

# Research on the Integrated Teaching Design of Junior High School English Units Based on the Key Competencies of English Subjects

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**Abstract:** The overall teaching design for the junior middle school English unit aims to maximize the use of teaching resources by using the unit as the central theme, integrating it throughout all sections and related activities. This approach continually reinforces students' understanding and retention of individual lesson content while fostering their core literacy and skills. It promotes a comprehensive development of students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, allowing them to engage repeatedly with the language materials until they internalize them as part of their language proficiency.

**Keywords:** Junior high school English; Key competencies; Integrated teaching design

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## 1. Introduction

At the turn of the 21st century, with the development of economic globalization, there are increasing political, economic, and cultural exchanges between countries, such as international trade, investment, cultural exchanges, etc. These activities will bring new vitality to the world and promote contact and development between countries. English is a widely used language in various important activities in the world today, an essential communication tool for international exchanges and cooperation, and one of the carriers for disseminating the achievements of human civilization. It plays an important role in China's global outreach and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind <sup>[1]</sup>.

We should determine the curriculum objectives and select the curriculum contents according to the core qualities, innovate the teaching methods, improve the examination and evaluation, guide the construction of teaching materials, and carry out teacher training <sup>[2]</sup>.

## **2. The value of the core quality of English subjects and the integrated teaching design of junior middle school English units**

### **2.1. Constructing a deep knowledge system to improve students' language skills**

From the perspective of core literacy, the holistic view of curriculum content is more conducive to changing the value of the English curriculum from “knowledge-based” to “based on literacy development.” However, this does not mean to deny the relevance of knowledge in the course content, but only means to change the basis of determining the course content, from merely focusing on the growth of the subject knowledge body to focusing on the development. In other words, on the basis of cultivating students' core literacy, under the guidance of new educational concepts, most core literacy components and values are selected from the vast ocean of subject knowledge, and the content of subject knowledge is structured and organized to promote students' deep learning and improve students' development.

The deep structure of the six elements of English curriculum content includes four kinds of knowledge: language knowledge, culture knowledge, method knowledge, and value knowledge<sup>[3]</sup>. Language knowledge is the most basic knowledge in English subject, which constitutes the basis of language ability and skills. Topics allow students to learn, and cultural knowledge is classical humanities knowledge based on the meaning of the subject, which helps students to understand who they really are, how to accept others, and how to understand society. Learning strategies provide methods and techniques that promote language learning and use, while language skills provide ways of understanding and expressing meaning, connotations, and emotional attitudes. These methods and techniques have methodological and procedural characteristics and are considered methodological knowledge. These three kinds of knowledge constitute the three major foundations of English knowledge learning, but behind the language, culture, and method there is also the support of value knowledge. Value knowledge focuses on the social, cultural, and educational values of the English subject, and integrates the value orientation and practical significance of English and the culture behind it into the concept and spirit of the subject.

Cultural knowledge, language knowledge, methodology knowledge, and value knowledge constitute the deep structure of the six elements of the English curriculum and present the core information system with greater educational value, which is an organic whole that is interrelated and mutually limited. Language skills are the prerequisite for the development of language ability. If there is no reserve of language knowledge, regardless of the learning skills mastered, one will not be able to understand its true meaning. The improvement of language ability is inseparable from the dual reserve of knowledge and skills. Students should strengthen the construction of a knowledge system, consciously improve language ability, and promote the development of learning. When designing the integrated teaching unit, teachers should deeply study the language part and teaching value of the text, investigate the logical meaning chain behind the language signs, grasp and understand the relationship between correct words, methods, culture, and education, study the deep knowledge framework, and promote the improvement of students' language ability.

The unit-integrated teaching focusing on the development of language ability should also have the following three principles: First, the principle of integration, which means that middle school students have more language learning knowledge, and integrating the text, context, and pragmatics in the unit can improve the effectiveness of practical teaching activities. Second, the principle of real situation, middle school students should focus on improving their English skills in the classroom, the use of real language in real situations, and pragmatic ability needs to be strengthened. Third, the principle of cognitive law: every link of understanding, memory, and application in the process of learning language knowledge should be based

on the law of language cognition and the law of social cognition, and too mechanized activities should be avoided.

## **2.2. Looking at cultural differences rationally and developing students' cross-cultural awareness**

As one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, the emergence of English is closely related to various cultural factors. For example, many words, chapters, sentences, etc. in the English system are related to Western myths, social culture, historical allusions, etc., which come from the cultural system. The different economic systems, cultural traditions, and geographical environments of China and the West result in various cultural differences. Cultural differences are not only reflected in daily communication but also the deep logic behind the culture with language as the carrier. As a group whose cognition and emotion are not fully developed, middle school students are not familiar with the background of some authentic slang and puns, and they are often confused by British jokes. It is precisely because of cultural differences that people need to view the Western world from a “differentiated” perspective, respect cultural differences, and cultivate cross-cultural awareness.

In the core competencies of the subject, cross-cultural awareness is repeatedly emphasized, with the word “cross” implying the idea of bridging different cultures. Only by learning English with an English-thinking mindset can students truly understand various cultures, compare similarities and differences, and absorb the essence of these cultures. This process gradually fosters the awareness and ability for cross-cultural communication, enabling students to observe the world objectively and rationally, build an international perspective, and cultivate a strong sense of both national pride and global citizenship. It also strengthens cultural self-confidence and plays a vital role in shaping students' worldviews, life outlook, and values <sup>[4]</sup>.

At the stage of compulsory educational administration, the cultural value of English is mainly carried by the discourse, which contains English vocabulary, sentences, discourses, and literary works with English themes that also contain the textual logic behind the discourse, pointing to Western culture. The teaching design of English reading for deep learning should be the process of students learning English, paying attention to the arrangement of teaching content, exploring cross-cultural awareness and the appropriateness of teaching content, and using diversified teaching methods so that students can take ownership of English learning and better promote their cross-cultural communication skills.

## **2.3. Cultivating students' comprehensive thinking ability through critical thinking**

As the forerunner of the research on the quality of thinking in China, Professor Chongde Lin pointed out the close relationship between the quality of thinking and the training of specific discipline abilities as early as 1997. He believed that “the ability of any discipline must be developed in the thinking activities of students, without thinking activities, there is no discipline ability at all” <sup>[5]</sup>. In terms of English learning subjects, the quality of thinking should reflect the creativity, criticality, depth, flexibility, and agility of students in the process of English listening, speaking, reading, and writing <sup>[6]</sup>. The creativity of thinking quality refers to the innovative ability and innovative spirit embodied in thinking activities, which is manifested as the ability of learners to creatively solve problems and difficult problems. The critical quality of thinking is essentially the result of self-awareness exercises such as self-reflection, self-examination, and metacognition, which refers to the level of autonomous analysis and self-criticism in the thinking process, so that it can constantly

enhance its understanding of itself and the real world. The depth of thinking quality refers to the extent, complexity, and level of challenge demonstrated by cognitive activities. This is manifested in several ways: during the learning process, one engages in deep thinking, excels at inductive reasoning, summarizing, and categorizing information, possesses strong logical reasoning skills, and is adept at understanding the fundamental nature and principles governing various phenomena. The flexibility of thinking quality refers to the ability to adapt to changes in thinking activities. This shows that learners have strong transfer and summary abilities, can link one thing with another, and can use it flexibly in various situations. In addition, they also have the ability to think analogically and comprehensively about different fields, so as to analyze and solve problems from a holistic perspective. The agility of thinking quality refers to the speed at which thinking activities are opened.

The process of critical thinking is based on self-observation, self-reflection, and self-examination, which should be the core of the five aspects of thinking quality. Teachers with critical thinking will observe their own arrangement process in the overall teaching design of the unit. When thinking and judging the content of the text, teachers can critically look at the educational value and cultural value behind the text, and supplement the corresponding materials. Students with critical thinking can not only independently analyze text and discourse content in English learning activities, but can also consciously and effectively compare the connotation of cultural values between China and the West, so as to form their own discourse analysis system. The overall teaching design of units from the perspective of core literacy should be based on teachers' critical thinking, arrange teaching content reasonably and efficiently, compare the connections between things, exercise students' deep thinking ability, and promote the comprehensive development of thinking quality.

#### **2.4. Adopting flexible teaching methods to cultivate students' learning ability**

The teaching method refers to the teaching behavior taken by both teachers and students in the process of teaching and learning in order to achieve the teaching purpose and teaching task requirements<sup>[7]</sup>. In order to integrate core qualities into students' learning to a great extent, many scholars tend to adopt the "student-centered" teaching method. It is believed that only by presenting real-life situations in the classroom can students' practical skills and personalities be fully and truly developed.

Learning method is a method that uses a variety of learning strategies to help students feel, understand, remember, and transfer knowledge. The core quality of English subjects clearly points out that students' learning ability should be improved. Learning ability includes cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, communicative strategy, and affective strategy. Students cannot master learning without a teacher's teaching. To promote students' learning, some educators have changed the teaching design method of "teachers as the main body" in the past to emphasize the subjectivity of students in the teaching design, and carried out the research of "education plan" and "guide plan." By presenting the key points and difficulties in the teaching content in the form of open questions, we can not only perceive the text before class but also deepen students' impressions of the text after class<sup>[8]</sup>.

The unit teaching design under the core quality should be based on the concept of "promoting students' learning." Flexible and creative teaching methods should be designed, comprehensive teaching methods should be used, teachers' flexible teaching should promote students' rich learning, and students' enthusiasm and interest in English learning should be stimulated.

### **3. The basic principles of the teaching design of junior middle school English units based on the core quality of English subjects**

#### **3.1. Principle of integrity**

Wholeness is one of the basic characteristics of junior middle school English unit-integrated teaching. The teaching goal of junior middle school English unit teaching is overall, integrated, and systematic. The teaching objective of each unit is not a simple mechanical addition of all the sub-objectives of each unit, but a macro objective summarized on the basis of core literacy and the requirements of the new curriculum standards. Integrated and orderly design of unit teaching refers to unit teaching as a module, which can not only control the integrated unit teaching but also orderly step-by-step teaching design, so as to achieve the best teaching effect <sup>[9]</sup>.

The specific teaching content adopted in English subject textbooks is holistic. In unit teaching, listening exercises, vocabulary, phrases, reading texts, songs, after-class tasks, and other content should be cleverly combined, reconstructed from the local to the whole, and summarized and sorted out scattered knowledge points according to the unit theme. Secondly, the integrated teaching process should be complete, the core vocabulary, key phrases, pragmatic tasks, and teaching methods are organically integrated, which will make the students' knowledge system more comprehensive. Teaching evaluation should be holistic and use after-class evaluation to skillfully arouse students' interest and stimulate internal motivation. The overall goal of teaching, the specific teaching content of teaching materials, and the teaching process should be holistic. In the process of teaching, we should use core terms, pragmatic tasks, and teaching methods to achieve the integrity of students' cognitive structure. In short, students have subjective initiative. Teachers should, according to the differences in each student's cognitive level and English learning habits, take the core English quality as the guidance, combine the unit theme, and integrate all the teaching content and teaching resources of each unit and each class hour under the framework of the theme, so as to improve the teaching quality <sup>[10]</sup>.

#### **3.2. Principle of reconfigurability**

The principle of reconstruction is the reconstruction of objective, content, and text in unit teaching, which is also one of the important characteristics of junior middle school English unit teaching. The structure needs the integrated instructional design pattern that runs through the unit knowledge structure. As the foundation of its establishment, the structure principle needs to be reflected in every link of the entire teaching <sup>[11]</sup>. In the process of teaching design, implementation and evaluation of the units, the objectives, contents, texts, and activities among the units are divided hierarchically, the structure and rules of the units are divided, and the key points and difficulties that students need to master in the units are distinguished. Therefore, English teachers should adjust the teaching materials as a whole according to their own professional knowledge reserve, teaching ability, various requirements and regulations of curriculum standards, and students' certain cognitive level, and construct the content of the teaching materials reasonably. The reconstruction process is a complex creative process, which reflects the teacher's unique deep understanding and interpretation of the teaching content. Secondly, in the overall design process of the unit, teachers can choose appropriate classroom teaching forms, flexible classroom planning, and diversified evaluation modes, which is also conducive to teachers breaking the traditional mode of analytical thinking, and conducting better in-depth research on the design, implementation, and evaluation of unit teaching.

### **3.3. Principle of subjectivity**

As far as learning activities are concerned, students are the main body of educational development, and educational activities should focus on the development and growth of students <sup>[12]</sup>. The student is the subject, the content of education is the object, and even the teacher is the object to some extent. Students' subjectivity is mainly reflected in the following aspects: First, students' influence on education is selective. Students have a sense of subjective initiative and will not unconditionally accept teachers' influence on students regardless of good or bad. Students have the right to make positive or negative choices according to their subjective conscious judgment. In the process of English teaching, teachers should adapt to the development needs of students as much as possible. Second, students are self-conscious about their studies. Consciousness and initiative are important contents in English learning. In the concrete teaching practice, teachers' teaching behavior should take "initiative," "self-consciousness," and "self-pursuit" as the primary premise. Third, learning itself is creative learning. When students solve learning problems, their methods, logical thinking, and understanding do not strictly follow the "trajectory" set by textbooks and teachers in advance, but show a certain degree of innovation. In the classroom, we should see innovation as a new result that is nurtured, and support and encourage it.

The dominant principle of the integrated teaching of junior middle school English units is the principle of subjectivity. In teaching, we should flexibly use "teacher-oriented" and "teacher-student dependence" to cultivate and improve students' learning ability, so as to realize the purpose of "teaching is for not teaching." In the overall teaching design of this unit, teachers should adapt to the development needs of students to the greatest extent. More cooperative activities should be carried out between teachers and students as well as students and students, so that students can communicate freely, use English to express an active classroom atmosphere, and pay attention to highlighting students' dominant position.

### **3.4. Principle of situation**

As a communication tool in daily life, English is created by people in daily life. Language comes from life and is closely related to life, so English is situational. One cannot learn English without situations. Dewey believed that "we can use the environment as a teaching material" <sup>[13]</sup>. Therefore, in the process of English teaching, teachers should strive to create teaching situations related to life in teaching activities according to specific teaching goals, integrate teaching content, and adapt to life situations, so as to stimulate students' internal learning motivation. The teaching units, course objectives, teaching contents, and teaching activities set up in the whole teaching design of junior middle school English units are all closely linked with daily life through the creation of scenarios. To a certain extent, it can cultivate students' innovative thinking and stimulate students' desire to learn, so that students can better understand and master knowledge. The application of students' English knowledge is also inseparable from life. Students' classroom knowledge should be consistent with their daily lives. Through continuous practice and reinforcement in daily life, students can transfer and apply textbook knowledge.

### **3.5. Principle of progressiveness**

Progressive means that the class time of junior middle school English unit teaching should be arranged according to the integrity of students' cognitive structure and the law of students' cognitive development. The English Curriculum Standards (2011 edition) mentioned that teachers should fully consider the progressive and continuous learning of language when making teaching designs <sup>[14]</sup>. Knowledge content

and structure are related, the ranking between each unit should be hierarchical and progressive, and the arrangement between each class hour should be from easy to difficult, so that the content and class hour of each unit have obvious hierarchical gradient differences. Due to the limitations of the mother tongue, children will have great difficulty in mastering English. Therefore, the guidance of teachers plays a key role in education. When teaching, teachers should fully consider the level and progression of activities and gradually guide students appropriately. In teaching activities, we should pay special attention to the content of activities, and understand whether the learning activities designed by teachers have hierarchical requirements for students' language training. Through a series of continuous activities designed, we can improve student participation, stimulate the classroom atmosphere, improve the language training degree of students, and enhance the language output ability. In the setting of teaching content, it is also necessary to take the core theme of the unit as the center, connect the knowledge previously taught, take the whole teaching content of the core theme of the unit as the center, and constantly repeat and gradually improve<sup>[15]</sup>.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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