

# The Development of English Majors' Critical Thinking in CBI Courses --- Take the "English Speech and Debate" Course As an Example

*Shimeng Pan*

*School of Foreign Languages, University of Science and Technology Liaoning, Liaoning, 114051, China*

*E-mail: panshimeng1989@sina.com*

**Abstract:** Critical thinking deficiency universally exists among the English major students. The education of foreign languages in our country has put more emphasis on the language skills than the critical thinking ability for a long time. CBI relies on the contents of the subjects and students combine the content learning with the language learning. It is helpful for students to establish complete cognition. This article mainly discusses if CBI courses has impacts on the development of critical thinking ability of the English majors.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking deficiency, a lack of the ability of analysis, integration, judgment, thinking and discrimination, universally exists among the English major students, drawing the attention of more and more researchers and foreign language teachers. CBI relies on the contents of the subjects and is based on the learning contents or organizational information teaching which students are going to study rather than the language or other syllabuses.

This paper aims to research that what impacts on the critical thinking ability of students when "the course of speech and debate" which conform to the philosophy of CBI takes the place of traditional colloquial English teaching.

## 2. DOCUMENTS REVIEW

### (1). Content-Based Instruction

Content-Based Instruction is based on the content, combining the content and language organically. It is a philosophy of promoting students' knowledge and cognitive ability and their language skills at the same time[1]. The philosophy of CBI covers: (1) When language serves as the means of acquiring knowledge rather than the learning target, (2) when learners feel that the information they have gotten is interesting, useful and will achieve their expected objectives, the foreign language learning will be much more successful. (3) Only when the teaching method meets the needs of students can a good effect be reached[2].

### (2) Critical thinking skills

Critical thinking ability indicates the ability that to figure out the real value of a certain thing, someone

applies proper evaluation criterion, starts thinking and works out the valid judgment finally. The critical thinking not only includes critical spirits of hesitation, proving, persistence and creative spirit, but some fundamental thinking skills such as interpretation, evaluation, deduction, hypothesis and the ability of test.

From various related articles, we found that researchers at home and abroad have not thoroughly probed into the impacts of CBI on the critical thinking ability of learners, not to say the empirical study. Based on the description above, the further studies of the following questions are drawn.

(a) If "the speech and debate course", one of the project of the philosophy of CBI, has impacts on the development of critical thinking ability of the English major students after taking the place of the traditional colloquial English teaching?

(b) If it has, what impacts would be?

## 3. THE STUDY METHODS

### 3.1 The methods and the objects of the study

This study takes the method of qualitative study to research the speech and debate class's impact on the critical thinking ability of the English major students. Through the semi-structured interviews and observation at class, the study has gotten enough information needed, proffering enlightenment to the further study of related questions in the study.

The 12 students who accepted the interview come from the advanced translation class (2010) of the Dalian University of Different Languages. They have been taking the speech and debate class.

### 3.2 Research design

The study takes the way of purpose sampling. To get elaborate figures, we introduce the property of our study and the interview outline to the students. The interview is recorded to provide convenience for the regulation of information afterwards. We have gotten the approvals from the students of this interview and the use of the figures.

## 4. THE RESULT OF THE INTERVIEW AND ITS ANALYSES

We find in the research that all of the students hold the view that the class has impact on their critical

thinking ability. Next the useful results are summarized.

All 12 students hold the view that English speech and debate class requires analyzing ability to tackle with issues of this course. All of the students hold the view that this course has a positive impact on their reasoning ability, especially in their skills of questioning, supposing and deducting. For example, Student D said, "During the class, teacher will let us talk about the view of last student's speech. Evaluating ability comes from reasoning skills, therefore in the semi-structural interview. All of the students hold the view that this course has a positive impact on their explicitness of oral expression. Student E and Student G regard that there are many ways to practice oral English, including speech assignment, group discussion, and role play. Nine of the all twelve students hold the view that this course has positive impact on their relevance to the subject of speech. The other three students believe not. Many of the students believe that although the flexibility of their oral English skills, it will be improved after the English debate class in the following semester. Almost all the 12 students believe that listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating abilities are inseparable. Interview results reveal that 100% of the 12 students believe this course has a positive influence on their analyzing, reasoning, evaluating, logicity, and explicitness of their oral English. 75% of them believe that this course has a positive influence on their relevance to the subject of the speech. 83% of them believe that this course has a positive influence on their flexibility of their oral English expression. And 100% of them feel that this course is helpful towards their critical thinking ability. The result of the interview basically fit in researchers' hypothesis. The researchers can explain this phenomenon in many ways, but mainly it is due to the course it self. Meanwhile, teacher's teaching style also has an impact on students' meta-critical thinking ability So their expressions are natural, authentic. The content is logical and explicit. Their argument is powerful. And all the exercises are designed to improve students' critical thinking ability. In the class, teachers assign the students different tasks based on the content of the teaching material. Teachers also assign students tasks for statement, analyzing,

discussion, debating, and evaluating. Meanwhile, teachers also encourage students to question others' point of view for practicing their oral English. Therefore, in the English speech and debate class, students fully demonstrate and improved their meta-critical thinking ability.

The result indicates that students' relevance to the subject of speech and flexibility of oral English expression are not improved dramatically. This phenomenon probably caused by the characteristic of these two abilities itself. Relevance to the subject is an inner ability which will not appear to disturb conversation without training.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This research focuses on the impact of English speech and debate class in curriculum system scheme of the integration of content and language on the critical thinking ability of students. Through the semi-structured interviews and observation at class, the study has gotten enough information needed, proffering enlightenment to the further study of related questions in the study. The research shows that this course has positive impact on students' critical thinking ability. Meanwhile, qualitative research methodology is adopted in this study. Further study in quantitative method is requisite. The evaluation of critical thinking ability tends to be subjective. Therefore, the exactness and universality of this study need further confirmation.

## REFERENCES

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