

# The Use of Inquiry-based Teaching in Junior Secondary English Teaching

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**Abstract:** With the development and reform of China's education, rich and diverse teaching methods have gradually appeared in people's vision, among which inquiry-based teaching highlights the main position of students, advocates learning by doing, thinking in learning and exploring the acquisition of knowledge. This teaching style has a wide range of applications in teaching. When students enter junior high school, their learning tasks become more demanding and difficult, and traditional teaching methods are no longer suitable for junior high school teaching. The "independent exploration" and "learning by doing" approach in inquiry-based teaching can be a good solution to the dilemmas that exist in junior high school teaching. Therefore, this paper takes inquiry-based teaching as an entry point to explore its practice and application in junior high school English teaching, with the aim of improving the quality of junior high school English teaching and enhancing students' learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Inquiry-based teaching; Junior high school English teaching; Practice

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## Preface

Under the new curriculum reform, the objectives of teaching English at the junior secondary level are changing, with more emphasis on the development of students' comprehensive English skills - practical oral communication or writing skills - than in the past. With this goal in mind, teachers have to make corresponding improvements in their teaching. The teaching methods of self-directed, collaborative and inquiry can fully mobilise students' enthusiasm in the classroom and allow them to gain knowledge and experience through independent exploration, which can deepen their understanding and application of knowledge and improve the effectiveness of English teaching compared to traditional teaching methods. In this paper, we analyse the main dilemmas faced by inquiry-based teaching and put forward reasonable solutions and application measures to improve the effectiveness of English teaching in junior high schools by practising the transition from traditional to inquiry-based teaching.

## 1. Overview of inquiry-based teaching

The inquiry-based teaching method is a new educational tool that has emerged along with the education reform. It breaks the traditional teaching methods and injects fresh blood into contemporary education. Especially at the junior high school level, students need to develop their abilities in all aspects, and the application of inquiry-based teaching method can achieve free exploration of knowledge, which largely improves the quality and effectiveness of teaching. In the following we analyse the meaning, characteristics and application significance of inquiry-based teaching.

### 1.1 The meaning of inquiry-based teaching

Inquiry-based teaching is a form of teaching and learning that takes an 'inquiry' approach and is based on the principles of "Learning by doing", "discovery by doing" and "research by doing". In the process of teaching, especially when learning principles or concepts, teachers use a hands-on approach, allowing students to arrive at principles through observation, practice, collaborative discussion and independent thinking. This active inquiry process treats students as the main subject of teaching and learning, with the teacher playing a guiding role in the teaching. In this way, the students' main role is enhanced, their ideas

are put into practice and their abilities are fully developed and enhanced. In addition, students' independent exploration helps them to better understand and Solutions problems Method and steps to find out how things and principles develop Causes They can also develop their own cognitive models, learning styles and knowledge frameworks in their minds.

## **1.2 Characteristics of inquiry-based teaching**

Inquiry-based teaching has a strong practicality in teaching, and its characteristics include the following points. One: autonomy. This is because inquiry-based teaching takes students as the main subject of teaching activities and implements the concept of "student-centred" education. Students are able to conduct independent inquiry and research based on their knowledge and experience to gain more knowledge, which greatly enhances students' initiative and participation in the classroom. Secondly, practicality is a distinctive feature of inquiry-based teaching. Because it is practice-oriented, teaching is based on students' practical activities. In the process of practice, students' senses and minds are fully mobilised and they learn by doing. Practical activities are integrated throughout the inquiry-based classroom and are a great help to the teaching of the subject and to the development of students' skills in all areas. Thirdly, process is a feature of inquiry-based teaching that focuses more on the process of learning and acquiring knowledge than on the outcomes. In particular, the process of acquiring a piece of knowledge is more reflective of students' abilities than the results. Fourthly, inquiry-based teaching consists mainly of students' practice and exploration, and the process of exploration is flexible and open-ended. This is another characteristic of inquiry-based teaching - it is open and flexible. Through the process of discovering, exploring and solving problems, students can gradually transcend themselves, develop their own creative awareness and enhance their creative abilities.

## **2. Teaching English at the junior secondary level under inquiry-based teaching**

With the development of education in China and the promotion of the new curriculum reform, English at the junior secondary level has seen a comprehensive improvement, but there are still some problems in some junior secondary English classrooms that cannot be ignored. At the junior secondary level, students are easily distracted and active, and most English classes do not have situations that allow all students to participate, experience and interact with each other. Although most teachers now incorporate fun activities, the length and frequency of these activities do not ensure that the knowledge is effectively absorbed by the students. A number of students leave class without even having the opportunity to speak English. Learning a language means using and applying it a lot, and the junior high school stage is an important period for students to develop their language skills. Without efficient teaching, students will not be able to acquire enough English knowledge during this important period, resulting in a lack of English skills, and with inquiry-based teaching, the current English teaching find that there are still and some shortcomings.

### **2.1 Residual traditional teaching methods and lack of creativity**

Education should be in line with society, and English teaching is closely linked to the development of the times, otherwise education and teaching will form a fault line with society. The goals and directions of English teaching in China are also changing in the new era, but some teachers' teaching standards and so on have not been optimised and improved, leading to backwardness and a lack of creativity in teaching. In addition, in the process of inquiry-based teaching in practice, some teachers still do not pass through the breakthrough of traditional teaching and do not realize the transformation from traditional teaching to inquiry-based teaching. This has led to the advantages of inquiry-based teaching not being given full play, neglecting students' language needs and ability development, and students' low interest in learning, low learning efficiency and low classroom quality.

### **2.2 Practical inquiry is superficial and the quality of the classroom is not high**

English is a language and language learning is inseparable from practice, and the most important practice and exploration is under inquiry-based teaching. However, there are still many English language teachers who adopt the traditional form of teaching - teacher-based instruction. In this way, students do not get to practice and are unable to apply their knowledge to real-life situations. In addition, some teachers are also biased in their use of inquiry-based teaching, and practice and inquiry are superficial and merely a formality for students, which results in students not gaining insight and knowledge through practice. Finally, there are some students who do not know enough about inquiry and practice and do not do enough in the classroom, which reflects the inadequacy of teachers' management of inquiry-based classrooms. Language knowledge needs to be consolidated through practice, and English language needs to be used in practice in order to improve qualitatively. Superficial practice is not good for students' language skills.

## **2.3 Single form of inquiry and practice, lacking elements of life**

The inquiry-based teaching classroom should include inquiry and practice throughout, but some teachers practice a relatively single form, often using group discussions, and the content of the exploration is often based on the textbook, without certain extensions. Such a single, rigid form of inquiry not only makes students feel dull, but also fails to improve teaching effectiveness. The teachers' practice is open and flexible, and the students do not have a proper understanding of the meaning of inquiry practice and are not interested in it.

## **2.4 Lack of communication and interaction between teachers and students**

Under inquiry-based teaching, students become the main subject of classroom teaching, and the teacher plays the role of a guide, so communication between teachers and students needs to be strengthened in the process of inquiry. However, in the actual teaching of inquiry, there is little communication between teachers and students, resulting in teachers not being able to understand the problems encountered by students in the process of inquiry and not being able to give them timely guidance, which greatly reduces the efficiency of classroom teaching.

# **3. The use of inquiry-based teaching in junior secondary English teaching**

As a language subject, English is becoming increasingly important in the context of economic integration. Traditional English teaching has been characterised by a lack of practice and application, and the emergence of "dumb English". The following are some of the measures we propose to improve the quality of English teaching and students' learning outcomes.

## **3.1 Create an inquiry-based context for English immersion**

In junior secondary schools, students' learning tasks are more demanding and it is difficult to enhance their interest in learning and enthusiasm for practical inquiry if the classroom inquiry is in the form of a single, boring group discussion, so teachers can create an inquiry-based environment to further immerse themselves in English learning. In addition, the contextualisation should be close to the students' lives and innovative, moving away from traditional English teaching. Let's take Unit 6, Food and lifestyle, for example. The teachers start with food and lifestyle and build a situation for the students: "A friend comes to your house and you introduce your lifestyle and your favourite things to your friend". Students can explore independently or collaboratively, using this situation as a basis for dialogue, exploration and immersive discussion. It is important that teachers reach out to the students at this time to understand the problems they have in using English in contextual dialogue and to provide timely guidance and correction to ensure the effectiveness of their practical investigations. The students are better able to use their knowledge to communicate about food and lifestyles in their own lives than if they were taught in an inquiry-based context.

## **3.2 Strengthen the management of the inquiry process and set English inquiry tasks**

To address the situation that some students do not know enough about inquiry-based teaching and are perfunctory in the process of classroom inquiry, teachers should firstly make sure that students have a proper understanding of inquiry-based teaching and the importance of inquiry in the English classroom. Secondly, teachers should strengthen the management of the inquiry process in the classroom so that students do not use the inquiry time to desert or chat with their classmates. Finally, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of English classroom inquiry practice, teachers should set inquiry tasks during the practice process and also set tasks at the end of the lesson to help students consolidate what they have learned during classroom exploration. For example, in Unit 2, School life, in Year 8, teachers have to monitor the students' practice during the process of exploring the topic of school life and provide guidance to students who are not serious. In addition, teachers should set tasks for students to explore and solve problems before classroom practice. Teachers can also assign appropriate tasks to students according to their English language ability to activate their desire to investigate and learn. Teachers guide students in their classroom investigations and collaborate on tasks to further enhance students' inquiry skills.

## **3.3 Strengthen the interactive communication between teachers and students**

The relationship between teachers and students has changed considerably in inquiry-based teaching, with teachers moving from a dominant to a guiding role in the classroom, which means that teachers need to strengthen their links with students, otherwise it is difficult to identify problems in students' practical inquiry in the classroom. Firstly, teachers need to get off the podium and get involved in the students' inquiry groups and, if necessary, to build up a good relationship with them.

# **4. Concluding remarks**

At junior secondary level, which is a crucial period for developing students' English language skills, inquiry-based teach-

ing puts the classroom in the hands of the students, encouraging them to think, investigate, identify problems, solve them and participate fully in the learning process, rather than having knowledge shoved into their heads by the teacher. This highly practical and flexible approach to teaching encourages students to learn more actively, enhances their engagement in the classroom and helps to improve their overall English language skills.

## References

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