curriculum Standards advocates the activity-based approach to English learning that aims to cultivate students' core competencies. As the basic form of English learning, activities enable students to learn and use language

to understand and express meaning, cultivate cultural awareness, develop multiple thinking capacity, and develop learning ability.

The design of English learning activities should aim to promote the development of students' English subject core competencies. Activities should be designed around thematic contexts and make full use of oral and written multimodal texts. Students should be guided to deepen their understanding of the theme through activities that follow the process of "learning and understanding," "applying and practicing," and "transferring and creating," and integrate language, thinking, and culture. Teachers should help students learn language knowledge in activities, use language skills to interpret cultural connotations, compare cultural similarities and differences, analyze textual meanings, form correct values and positive emotions and attitudes, apply the language and cultural knowledge in the new context to analyze and solve problems, and creatively express personal opinions, emotions, and attitudes (The Ministry of Education, 2020).

3. The Practice of Listening and Speaking Teaching Design Based on the Activity-based Approach

3.1. Text Analysis

The theme of this unit belongs to "man and self", focusing on the improvement of learning ability. Specifically, each lesson in this unit presents effective ways to learn English, challenges and solutions in the process of English learning and good learning habits sequentially. This lesson (Listening and Speaking) lies in the beginning of whole unit, which introduces some basic words and expressions about ways of learning English (textbook, conversation, aloud, pronunciation, sentence, patient) and the grammar point of "by-verb-gerund" to talk about how to study. In this period, students will stimulate as much topic-related personal experience as possible and be exposed to preparatory

linguistic items and topical knowledge through brainstorming, listening and speaking, which is fundamental to the subsequent learning.

Besides, many pictures are provided in the textbook, which are helpful to create various situations for students. Also, those pictures with information can serve as the clues for students to conduct prediction before listening. As for the model of teaching process, it belongs to PWP. More specifically, it can be called “2 PWPs”, which means there are two different listening materials need attending. We can see each while-listening activity is followed by a post-listening task of making conversations. But there is logical connection between those two conversations. The first one is about asking others’ learning skills, the second one about introducing one’s own learning skill. Therefore, the order of the first post-listening task will be adjusted and combined with the second task to help students be engaged in longer conversations and practice speaking skills.

3.2. Student Analysis

The students from Grade 9 of junior high school are very familiar with the topic of learning skills and habits, therefore, they will be interested, curious and enthusiastic in class. And they have mastered “how-questions” and “by-means of transportation” to talk about means of travel, which makes it easy for them to understand “how-questions” and “by-ways

of learning” used to talk about ways of studying. Also, they have some useful learning strategies of their own and can talk about them with sentences like “I usually listen to teachers/tapes/English songs; I often work with others; I like watching English movies; I always write diaries in English”.

However, they lack the ability to produce sentences with the new grammatical point “by-verb-gerund” to talk about learning skills and give suggestions to others in real-life situations. What’s more, most of them still don’t make the most of listening and speaking sub-skills, which deserve strengthening.

3.3. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to, 1) distinguish different learning skills through prediction and listening for key words; 2) talk with each other about how to study by applying interrogative sentences and “by-verb-gerund” correctly and fluently; 3) act out the conversation about “ask for help and give suggestions” fluently and naturally by adopting stress, various tone and intonation; 4) rewrite a conversation and act it out by relating and reflecting their own learning difficulties and figuring them out with partners with confidence.

3.4. Teaching Procedures

3.4.1. Activities of Learning and Understanding

Table 1. Activities of Learning and Understanding

Stage	Activities (teacher and students)	Evaluation
Greetings 1’	Have a simple conversation. CW	Teacher observes if students are concentrated by looking at their eyes, facial expressions.
A Brief Introduction to this lesson 1’	Introduce the main content of this lesson. CW	Teacher observes if students are concentrated by looking at their eyes, facial expressions.
Lead-in 3’	Watch a video (An interview about the learning ways of students from another class). CW Q: How do they study English? How does the interviewer respond?	①Students can answer the two questions after watching the video. ②Students can read after their teacher in a right way.
Lead-in 2’	Conduct a free talk. CW Q: How do you study English?	Students can talk about their learning skills with the new language item of “by-verb-gerund” correctly and fluently.
Pre-listening 5’	Activity1: Check and add the ways of studying English. IW Activity2: Make predictions. IW Q: What’s the listening material mainly about? How do they study for a test?	①Students check and write their learning skills down. ②Students can make predictions based on the picture and the information in 1b. ③Students can answer the second question with the new language item of “by=verb-gerund” correctly and fluently.
While-listening 3’	Listen, choose and write. IW	Students can choose, write down the correct letters and answer teacher’s questions with the new language item of “by-verb-gerund” correctly and fluently.
Pre-listening 5’	Activity1: Skim and read aloud. IW+CW Activity2: underline the key words. CW	①Students skim the questions as required. ②Students can read after their teacher in a right way. ③Students can guess out the meaning of new words in the linguistic and situational context created by teacher. ④Students can underline and speak out the key words in each question.
While-listening 7’	Activity1: Listen(1st) and check. IW+CW Activity2: Listen(2nd) and match. IW+PW	①Students can read the four questions they checked aloud correctly. ②Students can match and make conversations correctly and fluently. ③Students can guess out the meaning of “that way” in the linguistic and situational context created by teacher.

Specifically, activities of learning and understanding mainly include text-based activities such as perceiving and

noticing, retrieving and summarizing, and generalizing and synthesizing. For example, teachers create situations around

the theme, activate students' existing knowledge and experience, prepare students with necessary language and cultural background knowledge, and lead them to the problem to be solved. On the basis of this, in order to solve the problem, teachers should encourage students to obtain new knowledge from texts, establish connection between the information through sorting, summarizing, and integrating information, form new knowledge, and comprehend and understand the meaning and cultural value orientation of the text (The Ministry of Education, 2020).

This is the first class of a new term (Grade 9). An enthusiastic greeting and a fresh start are essential to set a tone of expectation and practical efforts for students. Therefore, it can arouse their willingness to keep working and to assume responsibility for themselves, which in return, sets a desirable environment for the learning activities in this class. The important prerequisite for the significant improvement of teaching effect is to create a high-quality teaching environment and stimulate students' enthusiasm for independent inquiry through the subtle influence of the atmosphere (Wang, 2024). By regarding them as good language learners and relating to their personal learning habits, students are exposed to the topic of this lesson naturally while feeling confident and relaxed in the meantime. As mentioned above, students are exposed to the topic of this lesson naturally in the casual conversation. But teachers still need to state the topic and main content clearly to students so as to help them to have a basic understanding of what they are going to learn and what tasks to finish. Also, it can help students get concentrated and look forward to learning. A short video (an interview about the learning ways of three students from another class) in the lead-in step in the beginning of this lesson will be played and they need to be highly focused while watching so as to answer the two questions prepared for them. By answering the first question, students will stimulate their learning experience and topic-related words and expression. As for the second question, they will be exposed to new knowledge. In the video, the teacher, being the interviewer, paraphrased what the interviewees said by integrating the important language knowledge (by-verb-gerund) of this class. As analyzed, students can produce sentence patterns like "I usually listen to teachers/tapes/English songs; I often work with others; I like watching English movies...". Therefore, a scaffolding will be set between what they already knew and what they don't know, which will help students relate to their existing cognitive structure and better understand and input new knowledge. Besides, they are familiar with the people and place in the video, which will arouse their interest. And the basic language knowledge is introduced briefly to prepare students to conduct a free talk later.

A free talk in the lead-in step in the body of this lesson is arranged to guide students to talk about their learning skills and habits by using the important language knowledge (by-verb-gerund) explicitly. They can practice speaking and consolidate new knowledge at the same time, which will lay the foundation for the following listening activities. And it can create an active and relaxing atmosphere to intrigue and encourage students to speak aloud confidently. Through the free talk, students have been familiar with the grammatical point (by-verb-gerund) and topic-related expressions. But it's still necessary to keep strengthening and there are still other

new words need introducing so as to lay the foundation for the following listening activities. Therefore, Activity1 is arranged. All the new words and phrases are not directly told to students. They need to guess the meaning of new words in certain linguistic context. Besides, students can reflect on their own learning skills and habits by checking the list. In Activity2, students will be guided to make predictions before listening so as to be well-prepared and improve the accuracy of their listening. In the meantime, students will practice the sentence pattern of this class one more time by answering the second question in Activity2. After the carefully preparatory work, students are able to deal with the listening task on their own with confidence. In the listening process, they are highly focused to target the information they need. In addition, by answering with sentences, students practice the focal point 'by-verb-gerund' again, which will promote the transition from input to intake.

By setting consistent situations with the help of pictures, students will be more interested and engaged in the learning process. Besides, the presentation of new words and expressions is indispensable to help students to be linguistically prepared. And skimming through the questions in advance can help them to be topically prepared. Guiding students to underline the key words before listening can help them to develop the skill of listening for key information. All the explicit instruction of learning strategies can serve to enhance students' learning effects and boost their confidence in English learning. Students will develop a positive outlook on English learning if they apply those skills in daily learning practice. After the carefully preparatory work, students are able to deal with the listening task on their own with confidence. In the listening process, they pay attention to the key words. The sub-skill of listening for key information can be developed. In addition, evaluating students' performance by answering with sentences, students practice the focal sentence patterns (general and special questions) and new expressions (practice conversations with; read aloud to practice pronunciation) one more time, which will promote the transition from input to intake. Setting targeted and continuous evaluation is the fundamental guarantee for developing language ability and developing thinking capacity (Zeng, 2024). In activity 2, students making conversations in pairs to check answers can provide them with an opportunity to practice speaking, which lays the foundation for the meaningful and communicative tasks later. And after that, the new phrase "that way" is introduced in a specific linguistic and situational context so as to develop students' ability to guess the meaning of new words.

3.4.2. Activities of Applying and Practicing

The activities of applying and practicing mainly include in-depth text learning activities such as describing and interpreting, analyzing and judging, and internalizing and utilizing. On the basis of activities of learning and understanding, when doing activities of applying and practicing, teachers guide students to participate in activities to describe, interpret, analyze, and judge following the themes and the newly formed knowledge structure, in order to gradually realize the internalization of language and cultural knowledge, consolidate new knowledge structure, promote the automation of language use, and help students turn knowledge into ability (The Ministry of Education, 2020).

Table 2. Activities of Applying and Practicing

Stage	Activities (teacher and students)	Evaluation
Post-listening 15'	Activity1: Make conversations using information from 1a, 1c, 2a and 2b. PW	Students can make conversations by using the language knowledge learned in 1a, 1c, 2a and 2b correctly, naturally and fluently.

As analyzed before, there are two different listening materials need attending and each while-listening activity is followed by a post-listening task of making conversations. Since there is logical connection between those two conversations, the order of the first post-listening task will be adjusted and combined with the second task to help students be engaged in longer communicative conversations and practice speaking skills. It's not difficult for them because they have conducted several enabling tasks to input and intake new language knowledge and skills before.

3.4.3. Activities of Transferring and Creating

The activities of transferring and creating mainly include reasoning and arguing, criticizing and evaluating, imaging

and creating, and other learning activities that go beyond the text. Teachers guide students to reason and argue about the value orientation or author's attitude behind the text, appreciate its stylistic features and rhetoric techniques, explore its relevance to the meaning of the theme, criticize and evaluate the author's viewpoints, deepen the understanding of the theme. Then in new contexts, by using new knowledge and autonomous, cooperative, and inquiry-based learning methods, students try to comprehensively use language skills, conduct multiple thinking, creatively solve problems in unfamiliar situations, rationally express opinions, emotions, and attitudes, reflect correct values, achieve deep learning, and transform abilities into competencies (The Ministry of Education, 2020).

Table 3. Activities of Transferring and Creating

Stage	Activities (teacher and students)	Evaluation
Post-listening 15'	Activity2: Read and think. IW+CW Qs: How does Mike feel? Why does he have such a feeling? What problems does he have? What advice does Annie give him? How does Annie cheer him up? Activity 3: Role-play the conversation in 2d in pairs. PW	1)Students can mark the key information and answer the questions. 2)Students can present their role-play naturally and fluently.
Summary 2'	Summarize the focal points. CW	Teacher observes if students are listening attentively and thinking.
Assignments 1'	1. Finish the meaningful exercises (words and expressions) in worksheet. 2. Reflect and write down your good ways and problems of learning English.	Students are making notes about the assignments.

Guiding students to read the conversation and find out the underlying clues can serve to develop students' logical thinking. Telling students the truth of learning in the end can guide them to cultivate a proper attitude towards learning. Avoid producing cliches but to strike a chord with many students by relating to their learning experience. The cultivation of value, attitudes and emotion of the text should be natural (Huang, 2024). The communicative task of role-play in new contexts gives students an opportunity to use new knowledge and language skills comprehensively in both autonomous and cooperative way, express opinions, emotions, and attitudes rationally, reflect correct values, achieve deep learning, and transform abilities into competencies. Give a clear and concise summary by using visual (different colors, highlighting markers on the blackboard) and auditory (oral explanation) tools to reinforce the focal points. In so doing, students will construct a structural knowledge of this lesson, which will strengthen their sense of satisfaction and obtainment. The two tasks assigned can help students to consolidate what they have learned in class. Their performance-based features make it convenient for teachers to evaluate and give feedback. It is one of the important ways to implement activity-based approach that teachers design

performative tasks in English class (Yang, 2024). Integrating the instruction of language skills and knowledge shows the general principle of integration or comprehensiveness of lesson planning. In the first task, reviewing the basic language points can improve students' communicative competence since the development of skills is based on the acquisition of knowledge. The second task acts as the bridge between this lesson and next. Also, it provides a good opportunity for students to reflect their learning habits and make adjustments.

4. Findings

The case above demonstrates an instructional design following the activity-based approach to English learning of listening and speaking in junior high school. Following this approach, teachers need to integrate the six components of the curriculum. Led by the themes and based on the texts, classroom teaching should integrate language knowledge learning, cultural understanding, language skill development, and learning strategy training into the three kinds of interrelated language learning and thinking activities. Teachers can combine various goals with specific activities to promote students' thinking, ability, knowledge and strategies

development (Yuan & Sun, 2024). There is no fixed pattern or order for designing teaching activities. The case above doesn't follow the "PWP" model strictly, but adjusts it to "PWPWP", namely pre-listening, while-listening, pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening, based on the inner logic of learning content, students' learning conditions and learning objectives. Teachers should design teaching activities flexibly and purposely according to their analysis of the texts and their students' learning needs. Teachers can connect or combine different activities in different orders.

5. Conclusion

In short, no matter how teachers design activities, there should be activities of learning and understanding that focus on the factual information of text, activities of applying and practicing that dig into the text, and activities of transferring and creating that go beyond the text. In each type of activities, teachers should organically integrate language knowledge learning, language skills application, learning strategy application, thinking capacity development, and cultural awareness training, and help students actively participate in the study activities that explore the meaning of the theme, learn to analyze and solve problems using learned language and achieve the goal of developing the core competencies.

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