

# **A Study on the Cultivation of Critical Thinking Ability in College English**

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**Abstract.** The cultivation of critical thinking ability is the fundamental task of higher education and an indispensable part of University learning. In order to achieve a complete foreign language education and adapt to the increasingly complex international exchange environment, the reform of College English in China must be centered on the cultivation of critical thinking ability. The cultivation of critical thinking ability in College English classroom has two goals, namely, to promote the development of students' language skills and the combination of the three main contents of College English. Based on the theoretical models of Moore and Alnofaie [1], this paper establishes a framework for the cultivation of critical thinking ability in College English classes, and proposes that the task of cultivating critical thinking ability in College English must be in line with the task of cultivating critical thinking ability in the whole university and the college English curriculum system.

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the cultivation of critical thinking ability has become the central issue of higher education reform. As an integral part of China's higher education, the reform of College English teaching in our country must focus on the cultivation of critical thinking ability, serve the purpose of improving the teaching quality of our colleges and universities, and serve the overall situation of cultivating high-quality and innovative talents for our country. [2] To explore the meaning, necessity and value of cultivating critical thinking ability in College English classroom, as well as the framework construction and main tasks, is of great significance to foreign language teaching reform.

## **The Meaning of Cultivating Critical Thinking Ability in College English Classroom**

The cultivation of critical thinking ability in College English classroom has two goals. On the one hand, language is particularly important for critical thinking in any field, because speculation must be related with language activities such as induction, interpretation, discussion and evaluation. Therefore, the development of language skills is closely related to the improvement of critical competence. However, a person's good English language skills do not necessarily mean that he can use the language critically. The activities of annotation, analysis, evaluation, inference, interpretation and self-adjustment in College English classroom are the ways of transferring language resources to form texts. They use language in a new way, rather than an invisible psychological process unrelated to language. Only in this way can college English really play the role of basic language courses in higher education. On the other hand, in order to truly achieve the goal of College English teaching, it is necessary to combine the three main contents of College English, namely, English language knowledge and application skills, intercultural communication and learning strategies, so as to enhance students' understanding of the relationship among them. The teaching of any subject faces the same challenge: helping students transcend their experience, apply and reflect on it, thereby changing their views based on it, and thus changing the way they experience the world. [3] Foreign language teaching is no exception. Only by mastering the relationship between language form and viewpoint, can students control and apply it and construct meanings that reflect their own cultural environment and goals. The realization of the two goals can only be achieved through the intellectual inquiry into the linguistic form - viewpoint.

To sum up, the cultivation of critical thinking ability in College English classroom refers to the process of realizing the cultivation of critical thinking ability in accordance with the nature of College English curriculum and teaching objectives through direct or indirect means in College English teaching. This cultivation of critical thinking ability covers the two dimensions mentioned above, namely cognitive skills and emotional intentions. In essence, it enables students to have the will and ability to identify, analyze and deeply understand the relationship between language forms and viewpoints. On this basis, it strengthens their overall understanding of the relationship among the three major contents of College English and realizes the dual nature of College English curriculum. Become a lifelong language learner and lay the foundation. College English teaching should train students to combine this knowledge with English language communicative competence consciously, so as to meet the needs of future intercultural communication.

### **The Necessity of Cultivating Thinking Ability in College English Classroom**

Most college students in our country have strong comprehensive language application ability and communicative ability, which shows that foreign language education in our country is relatively successful. Sensitivity to foreign languages is our strong point, but the weakness of foreign language education is also obvious, that is, weak critical thinking ability [4]. This is reflected in many aspects of foreign language learning. First of all, the ability to express opinions orally is weak. When students are required to clarify or refute each other's opinions in foreign language classes, most of the students' statements are mere formalities, their arguments are simple, their analysis is not deep enough, and they often feel speechless. Secondly, in the aspect of thesis writing, students' argumentation ability needs to be strengthened urgently. Graduation thesis reveals that students' critical thinking ability is obviously insufficient. The choice of topics lacks novelty. The content of the paper is even more prominent, just the stacking of materials, superficial analysis, self-view part is almost arbitrary feelings, strictly speaking, it cannot be regarded as a research paper [5]. The lack of critical thinking ability leads to students' low comprehensive thinking ability in finding, analyzing and solving problems, which is a very dangerous signal and sounds an alarm for future foreign language teaching. The impact of weak critical thinking ability on foreign language majors entering the workplace is extremely worrying, which is mainly manifested in the lack of innovative consciousness in their work and the limited space for improvement, which is fatal for any profession. Finally, foreign language teachers' teaching concepts and methods cannot keep up with the pace of development of the times. The focus of classroom teaching is still the imparting of language knowledge, which has not been transferred to the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability through language.

### **Construction and Implementation of a Framework for Cultivating Critical Ability in College English Classroom**

The cultivation of critical thinking ability in College English classroom has two goals. The realization of these two goals can only be achieved through the intellectual exploration of language form-viewpoint. At the same time, promoting the effective transfer of critical thinking ability is the key and also the ultimate goal of the cultivation of critical thinking ability to guide teaching [6].

This framework holds that the cultivation of critical thinking ability should be integrated into all the courses in the college English curriculum system, and that the task of cultivating critical thinking ability in the curriculum system should be in line with the objectives of the whole university. College English curriculum system should focus on the intellectual exploration of the relationship between language forms and viewpoints in the process of language use. Language use is definitely about one aspect. From this point of view, different kinds of courses in College English curriculum system have different emphasis on language use, so their task of cultivating critical thinking ability is different. However, its core should be to understand the relationship between language forms and opinions, and this understanding is developmental: when students enter the stage of language and culture or professional English learning, and when students become

increasingly sensitive to social language norms, their understanding of the relationship between the two is also deepening. Language reflects not only the situational perspective, but also the long-term perspective associated with social identity. At present, College English is a basic language course. The task of cultivating students' critical thinking ability should focus more on the former and give consideration to the latter. With the continuous improvement of College English curriculum system, the task of cultivating critical thinking ability around this core will gradually be structured.

College English should teach students critical thinking ability as a kind of skill to help them establish an understanding of the essence of critical thinking ability in College English classroom. Intellectual inquiry into the relationship between linguistic form and viewpoint is the general task of cultivating critical thinking ability in College English curriculum. Detailed specific tasks are interrelated and unified in the exploration of the intellectual content of the course. These tasks will be transformed into thinking ability training activities in the classroom. Only when these activities are integrated into the curriculum content, can we promote the common realization of the instrumental and humanistic goals of College English. In this paper, five specific tasks, namely, understanding, evaluation, expansion, application and reflection, are proposed to improve students' language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as their critical thinking ability. Understanding is to understand the specific viewpoints of the text read; evaluation is based on this kind of comprehensive reading to enable students to evaluate the language form-viewpoint; expansion is to expand the context of the text, to connect it with other relevant texts, to expand the scope of thinking; application is to enable students to use the idea of understanding, evaluation and expansion in their oral and writing practice; reflection is to review and summarize the whole learning process.

## Conclusion

This paper clarifies the specific meaning of the cultivation of College English critical thinking competence, establishes a framework for the cultivation of College English speculative competence in the classroom, and proposes that the cultivation of College English critical thinking competence must be in line with the objectives of the whole university and the college English curriculum system. In this way, the legitimate status of College English in higher education has really been established. In addition, this paper explores the intellectuality of language form-viewpoint in language use, which is the general task of cultivating the critical ability of College English course and the specific task after refinement. It is feasible to carry out the teaching reform step by step with this as the core. The cultivation of critical thinking ability can really promote the common realization of the humanistic and instrumental purposes of College English and the real improvement of teaching quality.

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