

On the Construction of Training Mode of Critical Thinking Skills in College English Teaching

Jin Chengzhu

School of Humanities and Law, Beijing University of Technology, Beijing, China, 100124

Abstract

Critical thinking skills are the premise of independent thinking and creative thinking. In 2015, Ministry of Education stipulated that critical thinking skill is one of the cultivation indicators of National Standards for undergraduate college students. It is required that English teaching in colleges and universities should improve students' ability of applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating as well as training their English application skills. Emphasis should be placed on cultivating students' quality of being inquisitive, encouraging them to believe in reason, respect for facts, make prudent judgment, enjoy research, and pursue the truth. To construct a comprehensive training mode of critical thinking skills in college English teaching is a new task and new subject faced by English teachers.

Key Words: Critical thinking skills; College English teaching; Training mode

I. Introduction

Critical thinking skills, originated in the west, are an important part of thinking skills. Its basic connotation is "using appropriate evaluation standards to conduct conscious thinking and finally make well-founded judgments" (Paul and Elder, 2006: 20). Critical thinking is composed of two dimensions. In the emotional dimension, it includes a series of thinking qualities or psychological tendencies such as diligence, believing in reason, respecting facts, cautious judgment, fair evaluation, curiosity, and persistent pursuit of truth; in the cognitive dimension, it includes a series of skills such as elaboration, analysis, evaluation, reasoning and interpretation of elements such as evidence, concepts, methods, standards, and background. The importance of critical thinking skills is self-evident. It can be said that the development of human civilization is the result of continuous doubt, argument, reasoning, verification, innovation, and transformation of nature through the conscious use of critical thinking skills. In the era of information and globalization, critical thinking skills are indispensable for the sustainable development of human civilization as a whole and the survival and development of each individual. In the context of extremely fierce international talent competition, western society has paid much more attention to the cultivation of college students' critical thinking skills. In 1993, the US government began to list critical thinking skills as the goal of university education (National Education Goals Panel, 1993). However, compared with foreign countries, there is a clear gap in the cultivation of critical thinking skills in China. The gap in research on critical thinking skills between China and other countries is even larger. The study and cultivation of critical thinking skills of college students has just started. In the process of traditional college English teaching in China, teachers' requirements for students' English learning are often targeted at examinations, and more emphasis is placed on students' learning of simple materials such as reading and listening. In addition, the learning methods are mostly memorization, repetition, and retelling, all of which ignores the cultivation of critical thinking skills for college students. It makes it impossible to effectively improve students' comprehensive language application abilities, and students' high-level thinking skills such as application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creation have not been effectively cultivated. Therefore, in order

to better promote students' development,, in the process of college English teaching, teachers should adopt reasonable methods to build an appropriate training mode of critical thinking skills, so as to improve students' overall quality and creativity.

II. Status Quo of Cultivation of Critical Thinking Skills at Home and Abroad

As early as the 1940s, critical thinking skills have become the theme of western education reforms. Since 1993, the US government has listed the cultivation of critical thinking skills as the goal of university education. Many universities offer critical thinking courses. Universities in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have listed critical thinking skills as a course for professional students to improve their abilities, or at least have stipulated critical thinking skills as a compulsory course for students in social sciences. Compared to foreign countries, the cultivation of critical thinking skills in China has not yet attracted enough attention from the government and education circles. At present, only a few universities offer special courses of critical thinking skills, most of which focus on logical reasoning. The cultivation of critical thinking skills has not been included in the curriculum and educational system, nor is it systematic.

II. Theoretical Framework of Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills include critical thinking personality tendencies and critical thinking skills. From February 1988 to December 1989, the Lalfie Project Team adopted a qualitative approach. After six rounds of thorough discussions, a consensus was finally reached, that is, critical thinking skills were defined as two dimensions, namely, cognitive ability and emotional traits. In the cognitive dimension, there are six abilities: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, explanation, and self-regulation. Among them, analysis, evaluation and reasoning are the core skills. Each cognitive ability includes multiple sub-skills. In the emotional dimension, there are curiosity, self-confidence, cheerfulness, flexibility, fairness, honesty, caution, eagerness to learn, kindness, etc. (see Diagram 1):

Diagram 1 Hierarchical Model of Critical Thinking Skills (Wen Qiufang , 2012: 32)

Meta Critical Thinking Skills (Self-Regulation Ability)---First Level			
Critical Thinking Skills---Second Level			
Cognition		Personal Traits	
Skills	Standards		
Analysis (classification, identification, clarification, interpretation, etc.) Reasoning (questioning, hypothesis, inference, elaboration, argumentation, etc.) Evaluation (judgment, presuppositions, arguments, grounds of arguments, conclusions, etc.)	Clarity (articulation, precise) Relevance (relevant to the subject, appropriate in detail, clear primary and secondary information) Logicity (clearly organized and well-founded) Profundity (with breadth and depth) Flexibility (changing angles quickly, skillful and alternate use of different critical thinking skills)	Curiosity (suspicious, curiosity to ask all sorts of questions, fond of learning) Openness (tolerate, respecting different opinions, be willing to correct inappropriate opinions) Confidence (believing in his/her own judgment and daring to challenge authority) Integrity (pursuing truth and advocating justice) Perseverance (determined and persistent, do not give up easily)	

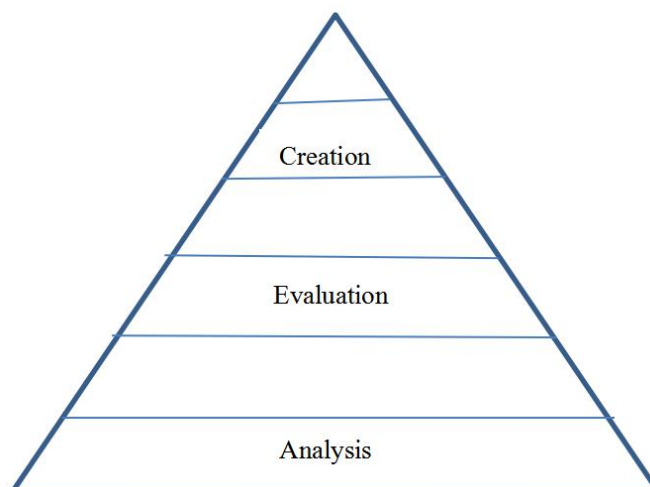
Wen Qiufang (2012) defines three core skills in the hierarchical model: analytical skills, reasoning skills and evaluation skills. Analysis skills include sub-skills such as classification, identification, comparison, clarification, distinction, and interpretation; reasoning skills include sub-skills such as questioning, hypothesis, inference, elaboration, and argumentation; evaluation skills refer to judgment skills of assumptions, argumentation process and conclusions, etc. The model has condensed the ten standards in the ternary model into five standards. These five cognitive standards include clarity, relevance, logicity, profundity and flexibility. Clarity means that the thinking should be clear and precise; relevance means that the content of the speculation should be closely related to the subject, and appropriate in detail, with clear primary and secondary information; logicity means that the thinking should be clear, well-founded, and persuasive; profundity refers to the breadth and depth of speculative activities, and flexibility requires the thinker to change angles of thinking skillfully and appropriately.

The emotional dimension in the hierarchical model can be summarized as five emotional traits: curiosity, openness, self-confidence, integrity, and perseverance. Curiosity means that the thinker is interested in new things, likes to probe the truth with common phenomena, is good at asking new questions, and has a strong desire to acquire new knowledge and skills; openness means that the thinker is broad-minded, has a broad vision, is able to respect and tolerate different opinions, and is willing to correct his or her improper opinions; self-confidence means that the thinker is confident in his or her analysis, reasoning, and evaluation abilities, daring to challenge authority; integrity means that purpose of the thinker is for the pursuit of truth and justice rather than personal gains; perseverance means that the thinker has strong resilience, not afraid of setbacks, and is always persistent (Sun Yuan, 2018: 48).

The hierarchical model is the theoretical framework of the construction of critical thinking skills for college students majoring in foreign languages. It also provides a theoretical framework for the cultivation model of critical thinking skills in college English teaching.

It can be said that the research on critical thinking skills in western academia has been voluminous. As early as the 1950s, Benjamin Bloom, a famous American educational psychologist, proposed a far-reaching taxonomy of educational goals. He divided the educational goals into three major areas, namely, emotional goals, motor skills goals, and cognitive goals. The main goal of college education should be the cultivation of the third level of cognitive ability. Lorin Anderson (1990) improved the former cognitive ability classification and proposed a model of six levels (see Diagram 2):

Diagram 2 Bloom-Anderson's Cognitive Ability Classification Model



(Sun Youzhong, 2011: 52, with alteration)

According to diagram 2, critical thinking skills such as analysis and evaluation are the highest levels of cognitive ability and are the premise and foundation of creative ability. A thinker with critical thinking skills, who is diligent in asking questions, believing in reason, open-minded, flexible, is fair in making evaluations, honest in the face of personal biases, cautious in making judgments, and is willing to reconsider. When facing problems, he or she has a clear mind, dealing with complex things with organized steps, and is diligent in searching for relevant information. When choosing standards, he or she has well-founded reasons. When exploring problems, he or she focuses on the goal, persistently pursues the truth, and realizes innovation and creation on the basis of rationality and truth.

IV. Insufficiency or Lack of Cultivation of Critical Thinking Skills in College English Teaching

For a long time, due to the impact of test-oriented education, Chinese college English teachers often focus on test requirements in the teaching process, increasing the language training for students' memorization and repetition, ignoring the cultivation of critical thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, judgment, and reasoning. Eventually students not only lose interest in learning English, but also suffer the so-called "Critical-thinking-skill-absenteeism". When students meet the need for reasoning in speaking and writing, they often have nothing to say, or their thinking is vague, that is, they seem to have ideas, but they are confused, and they don't know where to start, or how to organize their ideas, which indicates that they have a lack of logic. In the process of students' language output, that is, in speaking and writing, the contents are often incoherent, logically confused, or superficial in theory, lacking in depth and breadth, and even lacking the ability to distinguish right from wrong. Today's college students live in a rapidly changing information age, they must learn to think, learn to think independently. A high-quality college student should be good at using the language he has learned to analyze problems in depth, using creative thinking to think positively, daring to question other people's views, reflecting on them, and making sound judgments and evaluations. Simultaneously, college students should have the courage to put forward their own point of view, and be able to elaborate, analyze and comment on their own ideas. Critical thinking skills are the prerequisite for innovation and creation. The cultivation of students' critical thinking skills is an indispensable teaching goal and teaching task for college English teaching.

V. The Construction of Cultivation Mode of Critical Thinking Skills in College English Teaching

5.1 Raising Teachers and Students' Awareness of the Development of Critical Thinking Skills

To truly cultivate college students with excellent English language skills and critical thinking skills, we must start from all aspects of English teaching, such as constructing a cultivation mode of critical thinking skills for college English from the management, teacher, and student so as to cultivate students' critical thinking skills in an all-rounded and multi-dimensional manner.

Teachers should take emotional training as the forerunner, list the development of critical thinking skills as an important teaching goal, encouraging students to question, reason, evaluate, so as to arouse their interest and activate their thinking about differences, and promote equal exchanges between teachers and students. Teachers should adopt more heuristic, seminar, and debate teaching methods, through smart design, wonderful questioning, to obtain the attention of students, and make them enter the state of excitement of intellectual curiosity. Teachers should also encourage students to boldly put forward their own opinions, and to support their opinions through elaboration, analysis, evaluation, and argumentation.

5.2 Reforming Evaluation Methods and Standards

The evaluation standards of college English should limit the use of objective questions and standard answers. Instead, a certain degree of openness and inclusiveness should be added in evaluation, taking into account the richness and originality of the content. Formative evaluations should be added, especially evaluation methods that are beneficial to the development of students' critical thinking skills, such as discussion, public speech, debate, essay writing, and translation.

5.3 Curriculum Design

For college English curriculum, in order to strengthen the cultivation of students' critical thinking skills, critical thinking questions and seminars should be clearly designed in each unit of compulsory reading, writing, translation, audiovisual listening and speaking courses, with reference answers and discussion examples attached for students' reference. Students should be trained to use analysis and reasoning skills to understand the implication of the input at each stage of language input, and to use evaluation and elaboration skills to give their own opinions. In the output exercises, students should be trained to use facts, examples and details to elaborate their arguments and to prove their views with theories. Selective courses that are conducive to the cultivation of critical thinking skills should be included in a targeted manner, such as logical thinking training, public speech and writing, selective reading of English newspapers, English news listening and writing, British and American culture, overview of European cultures, International relations, Greek and Roman mythology, cross-cultural communication, etc., in order to expand students' knowledge, broaden their horizons, and provide multi-faceted training venues and thinking materials for the cultivation of students' critical thinking skills.

5.4 Reforming the Teaching Mode

College English teachers play a leading role in cultivating students' critical thinking skills. Teachers should start from all aspects of teaching, implementing the training of critical thinking skills in lesson preparation, while teaching, and after-class evaluation, striving to combine language communication functions, information functions and thinking functions so as to effectively combine the cultivation of critical thinking skills with that of language skills, thus to develop students' language ability and critical thinking skills in all directions.

Teachers should integrate meaningful language input with creative language output. while teaching, teachers should inspire and guide students to critically analyze, review and comment on the input materials, and encourage students to express their own views, so as to achieve creative language output.

Teachers should help students construct their own knowledge framework, activate their original knowledge reserves, and help students form coherent English thinking. Teachers should also guide students to gradually improve critical thinking skills in the integration and analysis of original materials and existing materials. Teachers should encourage students to increase the amount of extracurricular reading, actively think about life, society, politics, economy, history, humanities and other issues, and encourage students to boldly put forward their own views and demonstrate them, so as to let them be brave to ask questions, and be brave to solve problems.

Teachers should ensure that classroom teaching is student-centered and guide students to learn independently. Teachers should also supervise students to reflect on their own learning behavior, develop good thinking habits, and gradually develop critical thinking skills.

Teachers should quit the traditional teaching method of cramming, using heuristic questioning and mutual refutation to carry out teaching instead. In the teacher-student Q&A and group discussion activities, students should be guided to develop critical thinking on challenging issues. Teachers should adopt teaching modes such as flipped classroom and seminars, assigning reading tasks before class, and let students take turns to speak and discuss in class. In addition, teachers should ask students to organize their discussion and speech in class into a thesis, so as to achieve the goal of simultaneous development of speaking and writing, simultaneous development of critical thinking skills and logical reasoning skills.

5.5 Teachers' Development

To cultivate students' critical thinking skills, teachers must first be qualified critical thinkers. Teachers must be clear about what critical thinking skills are, which thinking qualities and thinking skills constitute the core of critical thinking skills; how to improve critical thinking skills; how to integrate the cultivation of critical thinking skills in English teaching; how to create a learning environment conducive to the development of critical thinking skills for students; how to evaluate the critical thinking skills of students, etc. It is obvious that in these aspects, Chinese college English teachers are generally congenitally incompetent. Therefore, college English teachers must first strengthen the training of their own critical thinking skills, actively participating in various training workshops and research seminars of critical thinking skills, watching videos of excellent teaching cases, syllabus and lesson plans and other related research results, constantly improving their own critical thinking skills and literacy.

VI. Conclusion

The cultivation of critical thinking skills is still a field of research and practice that has just started in domestic universities. Critical thinking skills are the prerequisite and foundation of innovation and creation, and they are the necessary ability and literacy for students to participate in international competition in the future. Therefore, the cultivation of critical thinking skills is a teaching goal and teaching task that cannot be ignored in college English teaching. Comprehensively promoting the reform of cultivation objectives, training mode, curriculum, teaching methods, testing and evaluation standards, textbook compilation and teacher development to meet the teaching goals and requirements of cultivating students' critical thinking skills is the advancement direction of the current reform in college English teaching in China.

Acknowledgements

This article is a phased research result of the Education and Teaching Project of Beijing University of Technology in 2020 (ER2020B065): The Construction and Practice of Ideological and Political Education System of the "Foreign Language + Chinese Culture" Curriculum Based on the Trinity of "Internet + Classroom + Practice".

References

- [1]. Bloom, Benjamin & Anderson, Lorin. *Benjamin and Anderson's Taxonomy* [Z.]. Retrieved on Oct.,5, 2021 from http://www.comp.rgu.ac.uk/staff/sy/PhD_Thesis-html/page_32.htm.
- [2] Paul, R. & Elder, L. (2006). *Critical thinking: learn the tools the best thinkers use*. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- [3] Sun Youzhong, (2011). Toward a Critical Thinking-oriented Curriculum for English Majors. *Foreign Languages in China*, 2011, (3).
- [4] Sun Yuan, 2018. *College English Teaching and Cultivation of Critical Thinking skills*. Beijing: China Water Power Press.
- [5] Wen Qiufang, (2012). *Research on the Status Quo of Foreign Language College Majors' Critical Thinking Skills in China*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Biography

Jin Chengzhu, Master, Associate professor of School of Humanities and Law, Beijing University of Technology, Research interests: College English teaching, American society and culture.