

An Exploration of Junior Middle School English Vocabulary Teaching Strategies Based on Thematic Context

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Abstract

Vocabulary teaching is the basic content of English teaching. How to conduct vocabulary teaching under the background of core literacy is a problem that English teachers should seriously consider. This paper explores the path of junior middle school English vocabulary teaching under the thematic context from four aspects: life situation teaching, problem topic teaching, cultural context teaching and sentence connection, aiming at helping teachers better conduct vocabulary teaching and finally achieving the goal of students' vocabulary acquisition.

Keywords

Vocabulary teaching; thematic context; life situation teaching; problem topic teaching; cultural context teaching; text context.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is the basis of English learning, which directly affects the comprehensive development of students' listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities. Therefore, vocabulary teaching is a very important part in the process of junior middle school English teaching. Learning English vocabulary well and accumulating rich vocabulary are very vital for the improvement of students' English reading comprehension ability and writing ability. The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022) clearly emphasizes the important position of vocabulary teaching in English teaching, and makes a clear and detailed division of vocabulary knowledge content. Therefore, when designing junior middle school English vocabulary teaching activities, teachers should not only rely on traditional mechanical and rigid memorization methods, but also innovate teaching methods to stimulate students' learning enthusiasm and enable students to acquire the rich connotation of English vocabulary through learning, so as to build a more perfect knowledge system. With the deepening of the new curriculum reform, the drawbacks of traditional vocabulary teaching have also begun to appear. How to effectively teach students vocabulary has become a heated topic for more and more teachers. At the same time, vocabulary teaching based on "subject context" can integrate the subject context and vocabulary teaching reasonably, and has been paid more and more attention and favor by learners. Therefore, this paper discusses the design of junior high school English vocabulary teaching activities based on the subject context by taking some unit vocabularies in the junior high school English textbook for PEP edition as an example.

2. The Disadvantages of Traditional Vocabulary Teaching

For most junior high school students, vocabulary is really a difficult problem. Some students spend too much time and energy on vocabulary learning, but still can not fully master vocabulary. The reasons for this phenomenon mainly include the following aspects. First, vocabulary teaching lacks specific context. Some teachers ignore the language environment of vocabulary in vocabulary teaching, and pay more attention to the spelling, Chinese meaning and

parts of speech of vocabulary, which leads to rote memorization in vocabulary learning. Even if students have mastered the spelling of the word, they can't relate it to the actual context and can't truly use it. In fact, the parts of speech and meanings of many words are not separated, but they have different usages and meanings in different language environments. Some English teachers are afraid that students haven't enough vocabulary, so they spend a lot of time in class to explain new words, and ask students to write down all the meanings of the new word, all the changes and phrases related to it, and recite vocabulary after class. However, much of what the teacher explains has nothing to do with the vocabulary context covered in the textbook. Such a practice is too demanding on students, which will not only increase students' learning pressure, but also lead to their learning enthusiasm decline and subjective initiative can not be fully developed. Second, the vocabulary teaching mode is relatively unitary. In the actual teaching process, although many teachers will innovate the reading teaching mode, oral communication mode and writing teaching mode, they neglect the innovation and optimization of vocabulary teaching mode. Teachers are still used to explain vocabulary knowledge to students according to the meaning of vocabulary, fixed collocation, and the order of grammar knowledge explanation. Although this mode can help students clarify knowledge points related to vocabulary, in the long run, it will make students form a thinking set, and they cannot creatively understand and use a word, so that their English learning initiative is affected, and the effect of the whole English class is very low, and ultimately affect the learning efficiency of students. Third, vocabulary teaching fails to explore the cultural connotation. Vocabulary is an important component of English language and contains a wealth of cultural thoughts. Therefore, culture and vocabulary complement each other. However, in the actual teaching process, many teachers do not try to teach relevant vocabulary knowledge from a cultural perspective. As a result, students have a narrow perspective of vocabulary learning, so that their vocabulary usage is pretty simple, falling into the dilemma of vocabulary learning.

3. Advantages of Thematic Context Teaching

Thematic context is a teaching mode in which teachers establish teaching objectives, design teaching contents and carry out a series of related teaching activities around a certain theme in a specific context. Compared with the disadvantages of the fragmented teaching of traditional vocabulary teaching, the thematic context teaching has its obvious advantages. First of all, thematic contextual teaching requires teachers to create real context, because students are more likely to understand and master vocabulary acquired in context. Vocabulary memorized on the basis of understanding is more in line with the memory rule so that uneasily to forget. Secondly, thematic contextual teaching requires teachers to choose topics that are closely related to students' real life. Theme is the core of the whole teaching model, and all the teaching objectives, teaching contents and teaching activities are developed around the established theme. If the topic can be closely related to the real life of students, it will stimulate students' desire to express. Finally, thematic contextual teaching requires teachers to guide students to explore the vast amount of cultural information contained in vocabulary. Language is the product of culture. It is not advisable to just memorize vocabulary without exploring the cultural connotation behind the language. In the learning process, teachers should inspire students to actively search and sort out relevant materials to deeply explore the cultural background behind the theme and the drive of the cultural information it carries. This can not only enrich the cultural accumulation of students, but also allow students to review the vocabulary they have learned before, so that learning is more extended and systematic.

4. English Vocabulary Teaching Strategies Based on Thematic Context

This chapter mainly expounds the teaching strategies of junior middle school English vocabulary based on thematic context, including life situation teaching, question topic context teaching, vocabulary culture context teaching and text context teaching.

4.1. Construct Life Situations to Stimulate Interest in Vocabulary Learning

In teaching, teachers need to create a real language environment for students according to specific teaching goals and students' daily life, so that students can be placed in an intuitive and image situation, so as to use appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas. According to the interest characteristics of junior high school students, teachers can use objects to construct life-like situations in vocabulary teaching, and use intuitive teaching AIDS to attract students' attention and stimulate their learning interests. Under normal circumstances, visual teaching AIDS mainly include objects in life, PPT courseware, pictures and videos. Teachers should choose appropriate visual teaching AIDS according to students' actual life and cognitive level to create vocabulary learning situations for them, so that students can intuitively recognize, understand and use vocabulary. At the same time, teachers also interact with students through gestures, movements and expressions in teaching, which can also stimulate students' interest in learning. And in the teaching process, teachers gradually change students' thought from passively learning to actively learning in a relaxed and pleasant vocabulary learning atmosphere. This lays a good foundation for cultivating students' good vocabulary learning ability.

Taking the vocabulary of unit3, grade 9 "Could you please tell me where the restrooms are" as an example. The vocabulary of this unit revolves around place and direction. Words about places and directions in this unit include *restroom, stamp, bookstore, bathroom, mall, address, east, nearby, central* and so on . When teaching the vocabulary of this unit, the teacher should use teaching AIDS that are closely related to the topic. First, the teacher can introduce the topic by showing some pictures. The picture is about people talking in the street. After the picture is shown, the teacher asks the students to discuss what the person in the picture is doing and to guess what words might come up in the conversation. Then the teacher uses a mind map to guide the students to categorize the words they express so as to help them remember them better. In the process of categorizing, pictures are used to make students understand the meaning of new words. Next, teachers can start the "connection" game, list the new words and corresponding picture content respectively, and let students connect. Let students closely follow their familiar words, start a connection game, and get familiar with the relevant location words in this game, to achieve effective vocabulary accumulation. After the completion of the vocabulary learning in the first stage, teachers can create a theme context and show students a series of contextual stories in the form of animated videos, such as "sending stamps", "one-day trip to Chengdu" and so on to expand students' knowledge horizon. In the process of watching these stories, students activate their original vocabulary cognition while absorbing new vocabulary knowledge. Then, teachers can ask students to imitate and innovate the video stories they have seen by making up a relevant dialogue or interviewing, and finally realize the effective use of relevant vocabulary. Vocabulary teaching with the help of this life theme context not only fully activates the thematic vocabulary of the unit, but also enhances the initiative and enthusiasm of students in vocabulary learning. It can also activate students' innovative thinking and make their vocabulary learning more vivid, interesting and meaningful.

4.2. Implement Vocabulary Teaching in the Context of Question Subject

Vocabulary belongs to the content of language teaching, and the process of students learning language is actually a process of thinking activities. Therefore, in the process of vocabulary teaching, teachers should also pay attention to the training of students' thinking, and shouldn't just let students recite words mechanically, which will only make students have negative

psychology on vocabulary learning. Teachers should guide students to find and solve problems based on the thematic context and form a logical and holistic unit vocabulary structure. In this way, students can place the problem in a specific language environment, discover the rules of vocabulary learning in problem solving, consciously establish the connection between old and new knowledge, and enable students to view the vocabulary structure of the whole unit, the whole module or the whole book from a macro perspective, so as to improve the effectiveness of their vocabulary learning.

Take unit4, grade9 “I used to be afraid of the dark” as an example. When teachers teach this unit, they can take the problem as the driver to activate students’ thinking vitality and enthusiasm in vocabulary teaching, guide them to use vocabulary to solve various problems, and take the initiative to build a relatively complete vocabulary learning model. For example, teachers can combine the specific teaching content of this unit to ask students “How have you changed since you entered middle school?”, “What changes have you made in your life, such as personality, hobbies, etc?”. Through setting the context of the questions related to the topic of the unit, the teacher lets students discuss and say relevant vocabulary. For instance, a series of words for “personality” include “humorous”, “outgoing”, “shy”, “silent” and so on. In such questions and answers, students gradually accumulate more vocabulary and get a more authentic learning experience, which makes the atmosphere of their vocabulary learning more warm and natural.

4.3. Explore the Implied Cultural Context of Vocabulary

In vocabulary teaching, teachers should establish an organic connection with culture with the help of specific teaching contents. In other words, by creating a specific cultural theme context for students, students can dig cultural connotation from vocabulary, compare and learn Chinese and Western cultures, and then produce new cognition. Vocabulary teaching based on “thematic context” will arouse students’ curiosity in the set teaching activities and make them take the initiative to explore the cultural background behind the vocabulary. Therefore, from the perspective of culture, students can feel the unique charm of Chinese and Western cultures, form a dialectical and unified cultural concept, help students deeply understand Chinese culture, and promote their own cultural accomplishment.

Take unit10, grade 9 “You’re supposed to shake hands” as an example. The two reading passages in this unit are about the customs and cultures of different countries. When teaching the words in this unit, the teacher can put the words into specific reading passages so that the students can understand their deeper meanings. In 3a, Teresa Lopez and Marc LeBlanc are students from different countries. They have different views on the concept of punctuality. As students learn about the topic, teachers can use mind mapping to elicit words related to punctuality and analyze the different meanings of the same words in different cultures. For instance, take diet as an example. When teachers teach the word “dinner”, it means “the main meal, dinner party”. In foreign countries, the “dinner” is generally referred to a formal meal having in the evening, but in our country, the “dinner” generally refers to lunch. Therefore, teachers can start from “dinner” and guide students to explore the different understandings of dinner culture in China and abroad, so that they can have a new cognition of this word from a cultural perspective. On this basis, in order to let students master the specific application of this word, teachers can also introduce a number of similar words, such as “supper”, “lunch” and so on, and explain the basic usage of these three words. For example, “supper” refers to the last meal of the day, not the main meal in the West. Moreover, the usage of “supper” is mostly singular, and articles are rarely used to modify it. And “lunch” means a meal in the noon, or sometimes a simple meal between meals. So it can be used as either a countable noun or an uncountable noun. In this way, teachers can guide students to achieve a dialectical understanding of Chinese and Western catering culture. In this way, it can also help students use vocabulary in real life more scientific and reasonable.

This makes students feel the charm of English learning, and also helps students achieve the appropriateness of vocabulary application.

4.4. Infer the Meaning between Sentences

Any word can not be separated from the context and exist alone, teachers should not simply explain the meaning of words, parts of speech and changes when teaching words, which can only make students disgust vocabulary learning. When the teacher explains the words, he can put the words in the sentence, so that students can understand the meaning of the words according to the context of the language environment, which not only avoids the misunderstanding caused by the polysemy of the word, but also enables students to obtain a more profound memory through their own guess understanding.

In 3a, unit 2, grade 9, the article describes the story of Chang'e's fly to the moon. In "However, a bad man, Pang Meng, tried to steal the medicine when Hou Yi was not home. Chang'e refused to give it to him and took it all.", "steal" is a new word. Students can gradually guess the meaning of words by combining the known background information with the next sentence.

5. Conclusion

In junior middle school English teaching, vocabulary teaching is not only the basic content, but also the key and difficult point in teaching. At present, vocabulary teaching based on "thematic context" has become the key to English activities and permeates all aspects of teaching. Different from the traditional vocabulary teaching which is simple and fragmented, it integrates the thematic context with vocabulary teaching reasonably, which is of great significance to the cultivation of students' learning habits, the improvement of their learning ability and the improvement of their cultural accomplishment. In this regard, teachers should innovate vocabulary teaching strategies based on the thematic context, that is, they should implement vocabulary teaching with the help of life context, problem theme context, cultural theme context and the connection between texts and sentences. Through that, students can activate their innovative thinking, tap their thinking potential, and enhance their initiative in vocabulary learning in more space for independent exploration, independent thinking and independent practice. Finally, students can boost effectiveness of vocabulary learning, lay a solid foundation of vocabulary knowledge, and promote the cultivation of core English literacy.

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