

Review of Research on Middle School English Teaching Strategies based on Project - Based Learning

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ABSTRACT

In the context of continuous educational innovation, project - based learning, as an innovative teaching model, has received extensive attention in the field of middle school English teaching. With elements such as authentic tasks, driving questions, and an emphasis on students' dominant position, it integrates deeply with middle school English teaching, significantly enhancing students' comprehensive language application ability, thinking quality, and cultural awareness. Teachers can promote in - depth learning effectively by identifying projects that fit the unit theme and students' interests, creating real - life situations, and guiding students to conduct cooperative inquiries. However, in practice, project - based learning still faces many challenges, such as insufficient teacher guidance capabilities, a lack of teaching resources, and an imperfect evaluation system. Future research should focus on developing targeted teacher training programs, exploring efficient resource integration strategies, and constructing a scientific and comprehensive evaluation system to promote the wide application and optimization of project - based learning in middle school English teaching, facilitate the cultivation of core competencies in the English subject, improve the quality of middle school English teaching, and achieve the educational goals of the English subject.

KEYWORDS

Project - Based Learning; Middle School English; Teaching Strategies; Core Competencies.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of continuous educational innovation and the evolving English curriculum standards, middle school English teaching is in a crucial transition period from knowledge - imparting to core - competence cultivation. Both “The General High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition)” and “The Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)” emphasize the comprehensive cultivation of students' language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. This poses new challenges to traditional teaching models and prompts educators to actively seek more innovative and effective teaching methods.

Project - based learning (PBL), with its emphasis on real - life situations, cooperative inquiry, and outcome - orientation, is in line with the requirements of the new curriculum standards and has become a hot topic in foreign language teaching research. Its success in the STEM education field provides a reference for English teaching. In recent years, domestic and foreign scholars have conducted research on the application of PBL in middle school English teaching and achieved results in task design, localization practice, etc. International research focuses on task - design principles and interdisciplinary integration, while domestic research focuses on exploring practical paths such as unit integration in combination with local realities. However, currently, in the practice of PBL in

middle school English teaching, there are still many problems, and there are dilemmas in theoretical adaptability and operational feasibility, which has triggered disputes in the academic community.

This literature review aims to systematically sort out the research results of middle school English PBL at home and abroad from 2010 to 2025. Thematic analysis is used to analyze the core literature in databases such as Web of Science and CNKI. The research expects to provide scientific evidence for educational practitioners to implement PBL teaching strategies, promote its development in the field of middle school English teaching, improve teaching quality, and achieve the educational goals of the English subject. The following will analyze the theoretical basis of PBL, review its design, implementation, and evaluation strategies in middle school English teaching, and explore future research directions.

2. AN ANALYSIS OF THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF PROJECT - BASED LEARNING

2.1. The Definition and Core Elements of Project - Based Learning

Project - based learning is a student - centered teaching method. Students master knowledge and skills by exploring complex problems, designing project works, planning, and implementing tasks. It emphasizes that students carry out inquiry - based learning in real - life situations with the help of various resources and use the knowledge they have learned to solve a series of interrelated problems.

The core elements of PBL include authentic tasks, driving questions, the dominant position of students, and cooperative learning. Authentic tasks are a characteristic of PBL. They connect the problems students face with real life, thus enhancing the practicality of knowledge and students' practical abilities (Yang Huajuan, 2024). For example, in the research of Lin Xiaochen (2024), taking Unit 1 "Festivals and Celebrations" in Compulsory English Textbook 3 for Senior High School of People's Education Press as an example, an authentic task of "producing a podcast introducing Chinese traditional festivals" is set. Students need to deeply understand festival cultures and use English for creation and expression, making learning more meaningful in reality.

Driving questions are the core of PBL. They can stimulate students' inquiry interest and guide students to think and explore actively. A good driving question should be interesting, open - ended, and consistent. For example, in English project - based learning based on thematic meaning inquiry, teachers design driving questions such as "How to provide help to the elderly in a nursing home", guiding students to think about their own abilities and social responsibilities (Wan Shu, 2018).

The dominant position of students is fully reflected in PBL. Students play a leading role in the entire learning process and determine the learning progress and methods (Zheng Ou, 2022). Cooperative learning is also an important part of PBL. Students work in groups to complete project tasks. Through cooperation and communication, they share ideas and cultivate teamwork spirit and communication skills. For example, in academic English project - based learning, students complete projects through group cooperation. During the cooperation process, they learn from each other, make progress together, and enhance group cohesion (Zuo Xiuyuan, Chen Zheng, 2010).

2.2. Theoretical Foundations

The constructivist learning theory holds that knowledge is not obtained through teacher - teaching but is acquired by learners through meaning - construction in a certain context, that is, the social - cultural background, with the help of others (including teachers and learning partners) and necessary learning materials. PBL is highly consistent with the constructivist learning theory. In the process of project - based learning, students explore around real problems and actively construct their understanding of knowledge.

Dewey's "learning by doing" theory emphasizes the concept of learning through practice, believing that learning is achieved through practical operation and experience. PBL fully embodies this theory. Students experience the application process of knowledge by completing various tasks in project practice, thus deepening their understanding and mastery of knowledge. For example, in junior high school English project - based learning, students participate in practical projects such as designing travel plans and making brochures, applying English knowledge to real - life situations and realizing "learning from doing" (Zheng Ou, 2022; Yang Huajuan, 2024).

The sociocultural theory was proposed by Vygotsky. This theory emphasizes the important influence of the social - cultural environment on individual learning and development. In PBL, students' learning takes place in a social - interaction context. Interactive activities such as group cooperation and teacher - student communication provide students with rich learning resources and social support. Students continuously adjust and improve their thinking and behavior in communication and cooperation with others, achieving the internalization of knowledge and the development of abilities (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, when students complete project tasks in group cooperation, the discussions, sharing, and mutual evaluations among students can promote students' understanding and application of knowledge and improve their language expression and communication skills.

2.3. Differences from Traditional Task - Based Teaching

2.3.1. Task Design.

There are obvious differences between traditional task - based teaching and project - based learning. The former designs single tasks around language knowledge points, aiming to enable students to master specific language skills. The latter has more comprehensive and authentic tasks, which are based on real - life situations and require students to comprehensively use multi - disciplinary knowledge to solve complex problems. For example, in English writing teaching, traditional teaching is a single writing exercise, while PBL may assign a task of making a travel brochure (Sun Tieling, 2019).

2.3.2. Student Roles.

In traditional task - based teaching, students are relatively passive with limited autonomous space. In PBL, students are the main body of learning, with great autonomy, and can independently plan and implement projects. Taking the overall teaching of junior high school English units as an example, students can independently carry out various activities around driving questions in the project - based learning model (Zheng Ou, 2022).

2.3.3. Teaching Objectives.

Traditional task - based teaching focuses on the imparting of language knowledge and skills, with a single goal. PBL has diversified teaching objectives. In addition to enhancing language ability, it also pays attention to cultivating comprehensive qualities such as critical thinking and innovation ability. For example, in high school English comprehensive practical activities, students can exercise various abilities through project - based learning (Yang Huajuan, 2024).

3. THE APPLICATION STATUS OF PBL IN MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHING

3.1. International Research Trends

European and American countries started their exploration of PBL in language teaching relatively early and have accumulated rich experience. The "English Learning Project from a Global Perspective" carried out in the United States is quite representative (Johnson, Smith, 2020). In this project, students take cross - cultural exchanges in different countries as the background and

undertake tasks such as “designing an international cultural exchange activity plan”. They need to deeply study the language habits and cultural characteristics of the target countries and complete the design of activity processes, the production of promotional posters, and the compilation of communication manuals through group cooperation. The “English Drama Creation Project” implemented in some middle schools in the UK has also achieved remarkable results (Brown, 2021). Students create scripts, perform roles, and make stage presentations in English based on classic literary works or original stories. These practices fully demonstrate that PBL can effectively stimulate students’ learning interest and improve their comprehensive language application ability with the help of real and challenging tasks.

3.2. Domestic Research Progress

Domestic scholars have actively explored the application of PBL in middle school English teaching and achieved a series of representative results. Zheng Ou (2022) proposed that teachers should promote the implementation of overall unit teaching, rely on project - based learning, design teaching activities around the unit theme, and guide students to construct an understanding of the unit theme. This research takes the junior high school English textbooks of Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press as an example. By creating real - life situations and driving questions, students improve their language ability and comprehensive qualities while solving problems.

Project - based learning should be learner - centered and integrate content and language learning. Taking the high school English textbooks of People’s Education Press as an example, they elaborated in detail on how to integrate unit learning content with the project - based learning method in three links: project preparation, implementation, and improvement. In the project - preparation stage, teachers determine the project theme and product according to the unit content. For example, in the “Travelling Around” unit, teachers and students jointly determine to make a travel - guide notebook as the project product. In the project - implementation stage, students collect and compile information to complete the project product. In the project - improvement stage, students display, evaluate the product, and reflect. Through this process, the integration of unit language knowledge and cultural knowledge is realized, and the requirements of the curriculum standards are implemented.

3.2.1. Vocabulary Teaching.

Some research focuses on improving students’ vocabulary learning effects through project - based learning. Wang Shanshan (2023) proposed the project of “making an English vocabulary theme hand - copy newspaper”, integrating vocabulary into real - context tasks. Students deepen their understanding of the meanings and usages of vocabulary in the process of collecting and sorting out vocabulary related to the theme, thus improving vocabulary memory effects and application abilities. This method enables students to actively learn vocabulary in practical activities, changes the traditional rote - learning model, and improves learning interest and efficiency.

3.2.2. Writing Teaching.

PBL has also been widely applied in writing teaching. Wang Shu and Li Ping (2020) carried out the research on “the application of PBL teaching method in high school English practical writing teaching”. Teachers set practical problems such as “writing an invitation letter for a campus activity”, guiding students to learn independently and conduct cooperative inquiries. In the process of completing tasks, students not only improve their writing ability but also cultivate comprehensive qualities such as planning, organization, and communication, and enhance their ability to use English for written expression in real - life situations.

3.2.3. Cross - Cultural Teaching.

In the field of cross - cultural teaching, some research uses project - based learning to enhance students’ cross - cultural awareness and communication abilities. Lin Xiaochen (2024) mentioned that by carrying out the “comparison project of Chinese and foreign festival cultures”, students collect

materials, compare and analyze the origins and customs of Chinese and foreign festivals, and introduce and communicate in English. This enables students to deeply understand the differences between different cultures, cultivate an attitude of respecting and tolerating diverse cultures, and enhance cross - cultural communication abilities, allowing them to more confidently and accurately spread Chinese culture and express cultural views in English.

3.2.4. Grammar Teaching.

PBL brings new ideas to grammar teaching. Sun Tieling (2019) proposed designing the project of “the application of grammar rules in life scenarios”, allowing students to use specific grammar rules for communication and expression in real - life situations. Students naturally understand and master grammar knowledge in the process of solving practical problems, changing the boring mode of mechanical memory in traditional grammar learning and improving the effectiveness of grammar learning and students’ language application abilities.

3.3. Existing Problems

3.3.1. Difficulty in Teachers’ Role Transition.

Under the traditional teaching mode, teachers are used to being the knowledge - imparting leaders in the classroom. In the implementation process of PBL, it is difficult for them to quickly transform into the roles of guides and facilitators. Some teachers interfere too much in the students’ independent exploration process and do not fully give students autonomous space. Some teachers cannot provide effective guidance in a timely manner when students encounter problems, resulting in obstacles to the progress of the project. For example, in the project - planning stage, teachers should guide students to think independently and develop plans, but some teachers directly give detailed steps, restricting the exertion of students’ creativity and initiative.

3.3.2. Imperfect Evaluation System.

The existing evaluation system mostly focuses on students’ knowledge mastery and is difficult to comprehensively evaluate students’ comprehensive performance in PBL. In PBL, students’ abilities such as teamwork, problem - solving, and innovative thinking are very important, but the current evaluation criteria do not consider these aspects in detail. For example, in the evaluation of group projects, the quality of the final results is often the main focus, and the differences in the contributions of members during the process are ignored, resulting in the phenomenon that some students “free - ride” being difficult to detect and correct. At the same time, the evaluation methods are relatively single, mainly teacher - evaluation, lacking students’ self - evaluation and peer - evaluation, which cannot fully mobilize students’ enthusiasm for participating in evaluation and is difficult to comprehensively reflect students’ learning processes.

3.3.3. Differences in Students’ Adaptability.

Different students have different degrees of adaptability to PBL. Students with strong learning abilities and high autonomous learning awareness can quickly integrate into project - based learning, give full play to their own advantages, actively participate in all aspects of the project, and make significant progress in knowledge acquisition and ability improvement. However, some students with weak foundations and poor learning habits often feel at a loss when facing the requirements of independent exploration in PBL. They have a low participation rate in the project and may even have an evasive mentality. For example, in the group - discussion session, students with strong learning abilities actively speak and lead the discussion direction, while students with weak foundations may gradually be marginalized due to fear of making mistakes or lack of confidence, further widening the learning gap among students.

4. DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH PROJECT - BASED LEARNING

4.1. Determining Project Themes Based on Curriculum Standards and Textbooks

To excavate project themes from textbooks based on curriculum standards, teachers need to deeply analyze the curriculum standards, clarify the knowledge and ability goals that students should achieve at different stages, and review the textbook content with this as a guide. Teachers can start from aspects such as the unit themes, text materials, language knowledge, and skill requirements of textbooks to find theme clues with exploration value and practical significance (Zheng Ou, 2022). Taking the junior high school English textbooks of People's Education Press as an example, when it comes to the "environmental protection" unit, the curriculum standards emphasize cultivating students' awareness of environmental protection issues and related English expression abilities. Teachers can dig out the project theme of "designing a campus environmental protection action plan" based on this. This not only closely focuses on the vocabulary, sentence patterns, and topic discussions about environmental protection in the textbook but also allows students to apply the learned knowledge to actual campus life, reflecting the idea of determining themes starting from textbook content and combining the requirements of curriculum standards.

To make the project theme not only fit the teaching content but also be attractive, the key is to combine textbook knowledge with students' real - life situations and interests (Wang Xinghua et al., 2024). For example, in the "cultural heritage" unit of the high school English textbooks of Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, if the theme is directly set as "introduction to cultural heritage", it may be a bit boring. Teachers can combine the rich local cultural heritage resources, such as the historical and cultural relics of a certain ancient town, and set the project theme as "making a promotional brochure for the cultural heritage of the ancient town to promote hometown culture to the world". Such a theme not only covers the teaching content such as vocabulary and text analysis about cultural heritage in the textbook but also can stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm for participation because it is closely related to students' lives, prompting them to actively invest in project - based learning.

4.2. Design Principles and Methods of Driving Questions

Driving questions have characteristics such as openness, challenge, and inspiration. Openness ensures that there are multiple answers to the questions, providing students with broad thinking space. Challenge means that the difficulty of the questions is slightly higher than students' current level, stimulating students' exploration desire. Inspiration is reflected in guiding students to think deeply and explore the connotations behind the knowledge (Xia Xuemei, 2018).

Taking the "comparison of Chinese and foreign festival cultures" project as an example, the driving question "How to make Western friends better understand and participate in Chinese traditional festivals and, at the same time, enable Chinese students to have a deeper understanding of Western festival cultures?" is designed. This question is open - ended. Students can think about solutions from multiple angles such as festival customs and historical origins. It is challenging and requires students to comprehensively use English knowledge and cross - cultural communication abilities to explore. It is also inspiring, guiding students to think about the differences and integrations between different cultures. In the process of project implementation, students conduct in - depth exploration of the questions through group cooperation, study the characteristics of different festivals, make introduction manuals, or plan cultural exchange activities, thus enhancing their language application ability and cross - cultural awareness.

4.3. Planning of Learning Tasks and Activities

The design of learning tasks should follow the principles of hierarchy, relevance, and practicality (Wan Shu, 2018). Hierarchy requires tasks to progress from easy to difficult, gradually increasing in complexity, which is in line with students' cognitive development laws. Relevance ensures that all tasks revolve around the project theme and goals, are interrelated, and gradually deepen. Practicality emphasizes that tasks should be close to real - life situations, enabling students to apply knowledge in practice and improve their problem - solving abilities.

Diversified activity forms play an important role in English teaching. Group investigation activities can cultivate students' cooperation ability and information collection and analysis abilities. For example, in the "campus environmental protection action plan design" project, students are divided into groups to investigate campus environmental problems and the environmental awareness of teachers and students. Through discussion and analysis, they propose targeted solutions. Role - playing activities help to improve students' language expression and situational application abilities. When learning about restaurant ordering, students can conduct role - playing in a restaurant scene, simulating the conversations between customers and waiters to master the English expressions for ordering. Project display activities provide a platform for students to showcase their achievements and share experiences. After the "making a promotional brochure for the cultural heritage of the ancient town" project, students share their understanding of hometown cultural heritage and promotion plans by presenting the brochures. This not only exercises their public speaking and presentation skills but also enables them to gain new inspiration from the presentations of other students.

5. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH PROJECT - BASED LEARNING

5.1. Creating Real - Life Situations

Creating real - life situations is of great significance in middle school English project - based learning. It can enhance students' learning experiences, making them feel as if they are in actual language - using scenarios. This makes the learning process more vivid and interesting, thus improving students' learning enthusiasm and initiative (Yang Miao, 2022). In real - life situations, students can better understand the practical application of knowledge and improve their knowledge - application abilities, achieving the transformation from theoretical learning to practical use. When learning English content related to tourism, creating a real - life situation of "planning a one - day tour in the local area for foreign tourists", students need to use the learned English knowledge, such as vocabulary and sentence patterns for scenic spot introduction, transportation guidance, and catering recommendations, to develop a detailed travel plan for tourists. This not only makes students' understanding of knowledge more profound but also improves their ability to solve problems using English in practical situations.

There are various ways to create real - life situations. Using multimedia resources is one of the common methods. Teachers can create a vivid language environment for students by playing videos, showing pictures, and audio materials (Tang Hongyan, Zhang Haiyan, 2024). When teaching English courses about natural landscapes, teachers play videos of famous natural landscapes around the world, allowing students to visually experience the charm of different landscapes. At the same time, teachers guide students to describe what they see and hear in English, stimulating students' learning interest and expression desire. Combining with real - life situations is also an effective way to create real - life situations. Teachers can integrate students' daily lives into the learning scenarios according to the teaching content. When learning English knowledge related to shopping, simulate a supermarket or store shopping scene, and let students play the roles of customers and cashiers to conduct real - life

shopping conversations, enabling students to naturally use English for communication in familiar life scenes.

5.2. Organization and Guidance of Group Cooperative Learning

Group formation should follow the principle of heterogeneous grouping and complementary advantages (Li Xuzheng et al., 2021). Grouping students with different learning abilities and English proficiency levels together allows students to learn from each other and give full play to their respective advantages. In a group, students with stronger learning abilities can help those with weaker foundations understand the learning content, and students with strong communication skills can promote the smooth progress of group discussions, thus enhancing the overall ability of the group.

Teachers play a crucial guiding role in group cooperative learning. Teachers need to provide guidance to students. Before the project starts, teachers should clearly inform students of the tasks and goals of group cooperation, as well as the methods and steps to complete the tasks, helping students clarify their thinking (Xiao Haimei, Guo Hongyan, 2022). During the group discussion process, teachers should promote communication among students, encourage every student to actively participate in the discussion, and guide students to learn to listen to others' opinions, cultivating teamwork spirit. Teachers also need to monitor the progress of group learning, discover problems in a timely manner, and provide help. When a group encounters difficulties or disagreements during the discussion, teachers should intervene in a timely manner, guide students to analyze the problems, and find solutions to ensure the smooth progress of group cooperative learning.

5.3. Transformation and Support of Teachers' Roles

In middle school English project - based learning, teachers need to transform from “authorities” to “guides”. In traditional teaching, teachers are the disseminators of knowledge and the leaders of the classroom. However, in project - based learning, teachers need to change their roles and become the guides of students' learning (Wang Shanshan, 2023). During the project implementation process, teachers should encourage students to think independently, give full play to their creativity and imagination, and let students acquire knowledge and improve their abilities through exploration.

Teachers can provide support to students in various ways. In terms of knowledge explanation, teachers should explain relevant English knowledge to students in a timely manner according to their needs, helping students understand the difficulties in project tasks. In terms of resource provision, teachers should provide students with rich learning resources, such as books and multimedia materials, to broaden students' learning channels (PINZON CASTAÑEDA R J, 2014). Teachers should also give students methodological guidance, teaching them how to collect materials, how to cooperate in groups, how to analyze and solve problems, etc., cultivating students' autonomous learning abilities and comprehensive qualities, and helping students better complete project - based learning tasks.

6. EVALUATION STRATEGIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH PROJECT - BASED LEARNING

6.1. Construction Principles of the Evaluation System

The diversification of evaluation is a key principle of the evaluation system for middle school English project - based learning, covering three important aspects: evaluation subjects, methods, and contents (Artini L P, Nitiasih P K, 2017). The diversification of evaluation subjects encourages the participation of teachers, students' self - evaluation, peer - evaluation, and parents. Teacher evaluation can judge students' knowledge mastery and ability development from a professional perspective. Students' self - evaluation can prompt students to reflect on their own learning, cultivating self - management and metacognitive abilities. Peer - evaluation helps students learn from each other and

make progress together. The participation of parents in evaluation can provide feedback from a family perspective, promoting home - school co - education. The diversification of evaluation methods includes various forms such as tests, assignments, classroom performance observations, and project result displays, to comprehensively understand students' performances in different learning links.

The combination of process - based evaluation and summative evaluation is crucial in the evaluation of project - based learning. Process - based evaluation focuses on the continuous observation, recording, and evaluation of students' learning processes. Through process - based evaluation, teachers can timely discover the problems existing in students' learning processes, provide timely guidance and feedback, help students adjust their learning strategies, and promote continuous learning improvement. Summative evaluation focuses on the evaluation of learning results, such as the quality of final project results and students' knowledge mastery. Combining the two can more comprehensively evaluate students' learning effectiveness, not only paying attention to students' learning processes and efforts but also considering the learning levels they finally reach, making the evaluation results more valuable for reference.

6.2. Common Evaluation Methods and Tools

Portfolio evaluation is an effective evaluation method. It collects various works, records, reflections, and other materials of students during the project - based learning process, comprehensively demonstrating students' learning processes and growth trajectories (Xiao Haimei, Guo Hongyan, 2022). Through the analysis of portfolios, teachers can deeply understand students' learning processes, progress, and learning styles. Performance - based evaluation emphasizes students' abilities to apply knowledge and skills to solve practical problems in real - life situations (Yang Liang, 2023). In English project - based learning, students demonstrate their understanding and application of knowledge by completing project tasks, such as giving English speeches, writing and performing scripts, and making English posters. Teachers evaluate students based on their performances. Peer - evaluation is a way for students to evaluate each other's learning achievements and performances (Wang Shu, Li Ping, 2020). When students evaluate others, they can learn from others' strengths, discover their own shortcomings, and at the same time, cultivate critical thinking and communication abilities.

Evaluation scales and questionnaires are commonly used evaluation tools. Evaluation scales can quantitatively evaluate students' learning performances, clarify evaluation indicators and grade standards, making the evaluation results more objective and accurate (Yang Liang, 2023). When evaluating students' English speeches, the evaluation scale can include multiple dimensions such as language expression, content organization, speech skills, and teamwork. Each dimension is set with different grades and scores, and teachers and students can conduct evaluations according to the scale. Questionnaires can be used to collect students' feedback on learning processes, project difficulties, group cooperation, etc. (Tang Hongyan, Zhang Haiyan, 2024). Teachers can design relevant questions to understand students' experiences and difficulties in project - based learning, so as to adjust teaching strategies and improve teaching methods in a timely manner.

6.3. The Feedback and Promotion Role of Evaluation in Teaching

Teachers can start from multiple aspects when identifying problems in teaching through evaluation (Xiao Haimei, Guo Hongyan, 2022). When evaluating students' project outcomes, if it is found that students generally have deficiencies in a certain knowledge point or skill, such as making frequent grammar mistakes, it may imply that the explanation of this knowledge point during the teaching process was not in - depth enough or that there was insufficient practice. By observing students' performance in group cooperation, if issues like low - efficiency group cooperation and poor communication are detected, it could be due to unreasonable group formation or a lack of guidance on cooperation skills. By analyzing students' feedback on questionnaires to understand their

satisfaction with teaching content and methods, if students commonly report that the teaching content is too difficult or the teaching method is dull, teachers need to adjust the teaching content and methods.

Based on the evaluation results, teachers can adopt various measures to adjust teaching strategies and promote students' learning and teaching improvement (Tang Hongyan, Zhang Haiyan, 2024). Regarding students' weak knowledge areas, teachers can design targeted exercises or supplement teaching content to strengthen the explanation and reinforcement of key and difficult knowledge. For problems in group cooperation, teachers can organize special team - cooperation training to teach students effective communication skills.

7. PRACTICAL EFFECTS AND PROBLEMS OF PROJECT - BASED LEARNING IN MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHING

7.1. Practical Effects

Project - based learning has played a positive role in promoting the development of students' comprehensive language application ability, thinking quality, and cultural awareness in middle school English teaching. In terms of comprehensive language application ability, students need to use a variety of skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing to complete tasks, so that each language skill can be improved (Poonpon K, 2011).

In the development of thinking quality, project - based learning encourages students to explore independently and solve problems, cultivating students' critical thinking, creative thinking, and logical thinking abilities (Wan Shu, 2018). Taking the "comparison of Chinese and foreign festival cultures" project as an example, students need to compare the origins, customs, and cultural connotations of different festivals, analyze the differences and similarities, which requires students to have critical thinking and logical thinking abilities. When presenting project results, students may adopt innovative methods, such as making short videos and designing creative posters, which exercises students' creative thinking.

In terms of cultural awareness, students can enhance their understanding and tolerance of diverse cultures by participating in projects and getting in touch with cultural knowledge of different countries (Lin Xiaochen, 2024). In the "comparison of Chinese and foreign festival cultures" project, students deeply study Chinese and foreign festival cultures. They can not only accurately introduce Chinese traditional festivals in English but also understand the cultural connotations of Western festivals, thus enhancing their cross - cultural communication ability and their sense of identity with their own national culture.

Take the "campus environmental protection action plan design" project carried out in a certain middle school as an example. Students work in groups, collect materials, conduct investigations, write plans, and make presentations in English. During the project implementation process, students not only learn to express environmental protection - related vocabulary and ideas in English but also think deeply about environmental protection issues and put forward many innovative solutions. The environmental protection posters and promotional videos they made are not only accurate and vivid in language expression but also full of creativity, effectively spreading the concept of environmental protection. Through this project, students' comprehensive English application ability has been significantly improved, their thinking has become more active, and their understanding of Chinese and Western environmental protection cultures has become deeper, enhancing their cultural awareness and sense of social responsibility.

7.2. Problems Faced

At the teacher level, some teachers have insufficient guiding abilities. This is mainly manifested in a lack of in - depth understanding of project - based learning, making it impossible to provide effective

guidance to students (Wang Shanshan, 2023). During the project implementation process, teachers cannot give students targeted suggestions and help in a timely manner, resulting in obstacles to the progress of the project. Some teachers are not proficient in the process and methods of project - based learning and lack experience in project planning, group organization, and resource guidance, affecting the effect of project - based learning. The main reasons for this situation are that teachers lack relevant practical experience, and the inertia of the traditional teaching mode makes it difficult for teachers to adapt to the requirements of project - based learning.

At the teaching resource level, there is a shortage of teaching resources, which has a great impact on teaching (Wang Wenquan, 2022). On the one hand, the resources provided by textbooks are limited and difficult to meet the diverse needs of project - based learning. On the other hand, the relevant resources provided by schools and society, such as library resources and network resources, have deficiencies in content and access methods. When carrying out project - based learning on “cultural heritage protection”, students may find it difficult to obtain comprehensive and accurate cultural heritage materials, which limits students’ in - depth exploration of the project and affects students’ learning effects and the quality of project results.

At the evaluation system level, the existing evaluation system has imperfections. The evaluation criteria are not clear, making the evaluation process lack objective basis and difficult to accurately measure students’ learning achievements and ability development (Yang Liang, 2023). When evaluating students’ project results, the evaluation criteria for language expression, teamwork, innovative thinking, etc. are not specific enough, resulting in inaccurate evaluation results. The evaluation process becomes a mere formality. Some teachers pay too much attention to result evaluation and ignore process - based evaluation, unable to fully understand students’ learning processes. In addition, the evaluation subjects are not diversified enough, and the participation rate of students’ self - evaluation and peer - evaluation is not high, unable to give full play to the feedback and promotion role of evaluation.

8. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

8.1. Theoretical Level

In theoretical research, future efforts should focus on how to more carefully integrate PBL with English subject core competencies. On the one hand, it is necessary to deeply analyze the cultivation focuses and mutual - promotion mechanisms of language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability in English teaching scenarios and project - based learning activities. For example, explore how to skillfully design tasks in a PBL project with the theme of literary work appreciation, so that students can improve their language understanding and expression abilities while exercising critical thinking and deeply understanding the cultural connotations behind the works, thereby enhancing cultural awareness. On the other hand, construct a systematic integration model, clarify the contributions of different types of projects to each dimension of core competencies, and the overall improvement path, providing teachers with clear and operable theoretical guidance. This enables teachers to accurately design and implement PBL projects around core - competency goals, guiding students to develop comprehensively.

8.2. Practical Level

8.2.1. Support from Information Technology Tools

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology, integrating it into PBL is an important future practical direction. Utilize the intelligent tutoring function of AI to provide personalized learning support for students. For example, develop an intelligent learning platform. When students encounter language problems during the project research process, the platform can

quickly provide accurate explanations and examples. During the data - collection stage, based on the keywords and research directions input by students, the platform can intelligently screen and recommend high - quality academic resources and relevant cases. With the data - analysis ability of AI, deeply mine the behavioral data of students in project - based learning, analyze students' learning habits, thinking patterns, and cooperation characteristics, and provide teachers with detailed learning situation reports to help teachers optimize teaching strategies and achieve precise teaching.

8.2.2. Development of School - Based PBL Courses

Each school should base on its own reality and actively develop school - based PBL courses. Combine the cultural characteristics of the region where the school is located, the school's educational philosophy, and students' interests and specialties to explore projects with local characteristics and school individuality. At the same time, pay attention to the systematicness and coherence of the courses. From curriculum goal setting, teaching content arrangement, teaching method selection to evaluation method formulation, form a complete and scientific system to ensure that school - based PBL courses can effectively meet the learning needs of our students and promote the improvement of students' English learning and comprehensive qualities.

8.3. Policy Recommendations

8.3.1. Optimization of the Teacher Training System

To ensure the effective implementation of PBL in middle school English teaching, it is necessary to optimize the teacher training system. The training content should keep up with the times, covering not only the basic theories of PBL, project - design processes, and teaching organization methods but also the latest educational technology applications and interdisciplinary integration concepts. The training methods should be diversified, adopting a mixed - mode of online and offline training. Online, rich theoretical learning resources and case libraries are provided, and offline, practical workshops, observation and discussion activities are carried out, allowing teachers to learn in practice and grow through communication. Establish a hierarchical and classified training mechanism, setting different - level training courses for novice teachers and experienced teachers respectively to meet the differential needs of teachers and comprehensively improve teachers' professional qualities in implementing PBL teaching.

8.3.2. Diversification of Evaluation Standards

Education departments should actively promote the reform of evaluation standard diversification. Construct a comprehensive and scientific evaluation index system. In addition to considering students' language knowledge mastery and project result quality, pay more attention to students' participation, cooperation ability, problem - solving ability, and innovative thinking performance during the project - based learning process. Encourage the use of diversified evaluation methods, such as portfolio evaluation to record students' growth trajectories in projects, performance - based evaluation to assess students through their performances in actual tasks, and peer - evaluation to promote students' mutual learning and common progress. Establish a dynamically adjustable evaluation standard, and regularly improve the evaluation standard according to the development of educational and teaching practices to ensure that it can accurately reflect students' learning effectiveness and provide a strong basis for teaching improvement.

9. CONCLUSION

Project - based learning shows unique value in middle school English teaching, but it also has certain limitations. Localized practical innovation is of great significance for its continuous development in middle school English teaching.

PBL has brought significant changes to middle school English teaching. From the perspective of learning effects, it breaks the limitations of traditional teaching. Through real - life situations and task - driven methods, students can exercise their comprehensive language application ability in practice. In the process of completing project tasks, students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills develop coordinately, instead of learning language knowledge in isolation. In terms of thinking cultivation, PBL prompts students to think actively and explore, effectively training their critical thinking, creative thinking, and logical thinking. When facing complex problems, students can analyze from multiple angles and try to solve them. In terms of cultural awareness, students can deeply understand different national cultures by participating in various cross - cultural theme projects, enhancing their tolerance and understanding of diverse cultures and improving their cross - cultural communication ability.

However, there are also some problems in the practice of PBL in middle school English teaching. At the teacher level, some teachers are affected by the traditional teaching mode and it is difficult for them to quickly adapt to the teaching requirements of PBL. They may either provide insufficient guidance or over - interfere in the project guidance process. In terms of teaching resources, the existing resources are difficult to meet the rich and diverse needs of project - based learning. Whether it is textbook resources or external library and network resources, there are defects in content and access methods. In the evaluation system, the current evaluation criteria are vague, the evaluation process is formalized, and the evaluation subjects are single, which cannot comprehensively and objectively evaluate students' learning processes and results and is difficult to play the feedback and promotion role of evaluation.

In view of this, localized practical innovation is urgent. Middle schools in different regions vary in teaching resources and students' foundations. Only by innovating and practicing PBL in combination with local actual situations can it better serve middle school English teaching. Each school should fully explore local characteristic resources, develop school - based courses with local characteristics, and integrate local culture into teaching projects to stimulate students' learning interest. Teachers should actively explore teaching methods and strategies suitable for local students and improve their teaching abilities to meet the challenges of PBL teaching.

In the future, with the deepening of theoretical research and the accumulation of practical experience, PBL is expected to play a greater role in middle school English teaching. By continuously optimizing the teacher training system, promoting the diversification of evaluation standards, strengthening the application of information technology tools, and developing school - based courses, PBL can be better integrated with English subject core competencies, providing students with a higher - quality English learning experience, cultivating high - quality talents with comprehensive language abilities, innovative thinking, and cross - cultural communication awareness, and promoting middle school English teaching to a new level.

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