

A Study on the Cultivation of Critical Thinking Ability in Foreign Language Teaching: Taking the Course "A Brief Introduction to English-Speaking Countries" as an Example

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Abstract: Critical thinking ability is a necessary ability to become a high-quality talent. In the increasingly competitive international environment, countries pay more and more attention to the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability. Both at home and abroad have made rich achievements in depth and breadth, which has laid a certain theoretical and practical foundation for training students' critical thinking ability in foreign language teaching. Taking the Survey of English-speaking countries, a compulsory course for English (normal) majors, as an example, this paper explores how to integrate the training of critical thinking ability into the teaching of foreign language majors in view of the lack of critical thinking ability training. From the five aspects of teaching objective, teaching environment, teaching content, teaching method and teaching evaluation, the paper combines the cultivation of students' language ability and critical thinking ability, and constructs the cultivation mode of critical thinking ability suitable for professional teaching practice in our country. Universities should practice the new liberal arts construction of foreign language major, and realize the innovative development of foreign language major under the background of new liberal arts.

Keywords: Foreign Language Major; Teaching; Critical Thinking Ability; Cultivate

1. Introduction

The Higher Education Law stipulates that "the task of higher education is to cultivate high-level professionals with innovative spirit and practical ability", and the fundamental basis of innovative spirit and practical ability is the ability of thinking [1]. The National Standards for the Teaching Quality of Foreign Language and Literature Majors in Colleges and Universities issued in 2020 have clearly listed critical thinking ability as the core ability that foreign language majors should possess, highlighting the importance of cultivating critical thinking ability in foreign language teaching. Overview of English-Speaking Countries is a compulsory course for English majors to understand the geography, history, politics, education and other aspects of major English-speaking countries, and to get familiar with the cultural customs and social life of major English-speaking countries. Therefore, this course plays an important role in cultivating students' humanities literacy and English discipline literacy. At present, the construction of new liberal arts and curriculum ideological and political construction of foreign language majors in colleges and universities is gradually deepening. Taking the course "Survey of English-Speaking Countries" as an example, exploring the training mode of thinking ability in foreign language major teaching is not only a useful attempt to construct new liberal arts for foreign language major, but also an active exploration to innovate "curriculum thinking and politics" in foreign language major teaching.

2. Research on "Critical Thinking Ability" at Home and Abroad

"Critical thinking" refers to high-level thinking, that is, "thinking about thinking" in a broad sense, or, more precisely, "purposeful reflective judgment." "Critical thinking" is defined as "the ability to make purposeful and rational judgments about things or opinions according to standards", and its core skills are analytical ability, reasoning ability and evaluation ability [2-4]. Analytical ability involves the process of interpretation, categorization, comparison, identification, and analysis and argumentation.

Reasoning ability includes four sub-skills: organizing reasoning, envisioning multiple alternatives, forming conclusions, and explaining. Evaluation ability includes testing and argumentation process and self-regulation skills [5]. In the face of global internationalization and increasingly fierce talent competition, Western countries pay more and more attention to the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability. In many colleges and universities in the United States, the cultivation of critical thinking ability is listed as an important task of higher education. Famous British universities, such as Oxford, Cambridge, etc., one of the admission assessment indicators is the ability of students to think. Boeckx believes that in the information age, if the teaching and assessment of knowledge points are still taken as the focus of teaching, the knowledge learned by students is likely to be outdated before graduation [6]. If the critical thinking ability to analyze and solve problems is taken as the educational goal, this comprehensive, transferable and systematic ability can bring lifelong benefits to students [7]. As early as 1998, Professor Huang Yuanshen began to pay attention to critical thinking and proposed the "critical absence syndrome" [8]. In his article, he pointed out the various manifestations of the lack of critical thinking ability of Chinese foreign language majors. Since then, some scholars have joined in the relevant discussion, or explained the urgency of critical thinking ability training, or reflected on teaching and analyzed the reasons, or carried out empirical research, or carried out teaching reform. Among them, Wen Qiufang and Sun Youzhong's research results are more influential. Wen Qiufang explored the relationship between critical thinking training and foreign language teaching, and how to integrate them, and put forward the "recessive and explicit" and "separation and integration" modes of critical thinking training. Professor Sun Youzhong stressed that the training of critical thinking is an important indicator to measure the quality of talents training in universities and put forward the teaching concept of "cross-cultural critical thinking education" and the TERRIFIC principle of critical English teaching [9-11]. The research on "critical thinking ability" has achieved rich results both in depth and breadth at home and abroad, which has laid a certain theoretical and practical foundation for cultivating and improving students' critical thinking ability in foreign language teaching. Based on the theoretical concepts of critical thinking ability and related research, this paper combines the cultivation of students' foreign language ability and critical thinking ability from five aspects: educational objectives, teaching environment, teaching content, teaching methods and teaching evaluation, explores the construction of a critical thinking training model suitable for foreign language teaching practice in China, and practices the construction of new liberal arts for foreign language majors.

3. Reform of Critical Thinking Ability Training in Foreign Language Major Teaching

3.1 The Training of Critical Thinking Ability Should Be Included in the Teaching Goal

Foreign language classroom effectiveness is achieved through purposeful and organized foreign language teaching activities. The first problem to be solved is to develop and improve the critical thinking ability of foreign language majors. The training of critical thinking ability is included in the syllabus of the course, the specific objectives of the training of critical thinking ability are reflected in the teaching objectives of specific chapters, and the teaching objectives of critical thinking ability are clearly defined and described in a detailed and clear manner to ensure that the teaching objectives are measurable. Based on the results of previous theoretical research and teaching practice research, the critical thinking skills in the teaching objectives of "Survey of English Countries" are decomposed into several sub-skills, including analytical ability, reasoning ability and evaluation ability. Take the chapter "Education in the United States" as an example. First, students should be able to understand, analyze, and articulate the American educational philosophy, the composition of the educational system, and the goals of education. Secondly, students need to learn how to compare Chinese and American education from the perspectives of education philosophy, education system composition and education goals, and use electronic and paper materials, video and audio materials, and interviews with experts and scholars to reason and put forward views on the differences between Chinese and American education. Finally, students need to: examine, question and judge the reasonableness of other students' arguments on the differences between Chinese and American education. At the same time, college teachers examine their own opinions and justifications, reflect on personal knowledge limitations, emotions, attitudes and other factors that affect the impartial and objective judgment of the differences between Chinese and American education, and self-adjust the unreasonable aspects. Clarifying these objectives is conducive to reaching a consensus between teachers and students, and also provides the possibility for evaluating the teaching effect.

3.2 Build a Harmonious and Open Speculative Teaching Environment

Harmonious, open, equal and friendly teaching environment provides environmental support for the cultivation of critical thinking ability. English teachers need to construct the classroom speculative teaching environment of "Survey of English Countries", firstly, insist on using a variety of classroom resources and teaching methods. Abundant classroom resources, such as blackboard, computer, projector, audio and video, etc. are conducive to creating a classroom physical environment with a class thinking atmosphere. Flexible teaching methods, such as question and answer, role play, discussion, debate and speech, help to build a suitable cultural environment for classroom thinking and cultivate students' critical thinking ability. Secondly, insist on equal dialogue and develop good teacher-student relationship. Teachers' oral and body language, as well as the position of desks and chairs, will affect the teaching environment in the classroom. For example, placing desks and chairs in a circle is more conducive to students' participation in interaction, taking the initiative to express their views and opinions, and speaking freely. Thirdly, student-centered, focusing on enlightening and inquiry teaching. This is an important factor to build a harmonious and healthy classroom psychological environment. The teacher's job is not to give students established facts or answers to problems, but to guide and inspire students to think independently, explore problems, explore solutions, and predict possible consequences and impacts. Finally, it is the key to build a harmonious and open speculative teaching environment that teachers have their own thinking education idea, knowledge structure and thinking practice teaching ability. Teachers can regularly summarize, reflect on and share their speculative teaching activities by writing reflection logs, course discussions, speculative teaching workshops, etc., so as to continuously summarize and make continuous improvement, so as to improve their own speculative teaching ability.

3.3 Enrich and Optimize the Content of Classroom Speculative Teaching

Teaching content is the basic carrier to implement educational goals. The construction of the teaching content of the Survey of English-Speaking Countries should first highlight the subjectivity of the professional content of English teaching, and insist on the combination of professional knowledge, ability training and value shaping. Secondly, the organization of teaching content reflects the hierarchy, and the thinking content of classroom teaching moves from low level to high level, from shallow level to deep level. Finally, the teaching content mining reflects the ideological and political nature, and insists on cultivating students' cultural self-confidence and feelings of home and country. Students develop critical thinking skills in the course of the Survey of the English-speaking World and refine values in a context beyond the classroom, as illustrated by the teaching of the traditional American holiday "Thanksgiving". As the most traditional holiday in the United States, Thanksgiving Day is the teaching focus of the chapter "American Education, Media and Holidays". In order to give students a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the origins of this festival, teachers must impart the necessary professional knowledge, including the geography and history of the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the knowledge of religious beliefs. After introducing the origin, date, traditional food and traditional activities of Thanksgiving, students can further enhance their emotional understanding of this holiday through short videos. Then, guide the students to dig out the meaning of "gratitude" behind this festival, and express and express the "gratitude" emotion. The use of "retelling" teaching method can not only cultivate and exercise students' language organization ability and oral expression ability, consolidate students' learning of British and American geography, history, religion and other professional knowledge, but also cultivate students' feelings of gratitude and positive values. The teaching content starting from "Thanksgiving Day" enriches and optimizes classroom speculative teaching content, ultimately achieving the cultivation of high-quality foreign language talents with a sense of patriotism.

3.4 Problem-driven Speculative Teaching Method Is Adopted

The teaching method of critical thinking training in foreign language classroom encourages the use of problem-driven inquiry teaching and learning, so that critical thinking runs through the whole process of foreign language teaching. The course of "Survey of English-Speaking Countries" can adopt the forms of question-and-answer, discussion and debate, and integrate the cultivation of critical thinking ability with the teaching of English subject knowledge. One of the course chapters, "British History", introduces 10 dynasties in the development of British history. Teachers guide students to discuss "Which British dynasty would they like to travel to if they could travel through?" This is a speculative and challenging problem. In order to get a reasonable answer, students first need to

comprehensively and deeply study the various dynasties in the development of British history, from the Norman dynasty founded in 1066 to today's Windsor Dynasty, from the dynastic monarchs to important historical figures, from major historical events to the social and cultural background. Before the discussion, the teacher provided the students with reference books and Internet resources, and encouraged the students to consult the materials and develop the ability of independent thinking and independent learning. In the process of discussion, students are encouraged to listen to and understand the thoughts of their peers, examine and explore the problem from multiple angles, pay attention to both "thinking" and "arguing", and share views, clarify ideas and form opinions in the process of "thinking" and "debating". After the discussion, the students will record their own ideas and opinions, and complete the written homework. After in-depth thinking and discussion, the students' ideas are clearer and the reasons are more sufficient. Through independent learning, cooperative learning and inquiry learning, students are encouraged to develop from shallow knowledge learning to deep information processing, and constantly improve their critical thinking ability.

3.5 Establish a Multi-element Critical Teaching Evaluation System

Evaluation plays a key guiding role in teaching activities. Teaching reform not only needs to reform the teaching content and teaching method, but also the reform of the teaching evaluation system is particularly important, otherwise it is difficult to achieve the expected goal of the reform. In order to effectively improve the effect of thinking ability training, first of all, it is necessary to incorporate the thinking dimension of classroom teaching into the teaching evaluation system. Based on detailed, clear and measurable teaching objectives, effective tasks or activities are designed, and critical thinking criteria are integrated into the learning content assessment of English Language Survey. Students' critical thinking skills, including analytical ability, reasoning ability and evaluation ability, are evaluated in multiple ways by combining peer assessment and self-assessment. To discuss the topic "If you could travel, which British dynasty would you like to travel to?" For example, students' critical thinking ability is evaluated through "peer assessment". After the topic is discussed in class, students are required to complete a written assignment. The teacher trained students on "speculative homework evaluation criteria", and then asked students to use this standard for peer evaluation and give constructive suggestions. Students used speculative criteria to evaluate peer homework and analyzed and reflected on their own homework at the same time. Another example is the "self-evaluation" of students' learning and thinking performance. Students clearly understand the learning objectives of this course, clearly understand the concepts and knowledge points that need to be mastered, and objectively evaluate their own performance in the course by using examination standards, so as to become the master of self-evaluation of learning and thinking. In the process of analysis, reasoning and evaluation, students gradually develop their own thinking habits, and over time, these thinking habits eventually develop into students' critical thinking ability. In order to promote the integration of students' critical thinking ability and subject knowledge, the critical thinking standard is integrated into the language ability assessment of foreign language majors. The effective evaluation of speculative teaching will play a positive backward-effect on the practice of speculative teaching.

4. Conclusions

Under the background of the new liberal arts, how to carry out the construction of the new liberal arts and how to play the ideological and political education function of the foreign language discipline is an important task at present. This paper explores the cultivation mode of thinking ability of foreign language major students, which is a useful attempt to develop curriculum thinking and politics under the background of "new liberal arts construction". Due to the disciplinary nature of foreign language major, students can have access to classics in different subject fields such as philosophy, sociology, history, literature, etc. These extensive and systematic humanistic knowledge input make foreign language courses have unique advantages in cultivating critical thinking ability. Foreign language learning is not only learning a language, but also learning a new way of thinking, mastering a new perspective of understanding the world, and constructing a discourse system to express Chinese culture and Chinese image to the outside world. In view of this, foreign language courses are an important carrier to cultivate students' critical thinking ability. Taking "Survey of English-Speaking Countries" as an example, while acquiring subject knowledge, students improve their English language ability and critical thinking ability, which complement each other and develop simultaneously.

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