

A Pathway Study on the English Classroom Questioning in High School Based on the Development of Core Competencies

Wang Lingbo

School of Foreign Language, Tianshui Normal University, Tianshui, 741001, China

Abstract: *On the basis of exploring the connotation of English subject core competencies, this study explores how classroom questioning is related to the English subject core competencies from the levels of language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity and learning ability. The study proposes feasible ways for classroom questioning to develop students' core competencies. It also puts forward some teaching suggestions, for example, reasonably designing the type of classroom questioning, developing and innovating the mode of classroom questioning, appropriately using the strategy of classroom questioning and so on. However, classroom questioning still has limitations in the process of developing students' core competencies. Only by combining classroom questioning with classroom themes and teaching activities can we achieve the teaching objectives to the greatest extent and realize the educational value of English subject.*

Keywords: *core competencies; classroom questioning; high school English*

1. Introduction

In 2014, the Ministry of Education pointed out the need to implement and deepen the reform of basic education by vigorously developing and constructing core competencies system. After many scholars in China discussed with each other, four-dimensional core competencies framework of English subject was finally put forward, and the final establishment of the core competencies framework in *the English Curriculum Standard for Senior High School (2017 edition, 2020 revision)* has brought high school English education into a new era of core competencies. Classroom questioning is one of the most common and easy-to-operate classroom activities in the English classroom, not only the main channel of teacher-student classroom interaction, but also the basic way to achieve the teaching goals. So scholars at home and abroad have made numerous studies on classroom questioning. However, in the context of the era of core competencies, how teachers' classroom questioning is related to the core competencies of the English subject has become a problem that the majority of scholars and front-line teachers are thinking and exploring.^[1] Based on this, this paper, on the basis of analyzing the connotation of core competencies of English subject, explores how teachers can develop students' core competencies through classroom questioning in high school English teaching.

2. English Subject Core Competencies

Core competencies is the concentrated embodiment of the nurturing value of the English subject and the specific expression of the English curriculum objectives. Core competencies of English subject refers to the comprehensive embodiment of cultivating students to gradually form key abilities, necessary character and correct values in the process of English learning, which consists of language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity and learning ability .

2.1 Language Ability

Language ability includes the mastery of linguistic knowledge and skills, as well as linguistic awareness and a sense of communicative identity, which are gradually developed in the process of using language. Language is contextual, which occurs in specific social contexts. When removed from the context, language is only a symbol with superficial meaning. Therefore, in the latest version of the English curriculum standards, the thematic contexts covering people and self, people and society, and people and nature are clearly delineated. The thematic contexts are subdivided into thematic clusters, so

as to enable students to accumulate language content in specific thematic contexts. Language knowledge is embodied in the ability to understand and apply knowledge of phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, pragmatics and so on. Knowledge of phonetics, vocabulary and grammar is better understood, and discourse knowledge and pragmatics knowledge are briefly elaborated here. Discourse is the unit of meaning expression and the main basis and carrier of teaching activities, including discourse type, discourse structure, discourse function and discourse content, etc. Dong Ling et al. divide discourse structure into macro-discourse structure and micro-discourse structure. Macro-discourse structure attaches great importance to the relationship between paragraphs and serves the topic and central idea of the discourse. Micro-discourse structure focuses on the articulation and consistency of the sentences in the discourse and serves the logic and association between sentences. Pragmatic knowledge refers to the knowledge used to understand others accurately and express oneself appropriately in a context, including linguistic knowledge, social pragmatic knowledge, cross-cultural pragmatic knowledge and interlingual pragmatic knowledge.^[2] Language skills are specifically expressed as the ability to understand and express meaning through listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing. The development of the times has brought about multi-modal forms of discourse, such as picture, meme, sound effect, cartoon, etc. Therefore, the development of the skill of "viewing" is conducive to the synergistic development of students' audio-visual speaking skills. Language awareness consists of language cognition and language sense. language cognition is the individual's external cognition of English as a language, which is specifically expressed in the understanding of importance, meaning and value of English learning, as well as the understanding of the relationship between English and culture, and between English and thinking; language sense is the internal cognition of English as a language, that is, in the process of learning English and constructing meaning, the internal perceptual ability of the language is built up in an intangible way. The sense of communicative identity is highlighted by the fact that language has a certain communicative purpose, and identity awareness and role awareness are built up in the process of written and oral communication.

2.2 Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is based on cultural knowledge and cultural judgement as skills to establish correct cultural attitudes and cultural emotions, which are internalized into cultural character and finally manifested as appropriate cultural behavioral orientation.^[3] Nowadays, under the background of globalization, there are frequent exchanges between different countries, and cultural outputs are also shown in different forms in daily life. So the English subject needs to teach students a certain amount of cross-cultural knowledge, cultivate cross-cultural awareness, and inherit and carry forward the excellent cultures at home and abroad. Language is the medium and carrier of cultural transmission. The learning of cultural knowledge is the basis for the formation of cultural awareness, which includes both material culture and spiritual culture. Cultural skill is to make correct cultural judgement on different cultures by comparing, analyzing, synthesizing and other thinking ways after learning rich cultural knowledge and combining it with the times background and social environment. This process is to understand Chinese and foreign cultures accurately through the reflections of the brain, to produce correct cognition and to produce different attitudes towards different cultures. Cultural emotion is the outward attitude and performance when dealing with different cultures, and this process depends on the correct cultural judgement. Cultural behaviour is the individual's adherence or rejection of cultural outward activities such as customs, traditions, practices, beliefs in a specific social environment.

2.3 Thinking Capacity

Language is a tool for thinking. Thinking capacity refers to the ability and level presented in logical, critical and creative aspects of thinking. The logic of thinking corresponds to logical thinking, which is a kind of thinking activity that uses logical tools to abstract and deduce the thinking content, such as judgement, reasoning, argumentation, etc.^[4] The logical thinking of high school students has evolved from figurative thinking to abstract thinking, entered the arithmetic stage. Their ability to synthesize and analyse, abstract and generalize, has produced qualitative changes. Moore and Parker point out that critical thinking is a kind of thinking about the unfolding of thinking. Critical thinking is criticizing or judging an existing kind of thinking, rationally evaluating its thinking process, and considering whether this kind of thinking is logical and meets a good standard.^[5] Creative or innovative thinking, which can also be called original thinking, is manifested in having the sense of innovation and the spirit of innovation. The persons qualified innovative thinking are not sticking to the old ways and old rules, being full of curiosity and interest in new things and seeking for differences and changes. They have a certain adventurous spirit, dare to think and experiment with their hands and are brave enough to validate their

own visions.

2.4 Learning Ability

Learning ability refers to the awareness and ability for students to actively use and adapt English learning strategies, to broaden their English learning channels, and to make efforts to improve the efficiency of English learning. Learning ability here should be understood from a macro perspective. First of all, learning attitude is one of the potential elements of learning ability, and individuals with a positive learning attitude have the clear and proper understanding for learning, sufficient and persistent motivation for learning, and strong interest and enthusiasm for learning, which leads to a positive cycle of learning. Learning strategy refers to the methods and steps adopted for language learning and language use. Learning strategy includes meta-cognitive strategy, cognitive strategy, communicative strategy and affective strategies, etc. The selection and use of learning strategies can help to improve the efficiency of learning, and lay the foundation for autonomous learning and lifelong learning. Learning channel includes learning resource and learning platform, as well as the willingness to expand the breadth of learning content and the openness of learning pathways. The problem of time-consuming and inefficient English learning is common, so learning efficiency is an important part of learning ability. Consciously promoting students' efficient learning will often yield twice the result with half the effort.

3. Pathway of Classroom Questioning to Develop Students' Core competencies

3.1 Improving Language Ability through Classroom Questioning

In English teaching, according to the different topics of classroom content, teachers should create a situation under a specific theme, and the situation must be consistent with the students' social environment and daily life, so that students are subconsciously integrated into the classroom. The teacher can use classroom questioning to create a situation, and the questioning way and questioning content should be carried out in the context of the situation. For example, in Senior High School English textbook published by Beijing Normal University Press, Book 1, Unit 1 Life Choices, topic talk, in order to let students adapt to their own stage, teachers can design classroom questions to bring students into the situation. The questions can be designed as follows: (1) What is your new school life like? Is it different like your previous school life? (2) What is your new plan for your new school life? This session sets the tone for the unit theme and allows students to enter the teaching situation in a natural way.

The learning of language knowledge is a gradual accumulation process. In the process of English learning, there is a combination of old and new language knowledge. Teachers can use classroom questioning to review and check the students' known language knowledge, and then transit to the students' unknown language knowledge, which not only takes into account the student's zone of proximal development, but also sets up the scaffolding for the students in the way of classroom questioning. For example, in Senior High School English textbook published by PNEP, Book 1, Unit 1, Lesson 1 Lifestyles, the use of the -ed/-ing adjective is involved in the knowledge point, and the word formation method has long been involved in the study of junior high school English. Therefore, when the teacher explains to the knowledge point here, who can ask questions about the knowledge point of the word formation method, and explain the use of the -ed/-ing adjective and then do some exercises.

In reading teaching, after students finish reading the discourse, teachers can check whether students understand the text correctly through classroom questioning and pay attention to whether they can express their own opinions clearly in the process of answering the questions, which is based on teachers' accurate interpretation of the discourse and reasonable design of classroom questioning. Although reading teaching takes up a large proportion in English teaching, reading ability and other abilities are not separated from each other, but promote each other and develop together. Teachers can improve students' reading ability to promote the development of students' writing ability, forming the role of reading promoting writing. In addition, we can take the article theme as a topic to exercise students' speaking ability. At this time the teacher needs to carefully design the classroom questioning methods and content, through thinking and answering questions, students are promoted the common development of listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing skills.

In the learning atmosphere full of classroom questions, students get to know English better, form language sense, and develop their own opinions and understanding for the English subject. Language is a tool for conveying individual thoughts. When answering questions, teachers also need to guide students to stand in their own position to conduct language communication, so that students can form a sense of

linguistic subjectivity and thus gain a sense of communicative identity in language communication.

3.2 Fostering Cultural Awareness through Classroom Questioning

For the fostering of cultural awareness, classroom questioning plays a positive role in guiding students. The fostering of cultural awareness is carried out in a subtle way, and the English discourse involves the cultures of different countries and the historical origins behind the cultures. On the basis of students' understanding of cultural knowledge, the teacher can prompt students to make comparisons between different cultural phenomena and analyse the reasons for the emergence of different cultures by designing various forms of classroom questioning so that they can form correct cultural judgment, better inherit and carry forward the outstanding cultural achievements of mankind. For example, after learning about the western afternoon tea and Yum Cha culture, students can be asked about the content of Chinese tea culture and the similarities and differences between the Chinese and Western tea cultures, which can be designed as a group quiz or answer questions in turns.

Classroom questioning can also promote the cultivation and stability of cultural emotion. In English teaching, teachers can organize some culturally relevant classroom activities through rich questioning methods, so as to guide students to form correct cultural attitude towards different cultures, which can make cultural attitude to develop stably and permanently, so as to form a positive cultural character. For example, in Senior High School English textbook published by PNEP, Book 1, Unit 3 Celebrations, the teacher can design the question: Should we celebrate Western festivals or Chinese traditional festivals? Organize a debate for the students. After the debate, the teacher will summarize and sublimate the theme.

Practicing appropriate cultural behaviour is the ultimate goal and destination of cultural awareness cultivation, and also one of the basic footholds of moral education. Cultural behaviour is ultimately expressed in intercultural communication skills, so teachers should take intercultural knowledge into consideration when asking questions in class, so that normal communication and intercourse can be carried out between different cultural groups.

3.3 Shaping Thinking Capacity through Classroom Questioning

The shaping of students' thinking quality should also be paid attention to in English teaching, especially the cultivation of the three major thinking mentioned in the English curriculum standards: logical thinking, critical thinking and innovative thinking. When designing classroom questioning, teacher should firstly clarify the logical relationship of the discourse content, and secondly carry out teaching activities according to the logical relationship. When asking questions about discourse knowledge, between questions should be logical and form a chain of questions. Teachers can still try to use questions to link up the line and structure of a text. Classroom questioning should involve more referential questions and higher-level cognitive questions. The answers to these questions are usually not fixed, which can inspire students to think in different dimensions. When students solve problems from different perspectives, teachers should encourage them, which is conducive to the development of students' critical thinking. Students' innovative thinking can also be cultivated through classroom questioning. Teachers can design novel questions to inspire students' thinking and Teachers can also give the initiative of classroom questioning to the students, so that students can ask some questions around the class content based on their own starting point, and the teacher can answer them or the whole class can discuss them together.

3.4 Cultivating Learning Ability through Classroom Questioning

Learning ability is related to students' behavior and academic performance in the learning process. Improving students' learning ability is not only conducive to the current stage of learning, but also to their lifelong learning and long-term development. Before the lesson, teachers should assign the task of preview for the new lesson and encourage students to conduct autonomic learn with the help of accessible channels using their own learning methods. In the warm-up stage, teachers can ask questions to understand the students' learning attitudes and previews and correct students with improper learning attitudes in a time, which can improve the efficiency of students' learning from the source. Teachers can also ask students' psychological process when solving the problem, which not only enables teachers to learn about students' learning situation after class which is convenient for teachers to give more accurate guidance to students, but also enables students to strike a chord through sharing the learning experience among them, so that they can reproduce the situation and think of solutions when they encounter the same difficulties next time.

When designing and implementing classroom questioning, breakthroughs can be made in the following aspects:

(1) Reasonably designing the type of classroom questioning.

Bloom divided the educational objectives of the cognitive field into six levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. So the type of question are divided into six types: knowledge question, comprehension question, application question, analysis question, synthesis question and evaluation questions.^[6] When teachers design classroom questions, they need to choose different types of questions according to the different core competencies to be achieved. When testing students' language knowledge and cultural knowledge, we need to design knowledge questions; when guiding students to think more comprehensively, the questions should be set as analysis questions; and when setting up students' correct values, we can design some evaluation questions.

(2) Developing and innovating the mode of classroom questioning.

The traditional English classroom mode is mainly based on the teacher asking questions and individual students answering questions. The teacher can let the students put forward some questions at the right time and the group of students explore the answer together. Or the student groups put forward the questions and let the other groups to answer them. The subject of classroom questioning is changed from teachers to students, and individual students' answer to question is transformed into the result of team discussion, which can not only mobilize the students' enthusiasm in language communication, but also promote the development of students' thinking level.

(3) Appropriately using the strategy of classroom questioning.

Proper use of questioning strategies helps to complete teaching content with high quality and achieve teaching objectives efficiently. Before class, teachers need to determine the content, order, mode of classroom questioning and possible answers to questions. The questions should be formulated in a reasonable and appropriate manner, so that students can accurately understand the content of the questions asked. After the teacher asks a question, he/she needs to give the students a certain amount of time to think about it. When answering the question, the teacher needs to listen carefully to the students' answers. After answering, the teacher summarize the students' answers and give them positive feedback. When the classroom questioning encounters an unexpected situation, the teacher should adopt the correct questioning strategy in time to realize the efficient classroom questioning.

4. Conclusion

Classroom questioning improves students' language ability, fosters students' cultural awareness, shapes students' thinking capacity and cultivates students' learning ability. The number of classroom questions in a lesson is limited, but classroom questioning will certainly play a great guiding role in the process of developing students' core competencies over time. In English teaching, it is difficult to support a complete English classroom with classroom questions alone, so classroom questions should be coordinated with teaching segments and teaching activities. Students can learn in the classroom under the guidance of questions to realize teaching objectives to the maximum extent and ultimately contribute to the development of core competencies.

References

- [1] Huang Limin, Su Qiuping. *A survey on classroom questioning by domestic English teachers from 1985 to 2019* [J]. *Modernization of Education*, 2019, 6 (73): 225-228+234.
- [2] Hou JJ. *Pragmatic Knowledge for English Learners* [J]. *China Adult Education*, 2006, (12): 178-179.
- [3] Zhang Zewen. *Cultural awareness of core competencies in English subject: substantive connotation and practical path* [J]. *Basic education curriculum*, 2019, (Z1): 49-53.
- [4] Liu Doyi. *Talking about English subject competencies - thinking quality* [J]. *Curriculum. Teaching Materials. Teaching Method*, 2018, 38 (08): 80-85.
- [5] Moore B. N. & Parker R. *Critical thinking* [M]. Zhu Sumei, Translation. Beijing: machinery industry press, 2015
- [6] Bloom, B. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook I: Cognitive Domain* [M]. New York: Longman, 1956