

Oral English Teaching Design in Junior High School from the Perspective of Connectivism Theory

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Abstract

Language proficiency is a crucial component in developing students' core competencies, and the importance of cultivating oral skills has gradually deepened. Under the guidance of connectivism theory, this paper discusses the feasibility of implementing teaching activities by integrating the connectivism learning network perspective. It then takes a case study of the listening and speaking lesson in Unit 7 of the eighth-grade textbook "People's Education Press English" to design oral teaching activities. Finally, following the principles proposed by connectivism theory, the teaching activities are analyzed. The aim is to promote the construction of knowledge networks among students, establish connections between sources of information, and provide a reference path for oral teaching through the design of oral teaching activities.

Keywords

Oral English Teaching Design, Connectivism, English of Junior High School.

1. Introduction

To cultivate talents for the new era and implement the fundamental task of moral education, the "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)" propose that the curriculum should revolve around the development of core competencies, namely, language proficiency, cultural awareness, thinking qualities, and learning abilities. In the aspect of language proficiency, the new curriculum standards have set specific goals for the junior high school level, which is the third stage. These goals include being able to understand clear pronunciation and slow-paced short oral expressions to extract key information, being able to spell words according to pronunciation rules and phonetic symbols, using the learned language to engage in daily communication with others, maintaining basic correctness in pronunciation, intonation, and word choice, and expressing ideas relatively coherently (Ministry of Education, 2022). This highlights the significance of English oral teaching. In addition, a few major cities have initiated reforms in the English section of the college entrance examination, such as adding oral exams starting in 2021, with a total of 50 points allocated to oral and listening tests. Therefore, improving the efficiency of English oral teaching and refining current oral teaching methods are urgent tasks.

In 2005, scholar Siemens proposed the theory of "Connectivism," which describes a learning model that adapts to changes in the current social structure and has significant theoretical guidance for learning and teaching in the information age (Siemens, 2005). Furthermore, English oral teaching places higher demands on the diversity of teaching activities and the richness of teaching materials. Utilizing network and information technology can effectively record students' oral proficiency development and enhance interactivity in oral teaching activities. Based on this, this paper aims to address the following questions: 1. Is Connectivism helpful for Students' oral English learning? 2. How to integrate the Connectivism theory into

oral English teaching design? The goal is to provide reference designs for junior high school English oral teaching activities and promote the efficiency of oral teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on Oral English Teaching Design

Foreign scholars' research on oral teaching primarily focuses on aspects such as teacher assessment methods, teaching environments, teaching methods, and teaching resources. (Sanjay Kumar, 2022) explored the application of authenticity assessment in oral teaching, pointing out that teachers often fail to use authenticity assessment appropriately and still tend to rely on traditional assessment methods, neglecting unfamiliar assessment methods like personal assessment and learning portfolio assessment. (Aeni et al., 2017; Ismail et al., 2018) noted that students have limited opportunities for oral practice both in and outside the classroom, which is a significant environmental factor contributing to poor development of their oral proficiency. (Bunjan & Suppasetsee, 2017) combined video blogs and role-playing and integrated them into oral teaching. Through classroom practice, they found that students were highly interested in VBRP (the Video Blog-Based Role Play) lessons and actively participated in classroom activities. (Chen & Goh, 2011) pointed out that most teachers wish to have access to richer teaching resources to enhance the efficiency of oral teaching.

Some domestic scholars focus on summarizing teaching experiences, teaching methods, and teaching assessment in the context of English oral instruction, while others combine evaluation theories and schema theory to explore oral teaching. (Ye Hongping, 2012) summarized some of the issues in current junior high school English oral teaching based on years of teaching experience, such as insufficient emphasis on teacher thinking, inadequate guidance in teaching methods, and students' lack of interest in learning. Therefore, teachers should optimize their classrooms, encourage students, pay attention to curriculum assessment, and help students establish a solid foundation in oral English. (Zhang Lingli, 2020) applied the "output-oriented approach" to the teaching of English as a lingua franca (ELF), with a focus on pronunciation teaching. Through the implementation of ELF courses, this teaching approach was found to effectively enhance students' confidence in oral expression and improve the comprehensibility of their oral communication. (Jiang Yazhen, 2016) explored evaluation methods in junior high school English oral teaching and found that introducing a dialogue-based assessment mechanism can enhance students' initiative and sense of responsibility in oral learning, promote communication between teachers and students, and create an active atmosphere in oral classrooms. (Ma Weilin, 2007) guided oral teaching from three levels of evaluation theory: attitude sub-system, intervention sub-system, and gradience sub-system. It emphasized the use of various language resources to express the speaker's subjective intentions, the use of various strategies to achieve different levels of control over discourse, and the recognition of the communicative effects of semantic enhancement or reduction. (Zhang Yanyan, 2015) explored oral teaching models based on schema theory, proposing that teachers can activate and enrich students' form schemas through various activities, train their language abilities, and solidify both language and content schemas.

In addition, in exam-oriented junior high school English oral teaching, students face certain obstacles in their oral learning. In the classroom, students lack opportunities to express themselves, and teachers tend to have students practice oral skills through recitation and reading aloud, which can lead to mechanical practice without actual expression, hindering the improvement of oral proficiency. Teachers should encourage students to read English books, newspapers, watch English programs, or access English learning resources online (Guo Minghe & Wang Yuan, 2013).

In conclusion, both domestic and foreign research on junior high school English oral teaching is comprehensive and in-depth, often incorporating theoretical insights into their explorations. However, with the advancement of internet technology, which has become an integral part of teaching, this paper aims to explore more era-appropriate and efficient teaching activity designs under the guidance of "Connectivism."

2.2. Research on Connectivism

Currently, foreign scholars are primarily researching Connectivism in various ways, using this theory as a basis for exploring teaching methods, combining it with learning theories to investigate learning methods, assessment, and the development of learning resources, as well as exploring the development of students' thinking qualities.

(Barnett, McPherson, & Sandieson, 2013) used Connectivism as the basis for the TVW (Teaching in a Virtual World) curriculum and found that during the teaching process, teachers and learners were more "integrated." They also highlighted another characteristic of Connectivism, which is that students with knowledge or enthusiasm for a particular topic often serve as providers of background information and lead discussions.

(Bozkurt & Ataizi, 2015) combined the Connectivism learning perspective to explore how Web 2.0 can be used for learning and acquiring English. They proposed specific learning tools for different English skills, such as using podcasts for extensive listening practice and using video blogs to record one's speaking process for self-assessment, evaluating fluency, accuracy, and more. (Ozturk, 2015) combined Connectivism to investigate learning in massive open online courses (MOOCs) and found that the knowledge structure framework of online learning resources is clear and continuous, but in some areas, it does not reflect open education principles. They suggested further development and enhancement based on Connectivism. (Chen & Hu, 2018) conducted a cognitive assessment of students using the Rain Classroom, a learning platform rooted in Connectivism. They used the Critical Thinking Skills Scale for experimentation and found that the intelligent learning system had a positive impact on the development of students' critical thinking but had less influence on assessment and self-regulation aspects.

These studies illustrate the various ways in which Connectivism is being applied and explored in the field of education, including its impact on teaching, learning methods, and the development of educational resources.

Chinese scholars are applying Connectivism in the context of curriculum development and learning environments, with a focus on strategies for creating self-directed learning environments and enhancing the learning environment.

(Wei, 2019) proposed strategies for building a self-directed foreign language learning environment based on the principles of Connectivism. They discussed hardware, software, and relational aspects, emphasizing how these strategies can help cultivate learners' awareness of network "nodes", strengthen the close connections between nodes in the learning network, and enhance learners' ability to extend and conduct self-directed learning through the network.

(Wang Liyuan, Zhang Yan & Lu Xiaohong, 2019) conducted research on the production of micro-lessons for middle school English oral courses, particularly integrating the Connectivism view of teachers as "facilitators of the curriculum, influencers, and shapers of the network" into the design and production of micro-lessons. This approach provides more ways for middle school English teachers to create micro-lessons, offers students rich learning resources and scenarios, and fosters a positive learning atmosphere.

(Wang&Qiu, 2021) discussed the direction of curriculum development based on the Connectivism theory, focusing on four aspects: multiple subjects, spatial expansion, smooth mechanisms, and a focus on curriculum experiences. They also emphasized the importance of using high-quality educational resources from both domestic and international sources to build

a resource platform that supports students' individual development and innovation, thereby providing new pathways for curriculum development.

These studies demonstrate how Chinese scholars are actively incorporating Connectivism into their educational practices, aiming to improve curriculum development and create more effective learning environments for students.

From this, it can be observed that both domestic and foreign scholars have primarily focused on the application of Connectivism in curriculum development, teaching methods, and learning resources. However, there is relatively less integration of Connectivism in the context of middle school English teaching, highlighting a research gap in this area. This suggests a potential opportunity for future research to explore and develop Connectivism approaches specifically tailored to middle school English education to enhance teaching and learning in this context.

3. The Main Contents and Principles of Connectivism Theory

Today, we live in the information age, with a plethora of learning resources available on the internet, covering a wide range of topics. Therefore, utilizing the Internet for learning has become the preferred choice for many learners. In 2005, George Siemens introduced the concept of *Connectivism* in his work *Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age*. Connectivism is a holistic principle explored through theories of chaos, networks, complexity, and self-organization. This theory suggests that learning is no longer an individual activity but occurs within a vague and ambiguous environment, and learning (defined as dynamic knowledge) can exist beyond the individual learner (within an organization or database). The knowledge acquired by individuals forms a network, which is then shared across various large networks and institutions, and conversely, knowledge from these large networks and institutions can be transmitted to individuals, allowing them to continue their learning and reference (Siemens, 2005). Additionally, Connectivism believes that its greatest advantage lies in a distributed learning network based on "nodes", where nodes can be organizations, libraries, websites, journals, databases, or any other sources of information (Siemens, 2006).

The principles encompassed by Connectivism include:

1. Learning and knowledge rest in diversity of opinions.
2. Learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources.
3. Learning may reside in non-human appliances.
4. Learning is more critical than knowing.
5. Maintaining and nurturing connections is needed to facilitate continuous learning. When the interacting time between the actors of a learning environment is not enough, the learning networks cannot be consolidated.
6. Perceiving connections between fields, ideas and concepts is a core skill.
7. Currency (accurate, up-to-date knowledge) is the intent of learning activities.
8. Decision-making is itself a learning process. Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information is seen through the lens of a shifting reality. While there is a right answer now, it may be wrong tomorrow due to alterations in the information climate affecting the decision.

(Zhou&Zhong, 2011) summarized eight principles of Connectivism based on the perspectives of learning networks, learning tools, and learning ecology. Among them, principles one, two, five, and six correspond to the learning network perspective, which involves the process of "forming connections and creating networks". Connectivism emphasizes that a person's learning activities should be similar to a network, where learners are nodes within the network and connect with other distinct nodes to form an information flow. Connectivism views learning

not as an individual's isolated action but encourages individuals to exercise their subjectivity, nurturing the ability to seek and share information (Chen Furong, 2018).

In the teaching process, teachers should indeed encourage and assist students in finding more "nodes" for oral language learning to create a knowledge network. Furthermore, in the information age, learning tends to be informal, and learners absorb many fragments of knowledge in their daily lives. Connectivism emphasizes that technology plays a significant role in the learning process.

Therefore, this paper, from the perspective of building a knowledge network in Connectivism and line with relevant principles, aims to explore the design of oral English teaching activities in middle school. It provides specific case examples to fully utilize internet technology support, enriching oral teaching content, and improving the way oral English is taught. The objective is for students not only to be able to speak English but also to be proficient in using the language.

4. Case Study of Teaching Design Based on Connectivism

This case is taken from the People's Education Press Eighth Grade English Unit 7, "Will people have robots?" As a practical application of Connectivism in middle school English teaching design.

4.1. Learning Activities Before the Class

The teacher selects the key oral practice paragraphs and sentence patterns for this unit and gives students two questions: 1) What's your prediction about the future? (This question is for future prediction); 2) Using general questions with 'will' to inquire about the future and responding with 'will be'. Besides, the teacher asks students to collect relevant information.

By doing this, students' self-directed learning abilities and information-gathering skills can be cultivated. Giving students the task of collecting information can allow them to acquire knowledge related to the current lesson's content, thus helping bridge the gap between new and prior knowledge. Meanwhile, the pre-reading tasks can help students become familiar with the target language knowledge. The assessment criteria here can be beneficial for implementing an integrated teaching, learning and assessing approach.

4.2. Learning Activities During the Class

During the class, there are five teaching steps.

First, the teacher introduces new lesson content and conducts target pronunciation and shadowing exercises based on students' pre-lesson preparation on the online platform can reinforce language knowledge effectively. By doing this, the teacher can assess students' language knowledge and proficiency levels.

Second, the teacher records and evaluates the information gathered and presented by students, and encourages them to actively participate in the report of sharing diverse information. It can boost students' motivation and promote their oral expression.

Third, the teacher guides students to listen to audio recordings and randomly selects students to answer questions related to the teaching content. By doing this, the teacher can ensure that students of different levels actively participate in classroom activities while building on their existing knowledge background.

Fourth, the teacher organizes students into small groups to engage in group discussions about technology-related information. The students can use the expressions learned in this class. By doing this, students can foster their capacity to acquire knowledge, communicate and view others' thoughts critically.

Fifth, the teacher invites students to engage in role-play activities, where one acts as the interviewer and the other as the interviewee. The language used in the role-play will not be

confined. By doing this, students can use the sentence structures without restriction so that they can obtain full exercise and talk about the future randomly.

Last, the teacher can evaluate and record students' oral expression based on the assessment rubric tailored to their individual learning needs, which was prepared in advance. It can be beneficial to the achievement of learning objectives.

4.3. Learning Activities After the Class

After the class, the teacher can publish listening and speaking tasks on the online platform, allowing students to independently access and complete them. This provides an opportunity for students to review and further consolidate the classroom content.

Meanwhile, the teacher can track and monitor the students' classroom performance based on platform data, as well as provide assessment and feedback on their oral expressions through the online platform. It can be an effective way to support students' learning progress. By doing this, the implementation of both summative assessment for the class and formative assessment for the entire unit can be achieved to some extent, thus the teacher can improve the oral English teaching activities continually.

5. Analysis of Case Study

To build students' oral learning network perspective, the teaching design case proposed in this article utilizes the internet and online learning platforms to assist students in establishing a network for acquiring knowledge information before, during, and after the class. This network connects various sources of information and continuously promotes students' oral practice, aligning with the principles of the Connectivism learning theory. This is primarily reflected in three aspects.

5.1. Gathering information from multiple sources and learning from different perspectives to acquire knowledge

In this lesson, students have multiple channels for obtaining information, including the internet, classmates, and teachers.

Firstly, before the class, students extensively collect information from the internet and categorize it. This allows them to not only acquire knowledge but also enhance their skills in gathering and organizing information. Secondly, during the class, students share the knowledge they have collected with each other, leveraging the differences in their findings to access diverse information sources. Through this sharing and exchange, they expand their knowledge base. Additionally, in the oral practice activity of role-playing, students engage in discussions based on the information they have gathered, which is conducive to them embracing different perspectives and cultivating their dialectical thinking.

After the class, students are required to complete review tasks on the online learning platform, which also allows them to connect with various sources of information.

5.2. Various interactive activities promote connections between information sources

In this lesson, students engaged in various interactive activities.

Before the class, students primarily connected with various types of information on the internet. While gathering technology-related information, students came into contact with various forms of information, and this extensive exposure prompted connections between the new information and their existing or prior knowledge.

During the class, students primarily connected with the teacher and their classmates. Under the guidance of the teacher, students participated in various instructional activities, interacting with the teaching content prepared by the teacher in advance. Additionally, through

interactions with their peers, students gained knowledge they either already possessed or lacked, fostering further connections.

After the class, students once again completed oral practice tasks on the online learning platform, establishing connections with the knowledge in the activities.

5.3. The online learning platform is integrated throughout, promoting continuous learning

In the information age, learning requires the use of various information technologies, and in this lesson, learning platforms were extensively utilized.

Before the class, students used the learning platform to preview the lesson content, enabling them to practice reading new vocabulary and expressions introduced in the lesson.

During the class, the teacher also guided students to use the online platform to reinforce their pre-learning results, assess their preparation, and evaluate their oral communication skills. After the class, the teacher used the learning platform to assign oral tasks, allowing students to consolidate the oral expressions they had learned in the lesson.

Additionally, this facilitated tracking and monitoring of students' progress in oral language learning.

6. Conclusion

The emphasis on spoken English in junior high school English teaching is gradually increasing, and as a result, the teaching methods for English speaking need to evolve with changing forms to enhance the efficiency of oral English teaching. Connectivism, as a learning model adapted to the current changes in social structures, can effectively guide junior high school English oral teaching. Based on the principles corresponding to the Connectivism learning network perspective, this article designs teaching activities for the listening and speaking lessons in Unit 7 of the People's Education Edition Eighth Grade, enabling teaching activities to promote students' construction of a learning network perspective, connect more extensively with various sources of information, and foster continuous learning.

The alignment of this oral teaching design case with Connectivism principles is mainly reflected in the following aspects: 1. Gathering information from multiple sources and learning from different perspectives to acquire knowledge; 2. Various interactive activities that promote connections between information sources; 3. The consistent presence of an online learning platform that fosters continuous learning.

Therefore, through the above analysis and discussion, this article aims to provide more reference ideas for designing junior high school English oral teaching and improving its teaching efficiency.

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