# Research on Teaching Strategies for Cultivating Students' Innovative Thinking in Listening and Speaking: Taking Unit 8 "Listening and Speaking: Ideas about the Future of Our School" in 7B as an Example

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**Abstract:** Thinking quality is one of the four core elements of the English subject's core literacy. The cultivation of students' thinking quality is an important task of English subject teaching. This article focuses on the cultivation of students' innovative thinking in English listening and speaking teaching. Taking the English listening and speaking class taught by the author as an example, it analyzes and proves through the three stages of before-listening, during-listening, and after-listening that by applying four teaching strategies such as "prediction and verification, step-by-step advancement," "extracting the theme and writing a summary for the dialogue," "grabbing the blank space and expanding thinking," and "creating a situation," students' thinking abilities such as prediction, analysis, inference, summary and induction, and transfer are cultivated, promoting the cultivation of students' innovative thinking.

**Keywords:** Innovative thinking; Junior high school English; Listening and speaking teaching; Teaching strategies

## 1. Introduction

Thinking quality is one of the four core elements of the English subject's core literacy. Cultivating students' good thinking quality is an important task that English subject teaching should undertake. Good thinking quality not only helps students master scientific and effective learning methods and improve English learning efficiency, but also helps students develop the ability of independent thinking and autonomous exploration, laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning and self-growth. In junior high school English listening and speaking teaching, more and more teachers have realized the importance of improving students' thinking quality, but in actual teaching practice, they often fall into the predicament of "having the means but lacking the ability," unable to find an appropriate teaching path. The main problems are as follows: The design of listening

and speaking activities lacks a unified main thread of context, and the various teaching links are isolated from each other, lacking organic connection, making it difficult to form a complete learning loop, resulting in the disruption of students' thinking activities and the inability to achieve continuous thinking and transfer; The listening and speaking activities often remain at the shallow level of interpreting basic information of the text, lacking the exploration of the text's connotation, logical connection, and cultural background, making it difficult to trigger students' deep thinking; Students' language input is limited to the basic content of the textbook text, and the output is mostly mechanical imitation and repetitive application, lacking individualized and creative expression, and language application remains at the surface level; Teachers either ignore the listening and speaking strategies contained in the listening and speaking texts or only impart strategy knowledge to students in a "informative" way, failing to provide students with sufficient opportunities for autonomous experience, exploration, and practice, resulting in students being unable to truly understand and flexibly apply these strategies to solve actual listening and speaking problems [1].

The thinking quality in the English subject's core literacy includes logical thinking, critical thinking, and innovative thinking. Among them, innovative thinking, as the key ability that leads students to break through conventions and showcase individuality, has received extensive attention from the education community in recent years. Although most junior high school English teachers have recognized the importance of improving students' innovative thinking, in actual listening and speaking lesson teaching, the cultivation of innovative thinking still faces many practical difficulties, seriously restricting the development of students' imagination and creativity. First, the teaching mode is fixed and single, where most classrooms still follow the pattern of "teacher demonstration–student imitation–mechanical practice," with too much teacher dominance and students always in a passive receiving state, lacking the space for active thinking and bold attempts. Secondly, the creation of scenarios is superficial, the existing scenarios are mostly simple scenes preset in the textbook, lacking authenticity, openness, and challenge, making it difficult to stimulate students' curiosity for exploration and unable to provide the soil for innovative thinking. Moreover, the design of classroom activities lacks hierarchy and extension, mostly aiming to complete basic listening and speaking tasks, without setting exploratory activities that can guide students to associate, transfer, and reconstruct, making students complete tasks without creative thinking, and innovative thinking naturally cannot be exercised. At the same time, the time allocation is unreasonable, a large amount of time is spent on knowledge explanation and mechanical training, leaving students with insufficient time for independent thinking, cooperative exploration, and creative expression. Even if there are innovative sparks, they cannot be fully ignited and developed. In addition, the evaluation method is single and fixed, teachers' evaluation mostly focuses on the accuracy of language expression, while ignoring the innovation and uniqueness in students' expression, lacking positive incentives for students' innovative thinking, resulting in students being afraid of making mistakes and not daring to try, gradually losing the enthusiasm for innovation [2].

## 2. Text analysis (Table 1)

The teaching case selected for this article is "Listening and Speaking: Ideas about the Future of Our School" from the Shanghai Edition of Oxford English 7B, with the unit topic being "A More Enjoyable School Life," which belongs to Module 2 "A Better Future." The unit topic content is closely related to students' lives, guiding students to look forward to a wonderful school life, and starting from the feasible changes in the classroom, contributing to the creation of a beautiful school. In this listening and speaking class, the text content is novel

and interesting, easily stimulating students' interest. In the previous reading class, students proposed the changes they wanted to see in the school. In this listening and speaking class, they continued with the learning content from the reading class and evaluated the changes they wanted to see in the school. The text content is close to life, making it easy for students to empathize with the characters in the dialogue. Additionally, the illustrations in the text are conducive to students obtaining information and experiencing the text intuitively [3].

**Table 1.** Text analysis

| What | Topic | The discourse focuses on "future changes of the school" and conducts listening and speaking activities. |
|---|---|---|
| | Content | The text presents a discussion between teachers and students regarding the improvement of the school (such as increasing books in the library, reducing homework, etc.), and designs group roles to enable students to exchange suggestions on the changes in the school. |
| Why | Convey meaning | Guide students to express their thoughts on the development of the school in English, enhance their language skills in "stating opinions + describing feasibility," and at the same time cultivate their attention to the campus environment. |
| How | Writing style characteristics | This text belongs to the listening and speaking section of an English textbook and is composed of "dialogue demonstration + task activities." It conforms to the practical writing style characteristic of the textbook's listening and speaking training. |
| | Content structure | Adopt the "model-practice" structure: 1. Model section (Look, listen, and say): Through teacher-student dialogue, develop the expression method of "suggestions for evaluating school changes." 2. Practice section (Discuss and write): Design group discussion tasks and provide sentence patterns (It would be... to...) to guide students to output. |
| | Language Characteristics | The core sentence pattern of this passage focuses on "It would be + adjective (possible/difficult, etc.) + to do," which is used to express an evaluation of the feasibility of an action. The language is concise and colloquial, suitable for daily communication scenarios and matching the difficulty level of junior high school English listening and speaking training. |

## 3. Learning situation analysis

The majority of the seventh-grade students in the author's class have weak basic knowledge and listening skills. Most students lack a solid foundation in English, have limited vocabulary accumulation, and do not have a systematic grasp of grammar. Their listening skills are particularly weak—not only do they have difficulty capturing key information in listening comprehension, but their oral expression also suffers from poor pronunciation, monotonous sentence structures, and a lack of confidence to speak. Moreover, there is a significant gap in English proficiency among students, with some having a certain foundation in listening and speaking, able to respond to classroom interactions, while a few students cannot even accurately recognize basic words or understand simple instructions. This two-tiered situation poses considerable challenges to classroom teaching. Therefore, in the subsequent teaching process, a combination of differentiated and comprehensive teaching methods is adopted to advance the teaching tasks: Comprehensive teaching ensures that all students in the class can master the basic knowledge and core listening skills required by the curriculum standards, and establish a unified knowledge framework; Differentiated teaching designs differentiated goals, tasks, and evaluation methods for students of different levels, providing more basic training and personalized guidance for students with weak foundations, and setting more challenging tasks for students with stronger abilities, allowing each student to improve their existing level and gradually narrow the learning gap within the class, and comprehensively enhance their overall English proficiency [4].

In addition, students still have many issues that need to be further addressed in terms of emotional attitude,

learning strategies, and cultural awareness. For example: Students are not clear about the purpose of learning English; Some students lack confidence in learning English well and are afraid to express in English; In group activities, there is a lack of group cooperation awareness; Some students have not developed good study habits and cannot do pre-class preparation or review after class, and their learning lacks planning and strategy.

In light of the learning situation of the class students, in the English listening and speaking teaching in the lower grades of junior high school, attention should be paid to cultivating good learning habits, and the teaching pace should be slowed down. By creating contexts that are close to students' real lives, encouraging students to express more in listening and speaking classes, and stimulating students' interest in learning [5].

## 4. Strategy application

In practical teaching practice, four teaching strategies have been systematically applied ("Prediction and Verification, Layer-by-Layer Progression," "Extracting Themes, Writing Summaries for Dialogues," "Capturing Blank Spaces, Expanding Thinking," "Creating Situations"), to specifically cultivate students' diverse thinking abilities such as prediction, analysis, inference, summary and induction, and the teaching strategies run through the pre-listening, listening, and oral output stages, thereby promoting the deep development of innovative thinking [6].

### 4.1. Prediction and verification, layer-by-layer progression
### 4.1.1. Pre-listening prediction, layer-by-layer progression
The pre-listening prediction activity is an important prelude to English listening and speaking teaching, which not only builds a cognitive bridge for subsequent listening comprehension but also effectively stimulates students' learning interest and curiosity. Students in junior high school are curious and eager to explore, and the pre-listening prediction precisely aligns with this psychological characteristic—teachers guide students to make bold guesses about the main content, character relationships, plot development or dialogue direction of the listening text based on the title, illustrations, key words, and topic background of the text, instantly igniting students' participation enthusiasm.

Since in the pre-lesson reading class before the listening and speaking class, students mainly discuss what changes they want to see in their school life, therefore, in the introduction, the teacher asks students: "Do you think our school life is enjoyable enough? What changes would you like to see in our school?" Then, the teacher showed the "changes in the top five most popular subjects in the school" that the students in the class most wanted to see, guiding the students to review the learning content from the previous class.

This laid the foundation for introducing the teaching content of this listening and speaking class.

Subsequently, the teacher showed the illustrations of the text before listening and asked the students, "What are you going to listen to? A conversation or a passage?" At this point, most students' attention was initially focused on the characters' actions, and they could easily understand that the listening text would be presented in the form of a dialogue. The teacher then asked, "What are they talking about?" At this time, students noticed the imaginative content of the characters in the illustration and replied, "Perhaps they are talking about school life." Subsequently, students discussed the possible topics of the dialogue based on the illustration content and reached the teaching expectation. Through this pre-listening prediction, it effectively stimulated students' imagination and enhanced their predictive ability [7].

### 4.1.2. Verify during listening, divergent thinking

During the listening process, the teacher guided students to predict the main content of the text based on their cognitive experience. The teacher only played Mr. Hu's question in the recording: "What do you think of the suggestions?" and asked the students, "What does Mr. Hu say?" guiding the students to verify the guesses made during the pre-listening activity, thereby activating students' divergent thinking. By listening to Mr. Hu's question, students could determine that the listening text was a dialogue and could know that the dialogue content of this listening text was about "evaluating the suggestions."

Then, the teacher continued to ask the students to predict "How many suggestions were mentioned in the dialogue?" Students guessed that there might be 4 suggestions based on the picture. The teacher asked, "Based on the pictures, what do you think of the suggestions?" and reminded the students to pay attention to the big crosses on the picture for guessing.

### 4.2. Extract the theme and write an introduction for the dialogue

When preparing the lesson, the author noticed that this listening text did not have a text introduction. When interpreting the listening text, the first listening task should focus on the main idea of the text. Therefore, when designing the teaching, the teacher could utilize the blank space in the textbook to guide students to extract the theme based on the recording content and write an introduction for the text, thereby cultivating students' summarization and induction ability and stimulating their innovative thinking [8].

Based on the fact that the teacher had already played Mr. Hu's question, the teacher guided the students to guess the students' answers in the text. In this teaching process, the teacher played the complete recording content and prompted the students, "Can you make a brief introduction for the conversation?" Independently create a brief introduction for the dialogue text. In teaching practice, most students provided short sentences such as "They are talking about the suggestions" or "Students have different ideas," but could not present a complete introduction that accurately summarized the content of the dialogue [9].

### 4.3. Make good use of the blank space in the textbook, cleverly set up discussion questions, and develop students' innovative thinking

By learning the dialogue text, students learn to use different adjectives such as possible/impossible/necessary/ unnecessary/nice/difficult to evaluate the suggestions. However, usually after the evaluation, we would provide specific reasons. But in this dialogue, the four students only evaluated the suggestions without giving specific reasons, which is a blank space left by the textbook. Therefore, the teacher made use of this blank space in the textbook to ingeniously set up discussion questions [10]:

-Why does Alice think it would be possible to have more books in our library?

-Why does Kitty think it would be impossible to have a swimming pool in our school?

-Why does Joe think it would be difficult to have less homework?

-Why does Peter think it would be nice to have more computer lessons in our school?

By asking about the reasons, the teacher encourages students to express their opinions creatively. Subsequently, the teacher guides the students to relate to real-life situations, asking, "If these four changes occurred in our school, what do you think? Why?" and reminds the students to use the sentence pattern "It would be... because …" [11].

### 4.4. Creating scenarios to cultivate students' transfer ability

In the output activity after listening, the teacher, in combination with the "changes in the top five popular items

in the school" that the students showed interest in during the introduction stage, asks "What do you think of the top five changes that your classmates would like to see in our school?" and follows up with "Why do you think so?" to guide students to pool their ideas in group discussions and express themselves logically [12]. At the same time, the teacher guides students to review the learning content of this lesson and complete it based on a semi-open evaluation form. When the groups give feedback, other students rate it according to the checklist (**Table 2**). Through the creation of a real scenario, students can comprehensively apply the language knowledge taught in this listening and speaking lesson, and their imagination and creativity can also be exerted in the post-listening activities [13].

**Table 2.** Checklist

| Checklist | | |
|---|---|---|
| Make _____reasons for why they have the ideas. | □Yes | □No |
| Use the sentence pattern "It _____..._____...". | □Yes | □No |
| Speak fluently and _____. | □Yes | □No |
| Checklist (key) | | |
| Make clear reasons for why they have the ideas. | □Yes | □No |
| Use the sentence pattern "It would be…because..." | □Yes | □No |
| Speak fluently and logically. | □Yes | □No |

# 5. Teaching outlook

In this section of the listening and speaking lesson case study, the teacher employed four teaching strategies: "predicting and verifying, step-by-step advancement," "extracting the theme and writing a brief introduction for the dialogue," "capturing the blank space and expanding thinking," and "creating a scenario." Through these strategies, the teacher cultivated students' thinking abilities such as prediction, analysis, inference, summary, and induction, thereby promoting the cultivation of students' innovative thinking [14]. The students' enthusiasm for participating in each teaching activity before, during, and after listening was very high. In the output activity, students could notice that they could achieve language goals by applying the language knowledge taught in this listening and speaking lesson [15].

Furthermore, the teacher also found that in the "writing an introduction for the text" teaching stage, due to the relatively weak English learning ability of the students in the class, students were unable to present a complete introduction that could accurately summarize the content of the dialogue. Therefore, before allowing students to independently summarize and generalize, the teacher could make the following preparations: first, let students select the content discussed in the text from options A. The conversation is about students' suggestions. B. The conversation is about students' ideas on the suggestions. This reduces the difficulty of the teaching stage and alleviates students' sense of difficulty, making more students willing to attempt to create the introduction of the text and improving students' summary and induction abilities and creativity.

# Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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