

Exploration of the Cultivation Mode of Critical Thinking Ability in College English Teaching Under the Background of the Belt and Road

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Abstract: With the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, the importance of cross-cultural communication and international cooperation has become increasingly prominent. To respond to these evolving demands, college English teaching urgently needs transformation, shifting its focus toward cultivating critical thinking skills, creating a conducive educational environment, aligning with international talent development requirements, and enhancing educational effectiveness. Grounded in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, this paper analyzes the significance of fostering critical thinking ability within college English teaching and proposes specific practical strategies. The objective is to construct a reasonable training system that nurtures English professionals with global perspectives and critical awareness, thereby providing a reference for the ongoing reform of college English teaching.

Keywords: The Belt and Road; College English; Critical thinking in teaching

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1. Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative represents a major Chinese contribution to China to globalization, involving more than 150 countries and regions to form an extensive international cooperation network. In this process, language communication is the foundation of people-to-people bonds. As an international lingua franca, English teaching has transcended its traditional role of teaching grammar and vocabulary, and it now bears the additional responsibilities of fostering cross-cultural understanding, critical thinking, and innovative expression. At present, issues in global governance, economic and trade cooperation, cultural exchange and other fields require practitioners not only to communicate effectively in English, but also to use critical thinking to distinguish cultural differences, verify the authenticity of information, and propose rational solutions. However, traditional college English teaching has the problem of emphasizing linguistic form while neglecting thinking training. Exploring the cultivation mode of critical thinking ability in college English teaching under the background of the Belt and Road is thus an essential response to national strategic needs and a key avenue for advancing foreign

language education reform and improving talent quality.

2. The importance of cultivating critical thinking ability in college English teaching under the background of the Belt and Road

2.1. Serve national strategies: The inherent requirement of cultivating cross-cultural critical thinking talents

The focus of the Belt and Road construction is extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, involving dialogue and cooperation among different political systems, cultural traditions and development models. In this process, language is not only a communication tool, but also a cultural carrier and a manifestation of thinking modes^[1]. For example, in the operation of China-Europe Railway Express, cross-border e-commerce negotiations or international environmental protection cooperation projects, practitioners must understand the logic behind each other's words, and critically view the interests and potential risks of cooperation topics; otherwise, it is easy to fall into a situation of "having a lively conversation but failing to reach an agreement". Therefore, college English teaching must attach importance to the cultivation of critical thinking ability, enabling students to have the ability of rational dialogue in cross-cultural contexts and become qualified bridges in the process of the Belt and Road Initiative.

2.2. Adapt to disciplinary development: The inevitable trend of foreign language education from "instrumentality" to "humanity"

Traditional foreign language teaching emphasizes the instrumentality of language, focusing on mechanical practice of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, while ignoring the connection between language and thinking. Modern linguistics research shows that language is a mirror of thinking, and the development of critical thinking ability, such as logical reasoning, evidence evaluation, and multi-angle argumentation, can only be deepened through language^[2]. Under the background that the Belt and Road promotes the global flow of knowledge, the goal of foreign language education has shifted from "teaching students how to use English" to "using English to enable students to understand the world and analyze problems". For example, when students read English literature related to the Belt and Road, they need to use critical thinking to identify whether the data source is reliable, analyze the stance of the text, and compare the advantages and disadvantages of different development models, rather than simply memorizing words and sentence patterns. This requires English teaching to integrate the cultivation of critical thinking ability into the whole process of language learning, promoting the unity of instrumentality and humanity^[3].

2.3. Improve students' core competitiveness: the core literacy to cope with global challenges

In the contradictory environment of globalization and deglobalization, cooperation among countries along the Belt and Road faces both opportunities and challenges. Students with critical thinking ability can remain sober in multiple information, acknowledge the characteristics of different civilizations without falling into "cultural centralism", and refute fallacies based on facts and logic to convey Chinese voices^[4].

3. The cultivation mode of critical thinking ability in college English teaching under the background of the Belt and Road

3.1. Improve teaching concepts: The transformation from “knowledge-oriented” to “thinking-oriented”

The traditional teaching concept is teacher-centered and textbook-based, focusing on the imparting of systematic language knowledge, and students passively accept standard answers. Under the background of the Belt and Road, it is necessary to establish a student-centered and thinking development-oriented concept, and take the cultivation of critical thinking ability as the core element of teaching objectives. First, establish an integrated view of “cross-cultural critical thinking”. English teaching should not only cultivate language users, but also cross-cultural critical thinkers^[5]. Integrate comparative cultural content of the Belt and Road into teaching, such as the differences in “family values” and “contract spirit” between China and Southeast Asian countries, to guide students to think about how culture affects communication methods and decision-making logic. Second, strengthen the “problem-oriented” teaching concept, abandon “fragmented knowledge explanation”, and construct driving question chains around real issues of the Belt and Road to stimulate students’ active exploration. For example, when talking about the theme of “Green Silk Road”, set progressive questions: “What are the main environmental challenges facing countries along the Belt and Road?” Let students obtain answers through group discussions, literature review, field trips and other ways, and teachers should guide them to question assumptions, test evidence, and revise conclusions throughout the process to cultivate critical thinking habits^[6]. Third, advocate the evaluation concept of “error tolerance and reflection”, change the evaluation inertia of “pursuing the only correct answer”, and encourage students to boldly express different views.

3.2. Improve the cultivation mode: Construct a “three-dimensional integration” practical path

The cultivation of critical thinking ability relies on systematic and scenario-based practical paths. Combined with the characteristics of cross-cultural communication of the Belt and Road, the cultivation mode can be formed from three aspects: curriculum content reconstruction, teaching method innovation, and practice platform construction.

First, reconstruct curriculum content and integrate critical thinking elements with Belt and Road themes. Integrate critical thinking training into basic courses. Add a “critical reading section” to courses such as “Comprehensive English”, select argumentative essays and news reports related to the Belt and Road, and let students learn to find the author’s arguments, evidence and logical fallacies^[7]. Set up “refutation writing” tasks in writing courses, requiring students to write response articles to negative reports on the Belt and Road by Western media, and refute them with data and cases in a reasonable and evidence-based manner. At the same time, offer special critical thinking courses on the Belt and Road, add elective courses such as “Cross-Cultural Critical Thinking and International Communication”, systematically teach critical thinking skills such as inductive and deductive reasoning, analogical argumentation, and causal analysis, and carry out situational teaching such as Model United Nations and business negotiations around themes such as “Digital Silk Road” and “mutual learning among civilizations”.

Second, innovative teaching methods and active thinking with “interactive” and “inquiry-based” approaches. Case teaching method: select typical Belt and Road cases, let students group to analyze the “cultural conflict points”, “interest game logic”, and “effectiveness of solutions” in the cases, and train the critical thinking chain through the process of “problem diagnosis - scheme design - effect evaluation”^[8]. Project-based learning

(PBL): take “Belt and Road Youth Voice” as the theme, requiring student teams to complete a cross-cultural communication project. The whole process is led by students, and teachers only provide framework guidance. Students need to independently investigate the needs of target audiences, screen information, conceive narrative logic, and finally test their critical thinking and expression abilities through achievement display and defense. Debate and role-playing methods: regularly hold “Belt and Road hot topic debates” with topics such as “Should the Belt and Road give priority to economic cooperation or cultural and people-to-people exchanges”. Through the processes of argumentation, inquiry, and summary, students can exercise their skills in quickly organizing arguments, identifying logical loopholes of opponents, and flexibly responding to challenges; role-playing simulates international organization meetings, such as the Belt and Road International Cooperation Summit Forum, allowing students to experience the discourse strategies of different positions in this context and deepen their understanding of multiple perspectives^[9].

Third, build practice platforms to link real scenarios with diverse resources. School-enterprise/school-media cooperation platforms: establish practice bases with foreign-related enterprises such as Huawei and ZTE, as well as international media such as CGTN and China Daily, and send students to participate in Belt and Road project translation, overseas social media operation of “overseas promotion”, and international news compilation. In real tasks, use critical thinking to handle cultural differences and information deviations^[10]. When compiling foreign media reports on the “opening of the China-Laos Railway”, it is necessary to identify the false accusations of Western media about China’s “debt trap” in building railways in Southeast Asia, supplement employment data and people’s livelihood improvement cases provided by China, and achieve objective and balanced dissemination of Chinese culture. International exchange platforms: rely on college international student programs from countries along the Belt and Road and online international academic forums, and arrange students to pair up with foreign students for joint research. When encountering cultural misunderstandings in cooperation, enhance trust through critical communication. Virtual simulation platforms: create a virtual simulation experiment system for cross-cultural communication of the Belt and Road, simulate high-risk scenarios such as diplomatic negotiations and crisis public relations, allowing students to repeatedly practice critical thinking response strategies in a safe environment, and improve their on-the-spot adaptability.

3.3. Construct a multi-dimensional evaluation system to strengthen process feedback on critical thinking ability

The cultivation of critical thinking ability not only depends on the design of the teaching process, but also requires a scientific evaluation mechanism to guide, test and continuously improve. Under the background of the Belt and Road, a “multi-dimensional, process-oriented and developmental” evaluation system should be established to make evaluation itself a booster for the cultivation of critical thinking ability^[11].

First, diversify evaluation dimensions, expanding from “language skills” to “critical thinking literacy.” Add special indicators for critical thinking ability in the evaluation system, specifically involving logical structure and argumentation ability, i.e., whether students can construct clear arguments and reasonable argument chains in written or oral expression, avoiding logical fallacies^[12]. Information discrimination and critical awareness: when facing multi-source information, whether students can evaluate the reliability of information sources and identify biases and misleading. Second, attach importance to the evaluation method throughout the whole teaching cycle, embed evaluation into pre-class, in-class and after-class stages to form a closed-loop feedback. Conduct pre-class diagnostic evaluation, implement in-class formative evaluation, and carry out after-class summative evaluation.

3.4. Strengthen the teaching team: Build a “dual-qualified” and “cross-cultural” teaching team

First, enhance teachers' critical thinking and teaching ability. Regularly organize teachers to participate in “critical thinking teaching training workshops” to learn critical thinking teaching theories and design methods such as Paul's critical thinking hierarchy model and Ennis' critical thinking assessment framework; encourage teachers to participate in Belt and Road scientific research projects, such as cross-cultural communication and international public opinion analysis, to better understand the cultures of countries along the route and transform research results into teaching cases. For example, teachers can use data from the “Survey on the Cognition of the Belt and Road in Southeast Asian Countries” in class to let students conduct data analysis and discuss the reasons for cultural cognitive differences ^[13].

Second, optimize the structure of the teaching team. Introduce teachers with overseas study experience and cross-cultural work backgrounds to enrich the “dual-qualified” team. Hire foreign experts and international organization officials as part-time teachers to offer courses such as “Practical Cross-Cultural Communication” and “International Rules and Critical Thinking”, bringing diverse perspectives and practical experience. For example, invite engineers who have participated in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project to share cultural adaptation cases, allowing students to understand the critical thinking points in engineering cooperation ^[14].

Third, establish an incentive mechanism and teaching and research community. Incorporate the achievements of critical thinking teaching into teachers' performance evaluation and professional title evaluation indicators to stimulate the motivation for teaching innovation. Establish a teaching and research team on “cultivating critical thinking ability in English teaching”, regularly carry out collective lesson preparation, teaching observation and case discussion, share high-quality teaching resources, and form a good cycle of “promoting teaching through research and research through teaching” ^[15].

4. Conclusion

In summary, the deepening of the Belt and Road Initiative has brought about an upgrading demand from “language skills” to “critical thinking ability” in college English teaching. After analyzing the importance of cultivating critical thinking ability, this paper proposes a cultivation path led by “concept renewal - model improvement - teacher team strengthening”, pointing out that the problem of lack of thinking training in traditional teaching can be solved through the teaching concept of integrating cross-cultural critical thinking, the three-dimensional integration training path, and the construction of a dual-qualified teacher team. In the future, colleges and universities need to dynamically adjust educational content and methods, such as adding new modules in connection with the development of digital technology, strengthening international cooperation, and forming a more inclusive ecological system for cultivating critical thinking ability.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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