



A Study on the Theory and Application of the 5E Instructional Model In Authentic Junior High School English Teaching

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Abstract

This study explores the inherent consistency between the 5E Instructional Model and the “authentic context” concept in the new curriculum standard. Based on the teaching case of Simple Past Tense in Unit 7, Grade 7 (PEP), it constructs an implementation path for authentic English teaching in junior high schools. Findings reveal that the 5E Model effectively addresses the dilemma of “inauthentic contexts” in traditional teaching by creating authentic situations, inquiry-based task design, knowledge transfer, and multi-dimensional evaluation, thereby significantly improving students’ language application and real communication competence. The research provides theoretical support and practical references for the reform of authentic English teaching in junior high schools.

Keywords

5E Instructional Model; Junior high school English; Authentic English teaching; Case study; Grammar teaching

1. Introduction

Both the General High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, Revised 2020) and the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) attach foremost importance to the authenticity of English teaching (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2020; 2022). The 2022 Edition of the Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards repeatedly emphasizes authentic situations, tasks, problems, communication, and linguistic materials throughout its provisions (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2022).

With the acceleration of globalization, the instrumental value of English as an international lingua franca has become increasingly prominent. The goal of English teaching has shifted from traditional knowledge indoctrination to the cultivation of

students' core competencies, namely, using language to solve practical problems in authentic contexts. Nevertheless, many current junior high school English classrooms still suffer from fabricated teaching contexts and impractical learning tasks. Common problems include rigid textbook dialogues, a lack of social interaction in classroom activities, and mechanical language output drills. These issues result in a clear separation between students' classroom learning and real-life language application. The development of linguistic competence relies on social interaction in authentic scenarios rather than isolated knowledge cramming.

The 5E Instructional Model, consisting of Engagement, Exploration, Explanation, Elaboration, and Evaluation, features a complete logical chain of context creation, inquiry practice, and knowledge transfer and application, which offers a theoretical approach to remedying the above deficiencies. Against the background of in-depth English curriculum reform, exploring the authenticity of English teaching is of great theoretical and practical significance.

Accordingly, this paper explores the intrinsic compatibility between the connotation of the 5E Instructional Model and authentic English teaching. Combined with specific teaching cases, it further discusses the integration of the E Instructional Model into authentic English teaching in junior high schools.

2. Concept Definition and Theoretical Correlation

2.1. Connotation of the 5E Instructional Model

The 5E Instructional Model was originally developed by the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS) in the United States, consisting of five phases: Engagement, Exploration, Explanation, Elaboration, and Evaluation (Hu & Gao, 2017).

In the Engagement phase, teachers are expected to create appropriate learning situations to arouse students' learning interest and attention. In the Exploration phase, diversified learning activities and tasks involving group cooperation and independent inquiry should be carefully designed. During the Explanation phase, foreign language teachers should avoid unilateral knowledge input; instead, they ought to deepen students' understanding of key knowledge through interactive communication and classroom discussion. The Elaboration phase requires teachers to guide students to apply what they have learned in new situational contexts to consolidate and extend their knowledge. The final Evaluation phase highlights diversified and multi-dimensional assessment, including teacher evaluation, student self-evaluation, and peer evaluation (Wu & Zhang, 2010).

2.2. Authentic English Teaching

Authentic English Teaching is an umbrella term that covers authentic linguistic materials, authentic learning tasks, authentic classroom discourse, and authentic language classrooms (Cheng & Wang, 2023).

The 5E inquiry-based teaching model adopts the five-phase framework in classroom

organization and focuses on stimulating and enlightening students at the Engagement stage. Instead of teachers imparting knowledge directly, students are encouraged to explore and solve problems by collecting information and engaging in peer discussion during Exploration and Explanation. After students have constructed a clear understanding of the knowledge, they are guided to transfer and apply acquired content to other real-life and academic scenarios in the Elaboration phase. In the process of knowledge application, teacher–student evaluation and student–student evaluation further facilitate students’ comprehension of new knowledge in the Evaluation phase (Meng & Sun, 2017).

Authentic English Teaching advocates that teacher–student interaction in classrooms should serve genuine communicative purposes and conform to the rules of real-life language communication. Classroom discourse should be natural and authentic rather than artificially fabricated or hypothetical, and its thematic content should reflect real-life situations instead of being contrived and unrealistic (Cheng & Wang, 2023).

2.3. Internal Correlation Between the 5E Instructional Model and Authentic English Teaching

The core of the E Instructional Model lies in knowledge construction through the five procedural stages of Engagement–Exploration–Explanation–Elaboration–Evaluation, which is highly consistent with the proposition of Authentic English Teaching that language acquisition is achieved through real social interaction (Cheng & Wang, 2023).

Both the 5E model and Authentic English Teaching emphasize that learning is a process of active meaning construction through contextualized activities, and that the development of language competence relies on negotiation of meaning in authentic tasks. For instance, the Engagement phase of the 5E model demands the creation of life-related problem scenarios, such as lead-in activities based on real news events. Likewise, Authentic English Teaching advocates that language input should conform to real communicative scenarios such as interviews and presentations (Su, 2024).

Both approaches attach importance to activating students’ prior knowledge via contextual authenticity and help resolve the disconnection between classroom knowledge and real-life application caused by inauthentic contexts in traditional English teaching. Accordingly, based on the above theoretical discussion and taking Authentic English Teaching as the starting point, this paper explores practical strategies for applying the 5E Instructional Model to junior high school English classrooms.

3. A Case Study of the 5E Instructional Model in Authentic Junior High School English Teaching—Taking the Teaching of the Simple Past Tense as an Example

To further illustrate the application of the 5E Instructional Model in authentic junior high school English teaching, this paper selects A Day to Remember in Unit 7, Grade 7 Volume 2 of the 2024 PEP edition textbook as the teaching content.

The content of this unit is closely related to students' daily lives. Sections A and B of Unit 7 both realize the in-depth restoration of authentic scenarios. The theme of school trips naturally leads to two real-life situations: a sewage treatment plant visit and farm labor experience. Meanwhile, the grammatical knowledge involved in this unit features strong practicality. It focuses on core verbs such as see, learn, be, walk, think, and work, which can largely satisfy students' needs for daily English communication. In addition, the presentation of grammar in this unit conforms to the three-dimensional grammar perspective of form–meaning–use. It progresses from mechanical drills of verb inflections to meaningful expression by writing diaries with the simple past tense, providing high-quality materials for authentic English teaching. Based on the authentic teaching resources of this unit, this paper elaborates on how to implement authentic English teaching under the framework of the 5E Instructional Model.

3.1. Engagement: Activating Situations and Perceiving the Past Tense

If teachers fail to deliver vivid, specific, and appropriate lead-in activities, they cannot effectively activate students' prior knowledge and experience. Consequently, students are unable to timely realize the assimilation and accommodation of new grammatical knowledge, which hinders subsequent learning at each stage (Zhang, 2022).

Therefore, in the lead-in phase of A Day to Remember, teachers may share photos of previous class trips and raise guiding questions: Where did you go on your last school trip? What did you do on that day? Students are required to share their most unforgettable memories with their desk mates. They may first express their thoughts in Chinese, and the teacher then helps convert their ideas into simple English sentences, such as I went to... I saw.... Equipped with sufficient prior knowledge and emotional experience, students will show greater enthusiasm for sharing relevant memories.

3.2. Exploration: Summarizing Rules and Discovering Verb Inflections

Teachers can flexibly adopt textbook texts as teaching resources. For example, Activity 1b in Section B of Unit 7 presents a diary containing most core verbs of the unit. Teachers may extract all verbs in the past tense from the diary and guide students to summarize and identify the rules of verb changes.

These past-tense verbs can be made into flashcards. Students work in groups to classify them into two categories: regular verbs ending in -ed and irregular ones, such as went and saw. On this basis, teachers may organize a competitive game entitled Verb Transformation Contest. The teacher reads out the base form of verbs

on the cards (e.g., work), and students respond quickly with their past tense forms (e.g., worked) by clapping hands to compete for answers. In group cooperation, students initially discover the necessity of using past-tense verbs to narrate past events and further consolidate their mastery of key verb forms through competitive games. The whole teaching process is logically coherent and creates an active classroom atmosphere.

3.3. Explanation: Structuring Knowledge and Highlighting Time Adverbials

In the Explanation phase, teachers focus on illustrating the basic sentence structure of the simple past tense: Subject + Past-tense Verb (Regular / Irregular). Grammar explanation should be closely combined with authentic materials. Teachers may adopt simple sentences selected from news articles, for instance: Sun Yingsha was the winner in that competition. She got the trophy for China !

Concise mnemonic rhymes can also strengthen students' memory: Past events take past tense; regular verbs add "ed;" irregular forms deserve attention. While explaining the simple past tense, teachers guide students to identify typical time adverbials that signal past time. Physical visual aids are used to reinforce such awareness. Based on reading news excerpts, teachers sort out typical time markers and write them on the blackboard. To highlight the usage of past-time adverbials, teachers may display pictures showing the school's appearances in the past, present and future, and guide students to match appropriate time expressions such as yesterday, last week, 5 years ago, now, today, tomorrow, and next week with different pictures.

3.4. Elaboration: Situational Application and Describing Past Experiences

Teachers may create new authentic situations in two ways: first, by selecting and adapting an appropriate corpus from each period of the unit; second, by designing new real-life situations based on the unit theme and students' daily experiences (Chen, 2023). Teachers should prioritize constructing authentic communicative contexts to encourage students to use the simple past tense naturally in interactive activities, realizing the ability to transition from mastering linguistic forms to expressing practical meanings.

Learning activities are arranged progressively from controlled practice to free production. At the basic stage, information-gap activities are designed. Students are distributed differentiated picture cards and exchange information by asking and answering, "What did you do last weekend?" followed by recording their partners' answers. This session consolidates basic sentence structures of the past tense through repetitive communicative drills.

Advanced tasks attach more importance to critical thinking. Based on the event flow

chart of a farm diary in Activity 1c, Section B of Unit 7, students are required to retell the farm labor process orally in groups using the simple past tense. Teachers provide linguistic scaffolding, such as First, they... Then... After that..., which consolidates the use of time adverbials and cultivates students' logical expression ability.

Authentic communicative tasks serve as the core of this phase. Students work in pairs as reporters and interviewees to conduct real-life interviews based on their own experiences. Role task cards are provided, requiring students to describe specific events with at least five past tense sentences. Example dialogue: Reporter: What impressed you most during the farm visit? Interviewee: When we picked strawberries, I noticed...

3.5. Evaluation: Multi-dimensional Feedback and Consolidating Learning Outcomes

In the Evaluation phase, teachers construct a diversified assessment system by integrating formative and summative evaluations to comprehensively assess students' learning performance.

Formative evaluation runs through the whole teaching process, including classroom observation records to mark students' accuracy in using the past tense in oral English, as well as peer assessment, such as checking verb tense errors in each other's diaries.

Summative evaluation consists of written assignments and project-based tasks. Written exercises include verb inflection, fill-in-the-blanks, and time adverbial matching, which helps students identify their weak points. Project-based learning tasks require group cooperation to create chain stories themed Unforgettable Experiences. Students are evaluated comprehensively in terms of tense accuracy, content coherence, and creative expression.

Teachers implement differentiated evaluations: focusing on correcting verb errors for underachieving students, strengthening the flexible use of time adverbials for intermediate learners, and improving narrative complexity for advanced students. Excellent works are compiled into an album as learning achievements and reference samples for future teaching. Outstanding stories are posted on classroom display boards with sticky notes for comments, enabling multi-party evaluation among students, teachers, and parents.

4. Conclusion

The 5E Instructional Model provides a feasible implementation pathway for authentic English teaching in junior high schools, and its five-stage teaching framework is highly consistent with the philosophy advocated by the new curriculum standards. By creating authentic learning contexts, organizing inquiry-based activities, facilitating knowledge transfer, and implementing

multi-dimensional evaluation, the model can effectively promote the development of students' ability to use the English language in real communicative situations.

Taking the teaching of the Simple Past Tense as a typical case, this study illustrates the specific application strategies of the E Instructional Model in grammar instruction and offers practical references for breaking through the dilemma of inauthentic contexts prevalent in traditional English teaching. Future research may further explore the adaptability of the 5E model in different lesson types and educational stages, as well as its integration with modern educational technology, to continuously advance the development of English teaching toward greater authenticity and practicality.

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