

International Journal of Social Science and Education Research



ISSN Print: 2664-9845
ISSN Online: 2664-9853
Impact Factor: RJIF 8.00
IJSSER 2023; 5(2): 26-29
www.socialsciencejournals.net
Received: 11-05-2023
Accepted: 14-06-2023

Qin Lijing
Department of Foreign
Languages, Yangtze
University, Jingzhou, Hubei,
China

Oral English teaching in middle schools guided by constructivist learning theory

Qin Lijing

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26649845.2023.v5.i2a.56>

Abstract

This paper analyses the existing problems and reasons in the teaching of spoken English in junior middle schools of China, introduces the main viewpoints of constructivism, which has been generally affirmed and valued by the foreign language community in recent years, and makes an example analysis of spoken English in junior middle schools under the guidance of constructivist learning theory. It is hoped that under the guidance of this theory, the students' main position in English speaking teaching can be established and the teaching effect can be effectively improved.

Keywords: Junior high school English, junior high school oral English teaching, constructivism

Introduction

From The English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education (2022 edition) ^[4]. The English language has been endowed with the dual nature of "instrumentality" and "humanity". In terms of instrumentality, it aims to enable students to master basic knowledge of the English language and develop the ability to communicate in English. Due to the tendency of exam-oriented education, coupled with limited classroom time, generally larger class size, and examination pressure, most junior high school students have very few opportunities to practice and train in the classroom, and even more so outside of the classroom, there is a lack of opportunities for practical use of the language. English learners generally have the phenomenon of "high scores and low ability" and "dumb English", how to improve the quality of English classroom teaching at the same time, to help junior high school students to carry out efficient oral English learning has become an urgent task. Although China's oral English teaching requirements are increasing, especially in recent years, many provinces and cities have carried out the reform of the English examination in the secondary school, and the oral English score is included in the total score of the secondary school examination, but oral teaching is still a weak link in the whole English teaching (Dong Wei, Fu Lixu, 2004) ^[5]. However, oral teaching is still a weak link in the whole English teaching. There is a considerable gap between the oral communication ability and level of secondary school students and the actual needs. This paper analyses the existing problems and causes of oral English teaching in junior high schools, and explores how to improve the teaching effect of oral English in junior high schools in the light of the existing problems according to the teaching theory of constructivism, so as to improve the English level of the students in a practical way.

Analysis of the current situation of oral English teaching in junior high schools

English is a compulsory course in China's basic education stage, which shows the importance our country attaches to English teaching. As a language learning, listening, speaking, reading and writing are four basic skills. This is an organically linked whole, interdependent and interacting with each other. In teaching, these four skills should be integrated together, and one of them cannot be trained or applied separately, which will have little effect. However, traditional English teaching in China has always favored knowledge-based indoctrination, grammar teaching, emphasized written expression training and neglected the cultivation of students' oral communication skills. Von Hippel (1994) ^[16] said that many students have learnt English for many years, but it is difficult for them to communicate in English in a simple way, and their oral English proficiency is low.

Corresponding Author:
Qin Lijing
Department of Foreign
Languages, Yangtze
University, Jingzhou, Hubei,
China

1. Target Orientation of English Speaking in Junior Middle Schools

The English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education (2022 edition) ^[4], which makes clear requirements for this to be able to express views or opinions on simple topics and participate in discussions to be able to communicate information, effectively ask for information and request help to be able to perform situational dialogues or skits on given topics to be able to be aware of problems in oral expression and self-correct appropriately and to be able to do the above oral activities with a natural tone and appropriate intonation. The above oral activities can be carried out with a natural voice, tone of voice, and appropriate intonation. The three-level standard of the Chinese English Proficiency Scale (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018) ^[10] roughly corresponds to the junior high school level, and the three-level standard of oral expression ability requires: Being able to communicate simply, correctly, and coherently on familiar topics; being able to participate in group discussions with the help of assistance, and using strategies such as indirect explanations and rewording to complete the communicative task when necessary.

2. Problems in the teaching of spoken English in junior high schools

According to the author's investigation and understanding, the following situations exist in the current oral English teaching in junior middle school.

The traditional teaching mode is dominant in junior middle school oral English teaching, which is reflected in the following aspects

Teachers are still the core and controller of the classroom, and the teaching concept of taking students' learning as the center has not been truly implemented (Steffe LP, Galef, 1995) ^[15]. In recent years, with the continuous development of learning theory, the education sector has become more and more aware of the important position of students in the teaching process. The key to teaching is not simply how teachers teach, but how students learn. Teachers should design teaching content and organize classroom activities according to students' cognitive levels (Brown AL, 1994) ^[2]. According to the teaching practice of the author's professors and the knowledge and observation of other junior high school English teachers' classes, the current junior high school English classroom mostly adopts the following procedures to carry out teaching: First, listen to the audio recording of the model dialogue of the text or watch the video, then explain the vocabulary and language points appearing in the text, then do the exercises designed for the content of the text and the language points at the back of each unit, and after proper explanation, the teacher will ask the students to complete some similar exercises according to what has been learnt in this unit. After proper explanation, the teacher will ask the students to complete some similar situational dialogues based on the content of the unit. On the surface, this mode of teaching seems to be in line with students' learning patterns, from familiarizing themselves with the content of the text, listening to tapes, watching videos, listening to the teacher's explanations (ELLIS R, 1994) ^[7]. The simple and preliminary application of what they have learned, for example, to do exercises to test their understanding of the content of the text and their mastery of

grammar, vocabulary and sentence patterns, etc., and then to the more complex application of what they have learned to carry out situational dialogues based on the content of what they have learnt. However, if we take a closer look, it is not difficult to find out that throughout the whole teaching-learning process, students are only passively completing the steps and tasks arranged by the teacher, rather than actively participating in them. Their subjective initiative and enthusiasm have not been truly mobilized. The teacher in this process is like a director, and the students are only actors, the plot and the way of expression are pre-set by the director, the actors only need to do what the director said, to complete the director's pre-determined links can be (Cai Li, 2006) ^[3]. Obviously, there is a big gap between this mode of teaching and the real concept of student learning-centered teaching.

Students have too few opportunities and time to practice speaking in class

As the author mentioned earlier, in the middle school English listening section, there is one listening in each unit, and the listening section is generally divided into two lessons, each lesson lasts 45 minutes. In the 90-minute period, after listening to the text, listening to the teacher's explanations and practicing, the time left for students to practice on their own is quite limited. In addition, the oral presentation part, the oral presentation is generally divided into small groups, a group of five or six members, but often the opportunity to speak English in the group's excellent members of the oral "Monopoly", the other members of the default who speaks well, who will go on behalf of the group "war", in this case, the students will not be able to speak English in the group (Dong Wei, Fu Lixu, 2004) ^[5]. As a matter of fact, the opportunity for everyone to speak English is unfairly divided.

The quality of teachers varies

Some teachers are unable to fulfil their teaching tasks in English, or they use the excuse of students' poor foundation to teach by boldly using Chinese in the classroom, and the context of spoken English is lost (Cai Li, 2006) ^[3]. Because of these reasons, the students' speaking is not guaranteed by the basic curriculum, and the English context is lost, which kills the students' motivation to learn speaking, thus making the teaching of speaking difficult.

3. Oral English Teaching in Junior High School under the Guidance of Constructivism

Constructivism's Learning Theory

The learning theory of constructivism holds that learning is the process of acquiring knowledge. Knowledge is not imparted by teachers, but is acquired by learners in a certain economic, social and cultural context, with the help of other people, using the necessary learning materials, and through the way of one-by-one construction (GASS SM, 1998) ^[8]. The amount of knowledge acquired depends on the learner's ability to construct meaning about the knowledge based on his or her own experience, not on the learner's ability to memorize and recite the content of the teacher's lectures (He Kexiang, 1998) ^[9]. This learning theory stresses student-centeredness, which not only requires students to change from the receiver of external stimuli and the object of knowledge instillation to the main body of information processing and the active constructor of the meaning of

knowledge, but also requires the teacher to change from the transmitter of knowledge and the instigator to the helper and facilitator of the students' active construction of meaning.

Implication of constructivism for classroom teaching

Applefield, Huber & Moallem (2001)^[1] synthesize commonly expressed constructivist views on learning. They note that constructivists tend to agree on four characteristics as central to all learning: 1) learners construct their own learning; 2) new learning depends on students' existing understanding; 3) social interaction plays a critical role; 4) Authentic learning tasks are needed to ensure meaningful learning.

Classroom Examples

In order to more clearly reflect the constructivist learning theory as a guide for junior high school oral English teaching, the author will arrange the teaching arrangement for the unit of Unit 4 Why don't you talk to your parents? It involves the sub-themes of "Difficulties, Problems and Solutions in Life and Learning" and "People and Society" in the topic of "Life and Learning" under the category of "People and Self". The sub-theme "Good interpersonal relationships and interpersonal communication" in the topic "Social services and interpersonal communication" under the category "Man and society" unit content.

The author takes the fourth class of the eighth grade in Dongfanghong Middle School as an example. There are 48 students in this class; the textbook used is the second book of the eighth grade of the Ren jiao edition, Go for it! I spent two lessons of 90 minutes to complete the study of Section A of Why don't you talk to your parents? In the first lesson, I check the effect of students' independent learning of words before class, and then let the students listen to the dialogue on the tape and answer the questions. Then students are asked to pick out the vocabulary and sentences that they have difficulty in understanding, and the teacher will explain them appropriately according to the students' requirements, and then do some phrases and sentences to practice and consolidate what they have learnt. In the second lesson, the author informed the students of the tasks and arrangements for the next lesson in the next lesson, the students will do the presentation of telling worries or problems in their lives, listening to the worries and giving the reasonable suggestions, the presentation time of each group will be about four minutes, and the preparation time will be one day. The scenario for the pet peeves was framed as follows two group members have a worry, other group members give advice about the worry, and respond to the advice. Note that the author gives a semi-open situational framework in which many of the key details can be freely created by the students based on their existing knowledge of English as well as their own common sense and experience, but students are reminded that creativity is allowed but the dialogue should be based on cognitively and ethically appropriate foundations. The 48 students were divided into seven groups of six, and the group members were subdivided into two types, confidantes and listeners or advice-givers. Advice. Both sides of the group were to rehearse outside of class, with each group member participating and presenting off script. According to Perkins DN (1991)^[11] through this type of independent learning outside the classroom, students not only connect what they have learnt in the classroom to real-life situations with a

high degree of authenticity, but also make connections with their own prior knowledge, thus completing the construction of meaning.

As a large amount of preparation was transferred to be completed outside the classroom, two class periods within the classroom could be focused on demonstrations for students. The two lessons last 90 minutes, and the author would set aside 25 minutes for presentation and focused evaluation and feedback, pointing out weaknesses, and encouraging students to ask and answer questions for each other.

From the example of the lesson, we can see that the oral English teaching in junior high school under the guidance of constructivist learning theory eliminates and improves the problems existing in the current oral teaching to a great extent. Inspired by this theory, the author designed some of the key contents to be taught in class as specific learning tasks outside class, changed the situation that activities in the traditional speaking class were concentrated in class, and shifted to the situation that students' activities in class should be based on a large amount of preparatory work outside class, so as to make better use of the originally very limited time for speaking class, i.e., to supplement and strengthen the teaching effect of the first class with learning activities in the second class. The above classroom examples show that the teaching of the first classroom is not as effective as it could be. In the teaching model presented in the classroom example above, students become the main learners and the teacher plays a leading role. Pressley M, Harris KR, & Marks MB (1992)^[12] state that semi-open-ended scenarios allow students to enjoy a great deal of autonomy and decision-making power in extracurricular preparatory activities, and are always in the process of active exploration, active thinking and active cognition. This enables classroom learning to be expanded through out-of-class learning activities under the guidance of the teacher, so that the content of the lectures is no longer confined to the textbooks used, but can be extended to any relevant sub-topics through the rational design of the teacher's out-of-class tasks.

The means of learning have also been enriched so that students can make use of any means and forms that are useful for completing extracurricular learning tasks, such as the Internet, multimedia, various forms of courseware, discussions among students, consultations and conversations between teachers and students, and so on (Sprague, J, 1993)^[14]. At the same time, by collecting and processing the required materials outside the classroom, the ability of collaboration and social practice among students grows, and students' interest and confidence in learning English increases. Students' full commitment and preparation outside the classroom makes the in-class drills more time, depth and meaningful (Radziszewska B & Rogoff, B 1991)^[13]. In addition, teachers should not be indifferent to students' learning activities outside the classroom, but should pay close attention to the process and provide timely advice and assistance.

4. Problems facing oral English teaching in junior high schools under the guidance of constructivism **Requirements for students' self-motivation**

The constructivist-guided oral English teaching in junior high schools has also increased the demand for students' quality. Although most students have a strong desire to learn

English well and want to change the traditional teaching methods, they are used to waiting for the teacher to "feed" them knowledge because the inertia and dependence brought about by the traditional teaching methods for many years have prevented them from actively participating in the construction of knowledge, and the traditional education and the fact that they were born into a family with one child have left serious deficiencies in the cultivation of collaboration (Dong Wei, Fu Lixu, 2004) ^[5]. How to change students' existing thinking structures that are not adapted to constructive teaching and fully mobilize their motivation and subjective initiative is still a topic worth exploring.

Challenges for teachers

Student-centered teaching under the guidance of constructivism places high demands on teachers' expertise in pedagogy and English language teaching, as well as on their management and guidance of students' learning processes inside and outside the classroom (Duffy G, Roehler L & Radcliff G 1986) ^[6]. As teaching activities extend beyond the classroom, teachers' time and energy are no longer limited to the weekly classroom but also pay attention to the students' extracurricular completion, and maintain contact and communication with students outside the classroom. Teachers as a student learning guide, helper, collaborator, its actual work time and responsibility has been extended and expanded. This requires teachers to be quite enthusiastic and highly responsible for their teaching work.

Conclusion

Under the influence of exam-oriented education and traditional teaching concepts, although the importance of speaking has been more and more generally recognized and acknowledged, and the cultivation of English speaking ability has been gradually paid attention to, there are still many problems with the current speaking teaching, which leads to the phenomena of ineffective teaching of speaking and poor students' oral expression ability. As the constructivist learning theory emphasizes the interaction and collaborative relationship between learners, learners should learn to cooperate with each other and share the results of learning together instead of direct indoctrination. This can develop students' motivation and initiative in learning (Steffe LP, Galef, 1995) ^[15]. Under the influence of constructivist learning theory, language teaching puts more emphasis on the meaning and interest of the learning content. When students engage in oral communication, they try to take the topics in life as the starting point to increase the interestingness of the topics and motivate the students.

References

1. Applefield, JM, R Huber, M Moallem. Constructivism in Theory and Practice: Toward a Better Understanding. *The High School Journal*. 2001;02:35-53.
2. Brown AL. The advancement of learning. *Educational Researcher*. 1994;23:4-12.
3. Cai Li. Business English Oral Teaching under the Guidance of Constructivist Learning Theory. *Foreign Language World*. 2006;02:30-34.
4. Developed by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. English curriculum standards for compulsory education: 2022 Edition. Beijing Normal University Press; c2022.
5. Dong Wei, Fu Lixu. An investigation of university English multimedia network classroom under the guidance of constructivism. *Foreign Language World*. 2004;02:8-13.
6. Duffy G, Roehler L, Radcliff G. How teachers instructional talk influences students understanding of lesson content. *Elementary School Journal*. 1986;87:3-16.
7. Ellis R. *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; c1994.
8. Gass SM. *Integrating research areas: A framework for second language studies: Applied Psycholinguistics*. Cambridge University Press, 1998;9:198-217.
9. He Kexiang. Constructivism A theoretical basis for revolutionizing traditional teaching. *Middle School Language Teaching*. 2002;08:58-60.
10. Ministry of Education of the people's republic of china, state language and literature commission. *China English proficiency scale: 2018 Edition*. Ministry of Education Examination Centre; c2018.
11. Perkins, D.N. What constructivism demands of the learner. *Educational Technology*. 1991;31:19-21.
12. Pressley M, Harris KR, Marks MB. But good strategy instructors are constructivists!, *Educational Psychology Review*. 1992;4:3-31.
13. Radziszewska B, Rogoff B. Children's guided participation in planning errands with skilled adult or peer partners. *Developmental Psychology*. 1991;24:840-848.
14. Sprague J. Why teaching works: The transformative power of pedagogical communication. *Communication Education*. 1993;42:349-366.
15. Steffe LP, Galef. *Constructivism in Education*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; c1995.
16. Von Hippel. Sticky information and the locus of problem solving: Implication for innovation. *Management Science*. 1994;40:429-439.