A Brief Analysis of English Teaching for Grade 6 Students in Primary School--Take Unit 2 At the Airport as an Example

Jiaojiao Liu
East China University of Science and Technology, Xuhui, Shanghai 200237, China

ABSTRACT. The four English skills—reading, speaking, writing and listening are of great significance for students’ English study. Primary school English lays a foundation for students’ further education. Especially excellent English study of students at sixth grade can make a solid foundation for their English learning at junior middle school. Therefore, it is necessary to apply the most scientific and efficient teaching methodologies to carry out efficient English teaching activities. This paper is a discussion about the useful English teaching method applied at sixth grade student by taking Unit 2 At The Airport (Oxford English textbook for Shanghai, grade 6) as an example.

KEYWORDS: Sixth grade study, Teaching theory, Teaching method, Teaching plan

1. Introduction

1.1 Teaching Background

Traditional English teaching is a teacher-centered class, with a single model and boring classroom contents, students are more likely to be distracted and unable to focus their attention. English language teaching in primary school is of great significance for students since it is an important period to form students’ interests in English learning and build their English foundation. Teacher has obligation and responsibility to make sure students’ learning effect. An efficient English class always connects with a better analyzing and understanding of teachers’ teaching materials and teaching aims. It means that teacher should have a good master of his teaching material and a good understanding of his students’ cognitive and learning ability.

An excellent teaching class is hard to realize without applying effective teaching theories and methods. The most frequently used teaching theories in primary school are Behaviorism, Cognitive Constructivist Theory and the Monitoring Theory. As for the teaching methods, Oral Approach and Situational ELT, the Audiolingual Method, Total Physical Response and Task-based Language teaching method are often adopted in English class at primary school. Taking Unit 2 At The Airport (Oxford English textbook for Shanghai, grade 6) as an example, this paper is going to discuss the useful teaching methods and theories used in English teaching class at primary school.

1.2 Teaching Theories and Teaching Methods

The motivational theory of behaviorism is an important role of educational psychology, which plays a key role in primary school teaching. It suggests that learning is the link between Stimulus and Response, and behavior is the learner’s response to environmental stimulus. The positive and negative reinforcement it refers to is of great significance for English teaching in primary school. As for the Cognitive Constructivist Theory, according to Phillips (1995), Constructivism’s central idea is that human learning is constructed, that learners build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous learning. Piaget (1952) believes that learners have been regarded as active participants in their knowledge construction process, and teachers are the promoters of this active knowledge construction process. The Constructivist Theory is rich in its content, but its critical point is that, instead of traditional teaching, which just transfer knowledge by teachers in class, it is a student-centered theory, emphasizing students’ active exploration, discovery and construction of knowledge. The last teaching theories concerned is the Monitoring Theory. Krashen holds that “comprehensible input” is the crucial and necessary ingredient for the acquisition of language. According to this, he has put forward five famous hypotheses, among which the Affective Filter Hypothesis is mostly concerned in primary school. The combination of these teaching theories can acquire beneficial outcomes in English teaching at primary school English class. As for the teaching methods used in English teaching, Oral Approach and Situational ELT,
the Audiolingual Method, Total Physical Response and Tasked-based Language Teaching method are often concerned. According to Oral Approach and Situational ELT, students must be able to produce accurate pronunciation and use of grammar. The ultimate aim is to be able to respond quickly and accurately in speech situations with an automatic control of basic structures and sentence patterns. It greatly improves teaching efficiency and students’ learning initiative without using of mother tongue, which is quite available in primary school English teaching. Language can be more effective and interesting if the learning process combined with living situation in reality. For example, role-play activities in English class is attractive for students.

Another method is Audiolingual Method, it stresses that speaking and listening competences preceded reading and writing competences. The Audiolingual approach focuses on grammar drills whose advantage is that the spoken English of students is greatly enhanced so that they can use English to communicate confidently by using this approach. The Total Physical Response proposed by James Asher(1966) is a method of teaching language or vocabulary concepts by using physical movement to react to verbal input. TPR, as an approach to teaching a second language, bases on listening and physical actions, which is beneficial to reinforce comprehension of particular basic items. In certain aspects, TPR, as an effective method, is to consolidate students’ knowledge, which students have learned and understood before. Another teaching method is The Task-based Language Teaching, which has frequently used by teachers of different grades. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. It cultivates students’ interests in English study through participating various activities and completing many tasks in class. In the process of completing tasks, the combination of knowledge and communication skills help to cultivate students’ comprehensive ability of using language. It has no doubt that using one teaching theory and teaching method has many shortcomings. However, the combined of these teaching theories and teaching methods in English class may help to keep a balance in teaching the four English skills at primary school.

2. Teaching Plan

In order to improve such teaching situation and adapt to the new primary school English teaching aims, it is necessary to enrich the content of the classroom and acquire students’ interests in learning English. Gu Xiaolan[1] indicates that it is an important step to correctly analyze the unit topic, reasonably set the unit topic, and reconstruct the text. Teachers should fully understand the content of the new lecture he should teach before class. In each chapter, there must be introduction, presentation, practice and consolidation to broaden students’ horizon, etc. Cao Shujun[2] has suggested that primary school is the best stage for students to learn. Take advantage of the curiosity of primary school students about English courses to help students establish an English learning system and promote students’ understanding of primary school English. The following is an example of primary school English teaching at grade 6 (Unit 2 At The Airport, Oxford English textbook for Shanghai).

2.1 Analysis of the Unit Points of Unit 2 At the Airport

Students at grade 6 Students have a preliminary cognitive ability and a low level of abstract thinking and have a strong curiosity and motivation to learn. Considering with the textbook. Unit 2 At The Airport is divided into three parts, reading, listening and speaking, and word box. The teaching aim in this unit is that students should be able to use some nouns to express necessary items and precautions when flying, such as an air ticket, suitcases, passports, boarding cards, a name tag, etc. They also need to use prepositional phrases to describe time, such as “They have lived in Los Angeles for six years. They will not come back until the end of the month”. The using of present perfect to express the results of the past actions on the present also need to learn by students, like “They have bought the air tickets already”. In addition, they require use some nouns or directives to express objects and directions. For example, telephones, exit and so on. It would be better if they can use some adjectives to indicate the numbers, such as a lot of, several, a small amount, etc.

In general, when it comes to the syntax points, there are sentences in this lesson that use the present perfect to express the impact of the past actions on the present. For example, “They have bought the air tickets already./They have lived in Los Angeles for six years.” Another syntax point is that the simple future tense indicates the actions or things that will happen in the near future. Meanwhile special question “how long...” also need to be reviewed in this unit. Besides, the unit points students need to learn in this unit can be concluded as following: 1) Things you need to travel abroad by air: an air ticket, suitcases, passports, boarding cards, a name tag 2) Prepositions: for, until, at, before 3) Nouns associated with the airport: check, departure, flight, arrival, leave for, passenger, trolley, exit, entrance, escalator. 4) Verb tense: live-lived; be-been; buy-bought; do-done; pack-packed; get-got; check-checked; put-put; bring-brought 5) Others: dried mushroom, Los Angeles, scarf, camera, waste, etc. What’s more, after learning this unit, students require to be able to give instructions and directions, such as Come in here. / Go out here. It is also an extra effect if students broaden their knowledge about something related to a trip by flying, such as the knowledge of “All passengers must arrive at the airport two hours before the departure time”. Specifically, each part has its teaching aims for students. The reading part includes two small branches, namely, look and learn as well as look and read. The teaching aim in this part
is that students ought to learn some nouns to express necessary items when flying, such as an air ticket, suitcases, a silk scarf, etc. They also need to have the ability to use prepositional phrases to describe time, such as “They have lived in Los Angeles for six years./ They will not come back until the end of the month”.

What’s more, students should have a better understanding of how to use the present perfect to express the results of the past actions on the present, like “They have bought the air tickets already”. Besides, some adjectives to indicate the numbers, such as a lot of, several, a small amount, plenty of, also need students’ attention. The listening and speaking part is concerned with learn and say, ask and answer, listen and match, listen and learn, say and act as well as think and write. After analyzing these small branches, it is easy to find that the main purpose of this part is two practice students’ ability in speaking and listening, which maybe precede above reading and writing. The teaching aims in this part calls for teacher and students’ great efforts. Students must learn to express how to ask and answer some related questions about having a trip by flying, and learn to express how to give instructions and directions when seeing a sign at the airport. Finally, the last page of this unit is the word box. There are several new words in this unit, which need teachers’ skillful arrangement to avoid boring teaching of English words like in some traditional English class.

2.2 Develop Thinking Ability of Students by Creating Situations

Wu Jialu[5] refers that situation-based vocabulary teaching focuses on the combination of different situations, which advocates the use of audio-visual integration, role-playing and story writing to teach, helps primary school students to complete English learning tasks and enhance their learning interests, and develop their corresponding abilities. Vocabulary learning is very important throughout the whole process of English study. In this unit, the word box includes 17 nouns, 3 verbs and several other words. At the beginning of this class, the new words are taught by teachers. With inadequate intrinsic learning motivation, students who love performance, and have difficulty in concentration are so emotional at primary stage. The teacher should use physical performance to deepen students’ understanding since some abstract new words may be hard for students to memorize.

In the process of teaching new words, some teaching aids like photos, word cards and short videos can be helpful. Teacher can set up a mock situation, such as “we are going to the Los Angeles” and the teacher is the tour guide who will bring students go to the airport. For example, when teaching the word “airport”, teacher can show a card of the new word “airport” combined with the picture of airport by saying “we are going to the Los Angeles by air, now we have arrived at this place. Can you guess where we are?” Then students can understand the meaning of the new word by teachers’ providing of word card and word picture. Wu Jialu[5] said that learning vocabulary through picture presentation can effectively improve learners’ ability to memorize and use vocabulary. Besides, when teaching the word “worry”, teacher can present a very short video such as Peppa Pig to students and let students guess what happened to Peppa Pig and how about his feeling. With the help of multimedia like short video, the class atmosphere can be more active and relax, which, to some extent, can reduce students’ affective filter toward English learning. If the students answer the meaning of new words correctly, teacher should give them some praises like “Good job, well done” or give them some gifts like red flowers or pens. In this way, students are encouraged by their teacher so that they would have more confidence and interests in English study.

In addition, many studies have shown that using music and songs while learning a new language can be of great benefit to students in aspects such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.[6] Therefore, teacher can also choose a song as the start of a lesson, which is powerful tool to cheer students up. One thing the teacher must pay attention to is that teacher must choose the song carefully, which would be better if it has much relation with their new lesson. The song can apply to teach them new words or to improve their English speaking. Therefore, teacher should avoid choosing unrelated songs in class, which has no use but a waste of class time. An American map may also be helpful for English teacher to start this unit. At the beginning of class when teaching the “Reading” part at page 8, teacher can show students this map and design a situation. In this situation, the whole class are going to Los Angeles with “Mr. Wang” and “Grandma”. Then teacher can start this part with a question “Can you find the Los Angeles?” Students can be more active in the process of discussing this topic. Considering with students’ characteristics, instead of asking students to be quiet and sit still in classroom, teacher maybe require them to stand up and get physical. For example, when teaching the first part at page 8 “look and read”, teacher can treat this material as a story because telling a story is an effective vehicle for teaching meaning, repetition of key phrases and deepen students’ understanding. Since there are two character “Mrs Wang” and “Grandma” in this passage, teacher can also ask students to read this short passage with their partner combined with their face expressions or physical actions. For example, when one student reads that “Grandma has bought Aunt Judy plenty of T-shirts and several silk scarves”, his partner can try to act it with his physical action or face expression. Teacher can also use the listening tape in class so that all students can listen together and read after the listening tape combined with their physical action. This method is available in teaching the part of “listen and say” in “listening and speaking”. At this part, it mainly focus on conversation so that students can read and act. At first, teacher shall give students several minutes to let them discuss with their partner and then to talk about the information they can find in the ticket card at page 9. After their discussion, teacher asks if there are any volunteers to share the information
to their classmates, which also can get gifts like candy, red flowers or pen from their teacher for their positive participant in class.

It is widely agreed that learning takes place when activities are engaging and memorable. Role-play activities is quite useful in this part, which is fun and motivating. The conversation in this part mainly happens among the three character, namely, Mrs Wang, Mr Wang and Grandma. Students can start a role-play read and act together, which can motivate their enthusiasm in class. In order to make sure each student has understood the meaning of this short conversation, teacher can ask students to repeat their conversation in their own words, which is also available to the first part “Reading” at page 8. The advantage of this method is that it is an effective way to practice students’ spoken English. Besides, when teaching the “say and act” part at page 11, teacher still can choose the role-play activity. The difference is that teacher can let them do this activity in groups and, teacher need to select two or four groups to act their role-play in front of the class after their preparing and practicing. Such performance is a group competition activity to attract students’ attention in class. In the process of teaching the signs and instructions as well as directions at the airport like “Come in here”, telephones and exit, teacher can show students short videos about the airport so that students can listen and share the information they find with their classmates. With the help of short videos and some related picture, students must get great impression towards this knowledge without unnecessary pressure.

2.3 Develop students’ Learning Ability by Cooperative Exploration

Group work is one of the efficient and highly practical teaching method, it breaks through the traditional rigid and single teaching mode, which let students become the master of the classroom, actively acquire knowledge and their learning efficiency have been greatly improved.[7]

Students should understand cooperatives are people working together to solve common problems and seize opportunities as well as to make progress together. Cooperative exploration is of great significance for students no matter what stages they are. It is a useful way to raise achievement of students and build positive relationships among students, which is important for creating a learning community that values diversity. The primary school students have an overwhelming amount of energy with short attention spans.

In this unit, students need to have a good master of some expressions such as “S1: What time does your plane leave for tomorrow? S2: At… in the morning/ afternoon/evening. What time should I arrive at the airport? S1: You should arrive at the airport before in the morning/ afternoon/evening.” When provided with a timetable about a plane ticket, students need to be capable of asking and answering the questions in the above. Traditional chalk talk way of English teaching is easy to make students get bored and lose interests in English. Considering students’ age and characteristics, teacher can design some active group activities to encourage each students, which is quite popular at primary school. For example, when teaching the “Reading” part at page 8, teacher can ask students to read this short passage together. After they finish their reading, teacher can divide students into two groups--Girls group and Boys group. Then a group activity is available to find out which group has a better performance. Combined with their group performance, teacher can give them some advice and praises about their reading.

When teaching the “Ask and Say” part, teacher still can seek help to group activity so that to make sure students have confidence and interests in English class. The whole class can divide into five groups. In the process of this group activity, students in each group need to learn to design a timetable about airplane by themselves and then the other group members should ask and answer the related questions. In order to make sure each group members understand how to ask and answer these questions, teacher ought to teach them at first with examples at first. As we all known that comprehensive input is very necessary for students, teacher need to make sure that his teaching is based on the original level of students. Then, students in each group can start to make their own timetable and questions after they have a certain foundation.

One of cooperative group activities’ advantages is that it gives every students opportunity to practice their English listening and speaking, especially the students who are too shy to communicate in English at class. By doing enough practice in cooperative group activities, students who are afraid of speaking in class can acquire more confidence and encourage through learning from their group members. Besides, the role-play activity also is a kind of cooperative activity, which is beneficial to encourage students to be more active in English class. Primary school students are very positive in cooperative activity, which can raise their cooperative awareness. As a result, cooperative activities have greatly improved primary school students’ learning efficiency and can achieve a balanced development of students’ general English skills.

2.4 Task-Based Teaching Consolidates Knowledge

Primary school English teaching is a quite critical stage for building up students’ English foundation. Wang Qiang[8] suggested that the basic requirement for Primary School English postulates that the main aims of primary English
include to develop pupils’ interests, self-confidence and positive attitude towards learning English. It is to cultivate the pupils’ language sense and enable good pronunciation and intonation; to develop the pupils’ preliminary ability to use English in daily exchanges and lay a good basis for further study. An important goal of teaching English in elementary school is to create a basic vocabulary that consists of single words and short sentences.

Task-based learning offers an alternative for language teachers. In a task-based lesson, the teacher won’t pre-determine what language will be studied, the lesson is based around the completion of a central task and the language studied is determined by what happens as the students complete it. In teaching activities, teachers should design specific and practical tasks around specific communication and language projects. Students complete the tasks through various forms of language activities such as expression, communication, negotiation, interpretation, and inquiry to achieve learning and the purpose of mastering the language. In the process of completing tasks, the combination of knowledge and communication skills help to cultivate students’ comprehensive ability of using language. However, in most primary and secondary schools, especially in rural schools, task-based teaching clearly shows its shortcomings. There are many students in a class, the individual outcome of students in classroom are difficult to be effectively monitored or controlled, and the feedback efficiency is not very positive. Therefore, teacher need to design the task more specific and reasonable. In this unit, teacher has designed tasks such as retelling a story, group cooperation activities and so on. Teacher can also assign the exercise book as their task to ensure every student is able to use what they have learned in class to do their homework. The status of syntax points, new words as well as sentences they learn in class can check by teacher through their exercise book. By checking out the learning results in their exercise book, teacher will know about students’ weakness and strength in this unit so that teacher can arrange his teaching process in a more reasonable and acceptable way.

3. Conclusion

In order to make sure the efficiency of English class, English teacher needs to know the teaching theories and teaching methods well. Simple teaching theory and teaching method would cause a plenty of problems and disadvantages to students’ English study, which would run out students’ learning interests and confidence in English. Teacher should design his teaching more reasonable to turn down students’ affective filter as much as possible by combined with different teaching theories and methods together. Therefore, as discussed in the above, the efficiency of teaching theories in primary school are Behaviorism, Cognitive Constructivist Theory and the Monitoring Theory. Oral Approach and Situational ELT, the Audiolingual Method, Total Physical Response and Task-based Language are effective teaching methods, which can apply to primary school English teaching, which are helpful to avoid the boring atmosphere in traditional English class.

References


