

Multi-Effective Integration: The Practice of Project-Based Learning in Middle School English Based On Thematic Meaning

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Abstract:

Project-based learning is a dynamic learning method that stimulates students' enthusiasm for learning through PBL in order to achieve good learning results. Middle school English is based on the new curriculum and the development needs of modern society, which puts forward more requirements for English teaching. This paper is based on the simulation teaching design of the unit "M6 Animals in danger" in the first book of Grade 8 of the Junior Middle School English textbook of the Foreign Studies Edition. Through the simulation design, it is found that the practice based on project-based learning can effectively exercise students' critical thinking, and students' cognition and exploration of the theme will be further developed, which will further bring into play the nurturing function of the English language subject and ultimately realize the cultivation of the core qualities of the new curriculum. Through design, research, and analysis, this paper will provide a reference for the design of junior high school English project-based learning based on the significance of themes

Keywords: Middle school English; project-based learning; core literacy;

1. Introduction

Project-based learning of junior high school English led by thematic meaning is widely used in junior high school English teaching. It is of great practical significance to deepen the concept of "English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition)" (Ministry of Education, 2022; hereinafter referred to as the "Curriculum Standards"), to actively explore the subject matter, and to improve the students' ability to identify and solve problems. Project-based learning is a learning process of overall perception based on the significance of the theme of a large unit with students as the main body of inquiry, and it is a kind of learning mode with clear direction.

At present, junior high school English teaching, despite continuous attempts to innovate and reform, classroom teaching activities creativity slightly improved, but in general, the classroom teaching impression is still stereotypical, teaching methodology is single, the effectiveness of the reform is not significant, the classroom is not the main body of the students. At the same time, there is still room for improvement in the enthusiasm of students' participation in the classroom. From the teachers' point of view, the teachers' personal comprehensive ability and teaching standard will directly affect the final teaching effectiveness, only from the self, and constantly improve their personal professional skills and teaching standards, in order to further enhance the English teaching to a new stage. From the students' point of view, in many classrooms nowadays, the students' willingness to learn is not strong enough, and the classroom lacks the main body of

learning, and the students lack subjective initiative. From the teaching point of view, junior high school academic task is heavy, time is tight, teachers will inevitably fill in the duck education of students, focusing on vocabulary and grammar and other memorized knowledge of the learning environment, out of the context of the direct presentation of the rules of grammar, indoctrination to explain the rules of grammar, the lack of the student as the main body of the exploratory and the overall grasp of the discourse, the loss of the cultivation of humanistic qualities and the comprehensive qualities of students, and at the same time also lose the English language subject itself nurturing function. It also loses the humanistic and comprehensive cultivation of students, and also loses the educational function of the English subject itself.

Present-day research on middle school English and project-based learning focuses on the construction of frameworks and theoretical research on the two themselves. Theoretical research on project-based learning initially started from a managerial perspective, discussing that the concept of project can provide more possibilities for learning in business development(Scarborough, 2004) and shifting to the field of pedagogy , more research has emerged on whether project-based learning is actually useful for good teaching and learning purposes, and ultimately concluded that project-based learning is beneficial for teaching and learning and student development(Almulla, 2020). In addition, research on the logic and requirements for the design of the problem chain of project-based research has advanced and has suggested more lessons for teachers' instructional design thinking(Lili Chen, 2024). Meanwhile, how to make project-based learning authentically integrated into the classroom and detached from the formalization to reach the role of truly cultivating students' thinking ability is also one of the topics that have been focused on and analyzed(Wang Jing, 2025). The important position of teachers in the design of project-based learning cannot be ignored, and improving teachers' management and thinking ability to promote the effective development of project-based learning is an important part of the research in related fields(Jin Zhiyuan, 2025). The interpretation of middle school English instructional design and the new curriculum standard has also been relatively mature. Unit teaching design with the core of enhancing students' core literacy is one of the requirements of the new standard(Yu Congmei, 2023). At the same time, cultivating students' critical thinking ability so that students really have the ability to learn and think is also the focus of middle school English teaching design(Gong Jiantao, 2025). The practice of unit overall instructional design in junior middle school English has also been visualized and its evaluation and improvement has been an important topic of research(Yu Dagui, 2025).

It can be seen that although there are numerous studies on project-based learning and junior high school English teaching, and all of them have been designed and conceptualized from the theoretical and macro aspects, none of them has really combined the two in practice and case studies. There are still gaps and explorable content in the research on simulation design and practice based on thematic meaning. Therefore, this paper aims to provide a reference for the organic combination of project-based learning and junior high school English teaching design, and to contribute to the realization of the realistic and meaningful connection between the two.

2. Structural design of project-based learning

Project-based learning is a student-oriented and central teaching method, mainly through small groups and problems in the design of teaching and learning. As a more mature pedagogy, the implementation and design of project-based learning has developed a more consensual thinking. Therefore, project-based learning is mainly based on the following seven steps.

Ask challenging and research questions. At the beginning of the instructional design, the teacher asks basic research questions from the unit theme, which are usually of a certain degree of inquiry and difficulty, and require in-depth thinking and logical analysis based on the question to come up with an answer.

Ongoing questioning creates a chain of questions. Teachers are designed for and around the initial basic questions to ask further questions, from shallow to deep design of sub-problems, the formation of logical and complete, relevant meaning of the problem group, and ultimately the formation of a specific task based on the question. Constructing authentic task situations and realistic connections. After the completion of the problem and task design, the teacher focuses on its connection with the real situation, and carries out the organic combination of theory and practice. The well-designed problems are integrated into real-life scenarios to stimulate students' interest and practice their ability to solve real problems. Encourage free thinking and ideas. In the formed groups at , students work together to answer and complete the chain of questions designed by the teacher and summarize the conclusions through group work and discussion. The teacher encourages students to express their opinions and answers freely to form a complete thinking and output process. Feedback on problems and deficiencies for rethinking. After students share freely, the teacher and other group members ask questions and analyze the gaps in order to achieve the effect of feedback and encouragement in thinking, exercise students' critical thinking and logical refinement ability, and build core literacy. Revise the answers to the ideas and reflect on them. Based on the constructive comments from others, students think again in groups and form new answers to come up with better and more rigorous ideas. In addition, the teacher guides students to self-reflection to achieve the teaching effect of practicing thinking skills. Publicly show the process and results of the formation of ideas. After several rounds of reflection and refinement, the teacher organizes a public presentation and explanation of ideas. Each group explains its process of analyzing and solving problems, and draws conclusions and produces results, which ultimately results in effective answers and self-learning of knowledge.

Project-based learning designed through the above process can effectively exercise the core qualities of learning and their own abilities. At the same time, self-reflection and feedback on the thinking of others can enable students to train in critical thinking and enhance their ability to solve practical problems.

3. Middle School English Standards and Teaching Characteristics

With the revision and continuous improvement of the Curriculum Standards, English teaching has formed a new English curriculum system for primary and secondary schools with Chinese characteristics. The English curriculum has gradually manifested the pursuit of the value of "cultural cultivation", and demonstrated the significance of cultural cultivation and core literacy. As the junior high school is in the critical period of compulsory education, how to bring more meaningful and cultivating English courses to students in this school is an issue that teachers need to consider.

Based on the design of large units, the textbook starts from a number of themes and is based on practical situations and value cultivation, leading to new teaching objectives and orientations. The in-depth integration of language and culture and the emphasis on educating people and conveying cultural connotations is a major feature of the new standard. In addition, the new standards also emphasize the overall teaching design of the unit and the improvement of students' learning and thinking abilities from the four basic abilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. This is a greater challenge to teachers' overall teaching design and requires them to deepen their understanding of the teaching materials and teaching objectives at a macro level. How to effectively teach knowledge and improve students' thinking ability and core literacy, all these purposes require the emergence of new teaching methods and teaching process design.

4. Simulation design for project-based learning courses

Unit themes provide scope and context for language learning, and meaningful themes are an important foundation for realizing teaching goals, integrating teaching contents and accomplishing teaching results. Middle school English project-based learning led by theme significance needs to be oriented by driving

questions, aiming at core literacy, taking rich forms as a means, and taking extensive dimensions as a criterion, so that students can familiarize themselves with and understand the topics related to theme significance, guide them to trace the origin of the problem, pursue the spiritual essence, and point directly to the core literacy of English learning, and drive them to learn and think with depth and breadth. Under the guidance of the teacher, students need to explore some questions such as What, Why and How based on the themes derived from the exploration, and such questions are also the core ideas around which the whole learning process revolves. In this process, teachers should not intervene too much, but should be side-tracked, guiding students to spark thinking, boldly express their own views, placing students in the main body of the classroom, so that they give full play to their subjective initiative, so as to complete the project-based learning.

4.1 Multi-level design-driven problems

The theme of "M6 Animals in danger" in the eighth unit of the junior middle school English textbook is man and nature, which is a clear theme. In different subjects, this kind of topic is more or less involved, and at the same time, this topic is close to students' lives, so it is easy to produce empathy between students' subjects. This project is centered on the driving question of "How to protect endangered animals". Teachers need to guide and provide thought leadership before rich thinking activities can take place. Through the factual situation of "Animals are in danger", students are prompted to think "Why animals are in danger? After clarifying the facts and understanding the reasons, through group inquiry, students can find out "How can we protect animals in danger?" and "What should we do to protect them? Through the setting of these question chains, the teacher guides the students' thinking and promotes the depth and breadth of their cognition. Based on the background of the theme of the large unit, the students are closely related to the topic and are actively exploring it. In this process, students not only learn the key words and sentences, improve their English speaking and reading comprehension skills, but also further improve their ability to understand the main idea and layout of the discourse, and ultimately enhance the students' subjective awareness of human beings and nature, and develop the quality of students' thinking.

4.2 Multi-dimensional grasp of teaching objectives

The Curriculum Standard clearly states that English language learning is not only about the transmission of subject knowledge, but also focuses on students' language proficiency, learning ability, quality of thinking and cultural awareness. Based on this goal, the implementation of this program is aimed at:

1. Through teacher guidance, students' language skills are developed with basic listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, mastering grammatical focus, verb usage and pragmatic functions, and understanding the main idea and detailed information of the discourse.

2. Through independent learning and group work, students can understand and master the key vocabulary and phrases of the module, and can use the learned sentence patterns for listening, reading and writing training and application.

3. Through the overall grasp of the discourse, students can find out how to protect endangered animals in real-life scenario simulations and express their personal opinions and thoughts on related topics.

4. Through the overall project-based learning process, students will eventually develop a sense of cherishing and caring for animals, protecting the environment, and shaping their core values and good personalities.

4.3 Multi-form implementation of project-based learning

The English textbook of the Junior High School of the Foreign Studies Edition, for example, grasps the interdisciplinary integration of English learning as the main subject, supplemented by the subjects of fine arts and information technology, and carries out project-based learning around each subject in multiple forms. The implementation of specific projects can be summarized as follows:

1. Public display to build a connection with real life. Create a real and interesting tour situation to help students understand the current situation of endangered animals. In the listening and speaking lesson of Unit 1, the teacher invites student representatives to act as small tour guides and introduce the current situation of endangered animals according to the collected information. In the reading and writing lesson of Unit 2, on the basis of understanding and mastering the usage of verb infinitives as object complements and object clauses, the teacher actively guides the students to talk about the living environment and the current situation of animals in the light of what they have learned in this unit.

2. Cooperation and innovation, critical thinking. In the way of group cooperation, we cultivate students' critical thinking ability to find out problems and solve them, and develop their ability of divergent thinking. In project-based information collection and discourse study, students are asked to identify information and understand the main idea according to words and phrases. In cooperative group discussions, students share concrete implementation measures on how to rescue endangered animals and reflect as a group.

3. Contextualization to achieve competence transfer. Students are guided to actively use what they have learned, what they have thought and what they have gained to complete relevant tasks in similar thematic contexts, thus realizing the transfer of learning ability and the improvement of comprehensive literacy. In the stage results demonstration, students can carry out role-playing under the guidance of the teacher and communicate in English during the activity.

In addition, this project-based learning has various forms of teaching and presentation of results. In the art subject area, teachers can guide students to utilize their art skills in the teaching process of Unit 2, based on the text of the giant panda as a symbol. Through watching the video and audio-visual of protecting endangered animals for cooperative exploration, combined with the discourse to make a poster for the protection of endangered animals for display. In the learning discussion at the end of the lesson, students are encouraged and guided to use multimedia software to develop activities such as webpage, software and video production, and to express creativity flexibly by using text, drawings and short videos.

This project integrates English, art, information and other disciplines to carry out exploration. In the process of completing the project, students mobilize their senses in all aspects by collecting information and making the project with their own hands, which expands their knowledge and thinking ability. In all aspects of the project, students' abilities were practiced, such as teamwork, communication, data collection, and public presentation. Through group collaboration and innovation to learn from each other, enhance the students' humanistic qualities, cultivate the love of nature, the spirit of nature protection, in the project permeated the continuous formation of the core literacy.

4.4 Project-based evaluation from multiple perspectives

In the design of project-based learning, teachers design to provide students with evaluation scales to motivate students to evaluate their own performance and the performance of group members. In the actual process of classroom teaching, the Evaluation of project is completed, and students are guided to give objective evaluation in their learning practice. Through the process of evaluation, students constantly reflect on their own learning and inquiry practices, and improve the effectiveness of their participation. For the project-based learning in Module 6 of the Foreign Studies Edition 8, the self-evaluation is designed as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Self-evaluation

Self-assessment	Score (5. 4. 3. 2. 1)
Do make enough pre-activity preparation?	
Do you participate in the process of project?	
Do you use vivid and accurate language to express your opinion?	
Whether your presentation are presented in logical thinking?	
Do you learn some skills from the whole project?	

In addition, teachers should purposefully design group evaluation scales to improve the efficiency of group work by means of mutual evaluation. The process of encouraging students to conduct group mutual evaluation is also the process of promoting the activities among members, improving the objectivity of evaluation and advancing the continuous development of project-based learning. The group evaluation scale designed for the project-based learning of Module 6 in Saiyan version 8 is shown

Table 2.

Table 2. Group evaluation

Group-assessment	Score (5. 4. 3. 2. 1)
Whether the team members have a clear division of project?	
Whether the team members cooperate to achieve the desired goal?	
Do you think the team members truly devoted themselves to the group work?	
Whether the activity results are comprehensive and well-organized?	
Do you think the results of the group will raise people's awareness of protecting environment?	

5. Project effectiveness and reflection

It is clearly pointed out in the Standard that the English curriculum advocates cooperative, independent and exploratory learning, and that English teaching should emphasize the learning process, focus on the practicality and application of English language learning, and do its best to create opportunities for students to apply the language in real and intuitive contexts. The core of education is people-oriented, and it is the requirement of the times to cultivate students' ability to find problems and solve them. In the process of solving practical problems, students integrate and utilize the existing knowledge system and integrate new knowledge learning, in which rational thinking is formed, which is of great significance to the exploration of the meaning of the theme of the unit.

In project-based learning, there are structural and basic content similarities between project-based learning on various topics. This triggers students to mobilize and apply their knowledge and experience to achieve knowledge transfer. Specifically, the core objectives of teaching and learning can be effectively realized by conducting activities such as data collection, inquiry and discussion in a group learning mode. Students can not only empathize with the texts in the project-based process, but also better demonstrate the concept of "student-centered" teaching and learning, so that students' progressive thinking skills can be well practiced and improved. In this large unit of study, the project-based learning integrates interdisciplinary learning. Through the project-based production, students can more intuitively feel the impact and influence of the subject matter of the discourse, cultivate students' ability to experience, perceive and understand in real situations, play a positive role in the cultivation of students' affective attitudes and values, and further cultivate students' core literacy and comprehensive literacy skills of the discipline.

In addition, in the process of designing project-based learning based on large-unit themes, attention should also be paid to the characteristics of the junior high school students' school years and the characteristics of the English language subject. When designing the project, we should take into account the requirements of the new curriculum and the actual situation in the classroom, and consider the implementability and operability of the teaching design, which is the key point to realize the ultimate teaching goals and the cultivation of core literacy. How to improve students' thinking ability and achieve good results through this practice, and how to rationally utilize it in future teaching practice, is a topic that still needs to be improved and researched.

6. Conclusion

The practical integration of project-based learning with the junior high school English subject is feasible and is the practice and implementation of the requirements of the new curriculum. Based on the existing English teaching mode, the essence of project-based learning is the integration and change of teaching and learning. In junior high school English teaching, the traditional teaching mode can no longer make students get the satisfaction of the spiritual realm. Under the call of the new era and new stage, teachers are needed to actively promote the teaching reform, change the long-standing teaching mode, and really implement the project-based learning into the learning of each module of the large unit, so as to truly realize the whole process of exploring learning in the real context.

Project-based learning is based on the concept of "starting from social practice, becoming from activity experience, and reaching core literacy", and its essence is to fully practice the concept of student-oriented teaching in diversified learning practices. Through continuous in-depth experiments and research, we will eventually find the balance point of the combination of the two, so that the two will eventually reach a more benign integration, which is a necessary way to promote the development of students, prompt students to learn in depth in the complete learning process, cultivate higher-order thinking and core competencies, and develop the scientific concept of the essence of the students.

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