Core Competencies Cultivation Oriented Teaching Reform on Viewing, Listening and Speaking Course of College English

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Abstract: *Addressing the new requirements of talent cultivation in the new era, this paper explores the connotation of the core competencies of College English discipline, and analyzes the problems existing in the teaching of College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking class and the gap with the training objectives of talents. Drawing on teaching experience of PAD class and flipped teaching, this paper innovates the College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking teaching mode, and proposes a four-in-one teaching mode which involves developing language competence, critical thinking & innovation ability, communicative competence and learning ability of students to enhance their core competencies, and promote their comprehensive and individualized development.*

Keywords: *core competencies, College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking teaching mode, PAD class, flipped class*

1. Introduction

Modern education means not only imparting knowledge and cultivating students' ability, but developing core competencies. Competency transcends knowledge and ability, which directly reaches people's spiritual realm. After entering the 21st century, "core competencies" is an important starting point for all European Union (EU) education plans and policies. The EU proposes "eight key competencies for lifelong learning" (communication in the mother tongue, communication in a foreign language, mathematical competences and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression)which are the core skills, knowledge and attitudes that every European must master to succeed in the knowledge society and knowledge economy; in 2002, the American 21st Century Skills Learning Alliance (P21) selected 4C abilities that need to be learned most in the century, which includes Critical thinking, Communication skills, Collaboration, Creativity and innovation; Chinese scholars Xin Tao, Jiang Yu, Liu Xia [1], Liu Xilang [2], Zhang Xianzhi [3], Cheng Xiaotang [4] and others all hold that the meaning of "core competencies" is broader than that of "ability", which involves not only the knowledge and ability in the field of traditional education, but also the emotions, attitudes and values of students. It is closely related to the growth and all-round development of human beings, and equips students with the ability to learn lifelong to meet the needs of social development. Cui Yunhuo believes that the question of core competencies is actually a question of what kind of person to cultivate. It is the key skills, necessary characters, and values to solve real life problems in the information, global and lifelong learning society with knowledge, ideas and methods they have learned [5].In March 2014, the Ministry of Education of China issued the "Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Curriculum Reform and Implementing the Fundamental Tasks of Morality Education", and called for the design of core competencies for students of different academic stages. In September 2016, the overall framework of *"Core Competencies for Chinese Students' Development"* was officially released. The core competencies of students' development mainly refers to the necessary qualities and key abilities that students should possess to meet the needs of lifelong learning and social development.

2. Core Competencies in English Subject

Core competencies to be cultivated vary in different subjects. Subject core competencies is a reflection of the educational value of the subject as well as the correct value, necessary qualities and

key competencies the students gradually form through learning a certain subject. In the English subject, Wang Qiang believes that the core competencies involve four dimensions: language ability, thinking quality, cultural awareness and learning ability [6]. Zhang Lianzhong，Sun Dawei, and Wu Heping believe that the core competencies of English subject includes three levels: first, the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills related to English subject. The second is the competencies and ability that can be obtained through foreign language courses, such as cross-cultural communication skills, international vision, interpersonal communication skills, etc. The third is not much related to English subject but closely related to students and social development, such as thinking ability [7].

College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking is an important course that integrates listening training, oral expression and video appreciation for non-English majors. It aims to cultivate students' English listening and speaking ability, oral expression ability and autonomous learning ability, improve students' comprehensive application ability of English. It has a feature of instrumental and humanistic integration. In the authors' opinion, the core competencies that College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking course aims to cultivate can be summarized as: English language competence(especially listening and speaking ability), thinking quality and innovation ability, communicative competence (communication ability and cross-cultural communication ability), learning ability (self-learning, cooperative learning, lifelong learning ability) .

English language competence is the basic element of the core competencies of the College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking subject. It refers to the ability to understand or express meanings in ways such as viewing, listening, speaking, reading and writing in social situations as well as language consciousness and language sense in the course of learning and using English language.

Thinking quality and innovation ability means the ability of thinking and acting in a logical, critical and innovative way. It contributes to improve students' ability to analyze and solve problems, so that they can observe and understand the world from a wider and cross-cultural perspective and make correct judgments.

Communicative competence is viewed as production of communicative language teaching，whose goal is to prepare learners successfully for real-life communication[8]. Communicative competence emphasizes the ability to communicate in English in the cross cultural context. It involves the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and the recognition of excellent cultures. Besides a good mastery of communicative skills in English, students should possess national identity and family-country feelings and heighten their cultural self-confidence as well as the community consciousness of human destiny so that they will grow up to be persons with sense of social responsibility. Thus, they could communicate cross-culturally and promote Chinese culture.

Learning ability includes self-learning, cooperative learning and lifelong learning ability. The cultivation of learning ability helps students to improve their strategies of English learning, develop good learning habits, obtain English learning resources from different channels, broaden their learning channels and improve their efficiency of learning.

3. Problems in the Teaching of College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking Course

Listening is the core of people's daily communication activities. Listening comprehension is not a passive language receptive skill, but a process in which communicators constantly construct meaning in communication. Listening comprehension activities involve the complex processing of multi-level spoken information (such as phonetics, vocabulary, syntax, etc.) in the listener's brain. It is situation-dependent, fast, and needs immediate response. Therefore, listening comprehension is often considered to be the most difficult skill to master in the development of English proficiency. What's more, many students scored poorly in oral English of College Entrance Examination. They have poor pronunciation, especially poor grasp of stress, sound changes, and intonation.

Problems existing in the course of College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking teaching are as follows: firstly, due to the limited class time and large class capacity, teachers do not arrange enough time and tasks to help students get phonetic knowledge or correct their mistakes in pronunciation, resulting in poor learning motivation and low self-confidence of students. Many of the students are too shy to speak English. They have frustrating experiences when listening to English native speakers. They find it hard to keep up with, sometimes even unintelligible. This is mainly because there are a lot of changes, such as weakening, assimilation, stress, shrinkage and aphonia in oral English, which makes the words sound strange and unclear. The students who have poor English listening and

speaking foundation need to learn some sound change phenomena and rules of pronunciation in English. However, insufficient attention on the part of teachers was paid to students' poor English listening and speaking foundation.

Secondly, in the traditional teacher-centered pattern, influenced by the exam-oriented education, teachers usually implement the rigid and unitary teaching mode of "listening + answer-checking". Teachers mechanically control the procedures and time of listening and speaking activities and their task design in class largely focuses on comprehension and memory (general understanding, grasping key points, fact memory, etc.), but less on analysis, reasoning and evaluation, such as distinguishing facts and opinions, identifying and reasoning process, resulting in students' poor learning initiative and higher-order thinking ability. Since there was not enough time for discussion and idea-sharing, the classroom atmosphere is dull, and the teaching is time-consuming and inefficient.

Thirdly, although some teachers have adopted flipped teaching, the teaching design is far from satisfactory. In the design process of internalization activities, excessively complicated tasks and activities are designed. Many class activities look "very lively": discussion, pair work, group work, etc., one after another like a revolving lantern, but they violate the rules of language learning and lack the reflection and the time for students to complete tasks; what's more, some activity designs have little connection with the themes and content of the listening texts, resulting in low learning efficiency.

Due to the problems in teaching, students' learning interest fail to be raised, and their higher-order thinking ability difficult to improve. Therefore, the core competencies is hard to develop.

4. A New Teaching Model of Viewing, Listening and Speaking Course of College English Based on "PAD class" and "Flipped class"

About the teaching model of audio-visual class, many scholars have put forward insightful and valuable suggestions, such as: audio-visual teaching should be student-centered and should pay attention to the emotional assimilation between teachers and students; different from speaking and listening classes, audio-visual teaching should create an open class atmosphere for students, and train students' comprehensive comprehension ability; audio-visual teaching should pay attention to the appropriateness of students' language use; extracurricular language practice is as important as classroom teaching; audio-visual teaching should focus on cultivating students' cross-cultural communication skills; sparing no effort in audio-visual teaching reform, improving teaching quality, focus on students' ability training, and promoting students' individualized, comprehensive and innovative development have become the common opinion of many educators. However, the research on the reform on the audio-visual teaching mode of College English is still immature.

A good Viewing, Listening and Speaking classroom should be one where students immerse themselves in a harmonious class, internalize knowledge, explore independently, and cooperate with peers to complete tasks, inspire inspiration, while improving language skills, higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking and innovation. The authors have been engaged in College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking teaching and research for many years. Inspired by the bisection class and flipped class, the authors have tried to innovatively integrate the two teaching modes and created a new teaching model. The new model have been applied into teaching and achieved good results. The teaching mode of bisection class was proposed by Professor Zhang Xuexin of Fudan University in 2014[9]. This model advocates the combination of lecture style teaching and student discussion. Half of the class time is for teachers' presentation, and the other half is reserved for students to internalize, absorb and discuss. It can be divided into two parts. The corresponding assessment method emphasizes process assessment and focuses on different learning needs. The bisection class is also known as the PAD (Presentation-Assimilation-Discussion) model, which refers to the three links of teaching activities, namely, the teacher's presentation (Presentation), the students' internalization (Assimilation), and the students-students discussion (Discussion). This mode of teaching is a combination of lecture and discussion, that is, half of the class time is arranged for teachers to conduct instruction, and the other half is reserved for student discussion[10]. The lecture-style class ignores the real needs of the students, which prones to cause students' distraction and low interest in learning; while the discussion-style class is conducive to students' active participation in the course learning, it is easy to deviate from the learning content. PAD class combines the advantages of lecture and discussion, and makes up for the deficiencies of these two teaching modes. This teaching model was first launched in the universities in China's western and coastal areas, and gradually entered primary and secondary schools across the country, demonstrating its strong vitality. Wang Xia (2015) made an attempt to

conduct PAD class in College English reading class, and achieved good results[11]. Cao Shuai and Fu Hui (2016) adopted the PAD mode in English writing class, which fully inspired the enthusiasm of students for writing[12].

"Flipped Class" (or Inverted Class) is an information-based teaching model originated in the United States. Learning mainly includes two processes, that is, knowledge transfer and knowledge internalization. The flipped class reverses these two processes in time and space: "learning first + teaching later". Students watch "Guidance Video" and finish other self-learning tasks at home. The learning tasks are divided into different degrees of difficulty, and students can select the tasks according to their situation, which will contribute to personalized teaching. Class time is spent on exploring topics in greater depth and creating meaningful learning opportunities, which emphasizes on autonomy, interaction and practice[13]. A number of flipped class teaching reforms have been proven effective in China[14].

However, if the Viewing, Listening and Speaking Class teaching simply adopts ONLY one mode, the effect is far from satisfactory. Flipped class teaching focuses on students' self-study before class, which puts knowledge transfer outside the class, and focuses on internalization and exploration in the class. Nevertheless, for the busy college students, it is difficult to ensure that students complete all self-learning tasks and pre-class video learning, so not all the units can be flipped; For the PAD mode, teachers teach first and students discuss later in class. It is difficult to have personalized teaching since students have different foundation and difficult points. What's more, the time for discussion is difficult to set without knowing students' foundation.

If PAD mode and the flipped class mode are integrated, it can provide a new path for College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking teaching. Both of the two teaching modes are student-centered. From the concepts of PAD class and flipped class, it can be seen that PAD class mainly emphasizes the change of teaching process in the class, while the flipped class emphasizes the change of the whole course learning process. Both are products of the development of modern educational concepts, and both have the same theoretical foundation and goals. The Viewing, Listening and Speaking class based on "PAD + flipped class" not only remodels the entire learning process, but also changes the teaching process in the class, which can significantly improve the teaching and learning effect of the courses. The process of the new teaching mode is shown in Figure 1:
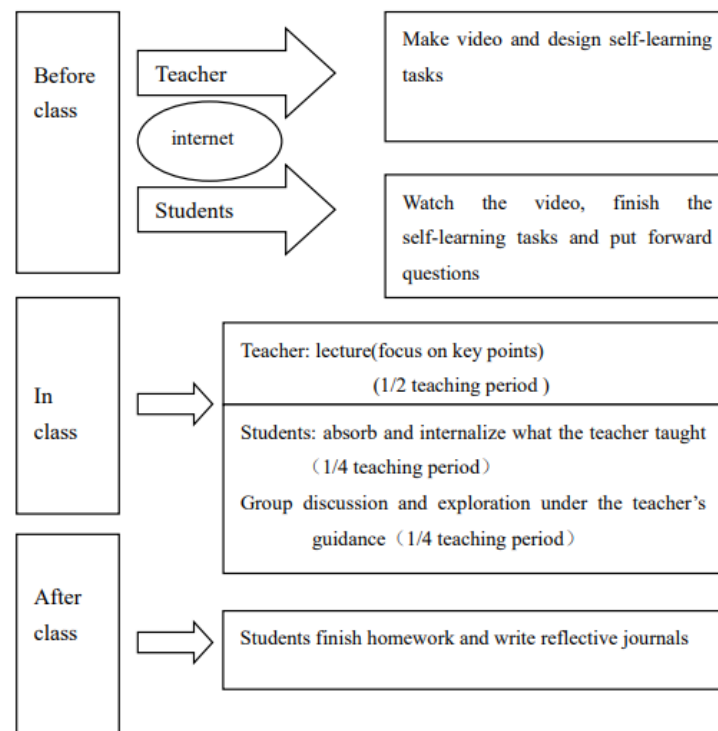

Figure 1: The new teaching mode based on PAD class and flipped class

Before class: finish self-study tasks and consolidate the foundation. Drawing on the procedure of

flipped class, teachers make teaching audio, video and design self-learning task lists(such as phonetic knowledge, micro-listening skills, key points), taking students' cognitive structure, emotions, language proficiency into consideration. When making self-learning list design, teachers should analyze the teaching contents of each unit carefully, summarize the cultural background, language skills and learning strategies in the unit. Teachers can also select learning resources for students from some platforms, such as U campus , China daily and so on.

Students complete self-study before class by the Internet. In particular, students should make full use of their spare time to master phonetic knowledge and pronunciation skills. Wang Yi and Shi Xiaojia's research on 342 Chinese non-English majors has proved that the mastery of knowledge such as the pronunciation of individual words, the pronunciation of words in the whole sentence, and the intonation of the whole sentence is positively correlated with listening scores, which is helpful for improving listening skills[15]. Learning pronunciation is the guarantee to enhance speaking. According to teaching objectives and teaching content, teachers record the skills of pronunciation into short video clips, and upload them to the Internet in combination with PPT explanations, so that students can master the theoretical knowledge of pronunciation through learning and do imitation exercises. In addition to phonetic knowledge, the self-learning task list also includes the objectives, main framework, key vocabulary, cultural background of the unit, as well as pre-class questionnaire. At the same time, teachers can obtain timely feedback from the platform to better know students' self-learning.

In class: conduct discussion and internalize knowledge. Creatively adopt three parts of the PAD class (teacher's presentation+ the students' internalization/assimilation and discussion): half the time is set for teachers to give a lecture, half the time for students to absorb, internalize and discuss. Changing the immediate discussion to delayed discussion leaves a certain gap between the teaching and the discussion. The interval is used for students to learning independently, explore independently, internalize and absorb. In this session, teachers only spends half of the class time (usually 45 minutes) in giving lectures without organizing discussions. For the unit video, the teacher does not present all the content in detail and teach them to the students in a cramming manner, but outlines the framework and difficult points (such as interpreting the cultural meaning in the material, explaining the key points in the dialogue exercises, etc.), cultivate students' ability to capture key information, learn a combination of "top-down" and "bottom-up" listening strategies and oral expression skills; in the absorption session (usually 15 minutes), students absorb and internalize on the spot after the teacher's teaching based on the self-learning task list they have completed before class. For example, they can read words aloud, practice pronunciation, analyze words or sentences that they do not understand, practice key words in spoken language, or prepare for class discussion tasks, etc. The discussion session (including group discussion + whole-class communication, usually 15 minutes) is for a discussion after students internalizing their knowledge and skills. In the discussion, students try to understand and express meanings by applying the language, develop diversified thinking, cultivate their cultural awareness and ability to solve complex problems. Since many college students, especially freshmen, are still in the intermediate stage of foreign language learning, students should be encouraged to engage in various forms of discussions, demonstrations, debates and other activities, otherwise language "fossilization" will easily occur. The teacher helps the students to acquire the knowledge, apply the linguistic skills, interpret the cultural connotation, compare the differences of cultures, evaluate the textual meanings and form the right values and positive emotional attitudes through various activities. Finally, the teacher makes a summary.

After class: students do the homework and write a reflective journal which includes "gains + quiz + puzzles" . Gains, that is, what did I learn? Students write down the points they gained in the class, (eg. I can employ basic listening strategies to facilitate comprehension, I can grasp the gist and key points). write key words, phrases, listening and speaking strategies, etc., or present a recorded audio or video (imitation + created); quiz, that is, the students put forward some difficult questions that they already understand and let other students try. This will push students to the "Zone of proximal development"; puzzles, that is, the students put forward some difficult points, which will help students to think actively, find problems, and improve their critical thinking ability. As long as students complete the homework, they can get passing marks, and teachers add points according to the quality of journal. A certain degree of teacher intervention is provided，especially when students lose in "blind alley" or fail to set "optimal challenges". The purpose is to raise students' enthusiasm for learning, and develop the habit of summarizing and thinking.

5. Conclusions

The new teaching model which combines PAD class and flipped class contributes to the development of students' core competencies. Students learn to grasp the listening strategies, learn to communicate in English, conduct discussions on a given theme or specialized topic with a certain degree of fluency and accuracy and give short talks on familiar topics with clear articulation and basically correct pronunciation and intonation in the course of learning. Added to language competence, the new model also provides students with an effective channel to adjust their learning strategies, improve learning efficiency and attain desired learning effects. Besides, it enhances their cultural awareness and thinking quality as well as expands their global outlook.

To implement the new teaching model, teachers should, while adhering to the traditional role of teaching, constantly improve themselves, challenge themselves and possess multiple capacities to adapt in the mixed context. It is necessary for them to establish the concept of student-centered and whole-person education, and timely change their roles. Besides being knowledge transmitters and learning instructors, teachers are also curriculum developers, task facilitators, participants in teaching activities, and assessors of students' outcomes. Multiple roles require teachers not only to improve their English professional literacy, but also get a multi-disciplinary perspective, such as brain science, psychology, sociology, etc. More attention and devotion should be attached to relevant and effective teaching reforms and training programs preparing teachers to efficient College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking classes.

Acknowledgements

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