

Constructing a Hybrid Writing Teaching Model for Cultivating Critical Thinking Skills in English Education Majors

Xiulan Ge^{1,a,*}

¹School of Foreign Languages, Heihe University, Heihe, China

^aGexiulan1@126.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract: *The English writing course is a compulsory subject for English teacher education majors. In response to three pain points: students' weak language foundation, lack of writing knowledge, limited self-learning ability, low interest in learning, low participation in learning activities, and the disconnect between classroom teaching and industry demands leading to inadequate application skills, the English writing course teaching team has implemented an "online teaching + offline teaching, classroom teaching + internship training, professional teachers + school internship mentors" (three-dimensional) approach. The teaching model involves the active participation of both the school and the internship institution, with a focus on future job positions. The teaching objectives have been optimized, teaching content has been restructured, teaching resources have been diversified and expanded, forming a diverse learning community, and incorporating the "guidance-integration-discussion-consolidation-reflection" teaching framework. Additionally, a comprehensive assessment system has been established, involving the four main stakeholders - teachers, internship mentor', students, and the platform - utilizing multiple forms of formative evaluation. Based on these methods, students' critical thinking abilities are effectively enhanced.*

Keywords: *Writing, Critical thinking ability, English Education Majors*

1. Introduction

In the 1980s, China began to study critical thinking, mainly through the translation of foreign philosophical and psychological works. Criticality of thinking is an extremely important quality, but specific and systematic research and educational practices were still relatively weak. This situation was not in line with social development and progress^[1]. With the introduction of the "National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)" in 2010, the cultivation of innovative talents and innovative education has gradually gained attention. The cultivation of innovative and critical thinking received great attention from the domestic academic community, leading to a thriving research field with numerous achievements.

As of May 23, 2023, a search on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) using the topic "cultivation of critical thinking" yielded 1,599 results, with 61 results before 2011 and 1,538 results from 2011 onwards. A search using the topic "blended learning model" yielded 19,032 results, with 325 results before 2015 and 18,707 results from 2015 onwards. From the above data, it is evident that the Ministry of Education's issuance of relevant documents on curriculum and educational reforms and the organization of related conferences have strongly promoted the research and exploration of first-class undergraduate curriculum construction by educators and scholars.

According to The Higher Education Law, the task of higher education is to cultivate advanced specialized talents with a sense of social responsibility, innovative spirit, and practical abilities. The premise of fostering innovative spirit and practical abilities is critical thinking (CT), which involves challenging existing viewpoints and authorities. Innovation arises and develops based on critical thinking and reflection^[2]. In the Teaching Guidelines for Undergraduate English Majors in General Higher Education Institutions, it is stated that English education majors should possess strong critical thinking skills. Critical thinking was first proposed by the American philosopher John Dewey, and it refers to a reflective thinking process that involves deep thinking, analysis, inference, and evaluation of events to form independent viewpoints. Despite critical thinking being recognized as a driving force for advancing

knowledge society and a goal in various educational levels^[3], especially in higher education^[4], research indicates that many Chinese university students lack critical thinking skills and suffer from “deficiency in critical inquiry”.^[5] This study focuses on English education majors to elucidate the importance of critical thinking skills for university students. Based on this, the study constructs a hybrid teaching model for English writing that is student-centered and output-oriented, guided by the concept of critical thinking, and implemented through both classroom and online platforms. The aim is to provide an example of a new hybrid teaching model and facilitate the cultivation of critical thinking skills in students.

2. The Significance of Cultivating Critical Thinking Skills in English Education Majors through Writing Classes

The primary goal of writing courses in English education majors is to improve students' English writing abilities. These courses help students enhance their writing skills, including grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and paragraph organization. By continuously practicing writing, students develop their writing style and expression to facilitate teaching and academic communication. Furthermore, it is crucial to cultivate teachers' writing teaching skills. As future teachers, education majors need to possess writing teaching abilities to effectively guide students in English writing. English writing courses provide teacher education students with teaching strategies and methods, helping them understand the problems students may encounter during the writing process and providing corresponding solutions. Moreover, these courses enhance academic research skills. Education majors often need to conduct academic research in the field of education. English writing courses can assist them in learning how to write academic papers, research reports, literature reviews, etc., enabling them to independently conduct research and write papers. Additionally, they cultivate cross-cultural communication abilities. Education majors often need to communicate with students and teachers from different cultural backgrounds. Through English writing courses, they can learn how to overcome language and cultural barriers, effectively communicate in English, and enhance their cross-cultural communication abilities.

Based on the teaching tasks of English writing courses, cultivating critical thinking skills is significant for English education majors for the following reasons.

2.1. Enhancing Academic Literacy

Critical thinking helps students develop solid academic literacy. Through critical thinking, students can gain an in-depth understanding of texts, raise questions, evaluate evidence, and form well-founded conclusions. This thinking approach promotes students' comprehensive understanding of the English language and literature, cultivating them into scholars with depth and insight.

2.2. Fostering Critical Reading Skills

Critical thinking is crucial for cultivating students' critical reading skills. In English education majors, students need to read a vast amount of English literary works, research papers, and educational literature. Critical thinking enables students to examine authors' intentions, reasoning, and logical arguments, facilitating in-depth analysis and interpretation of texts.

2.3. Enhancing Problem-solving abilities

Critical thinking cultivates students' problem-solving abilities. Students should be able to identify and solve various problems encountered in English teaching and research. Through critical thinking, students can pose critical questions, evaluate different solutions, and make wise decisions. This ability is crucial for their future careers in teaching, research, or other fields.

2.4. Stimulating Innovative Thinking

Critical thinking also stimulates students' innovative thinking abilities. In the field of English education, students need to provide novel teaching methods, curriculum designs, and evaluation approaches. Through critical thinking, students can challenge traditional notions, seek innovative solutions, and contribute to the reform and development of English education.

Critical thinking is the ability to evaluate information and viewpoints, while English writing requires students to apply this ability to their writing. Therefore, adopting a critical thinking-oriented hybrid

teaching model for English writing can help students better apply critical thinking skills to their writing.

3. Critical Thinking-Oriented Hybrid Learning Model for English Writing Concept and Philosophy Design

Under the context of the New Liberal Arts, following the educational philosophy of “student-centered, output-oriented, and continuous improvement”, addressing the real issues in English writing classroom teaching for English teacher trainees, and guided by future job demands, a “three-dimensional dual-track” teaching model involving online and offline teaching, classroom teaching and job training, professional teachers and internship supervisors (triple dimension), with the participation of both the school and internship institutions (dual track), is established. This model optimizes teaching objectives, reconstructs modular teaching content, broadens and extends teaching resources, forms a diverse learning community and a teaching process of “guiding - integrating - discussing - consolidating - reflecting”, creates a four-classroom setting for ideological and political education, and adopts a “four-subject, multiple-format” formative assessment approach. It aims to address the challenges of students’ weak language foundation, lack of business knowledge, and limited self-learning abilities, as well as low student interest and engagement in flipped classroom teaching, and the mismatch between classroom teaching and industry demands resulting in inadequate application abilities.

3.1. Optimizing Teaching Objectives

Based on the requirements of the “Guidelines for Undergraduate English Major Education” and the talent cultivation positioning of the school’s English major, as well as the future demands for talent in the field, teaching objectives are optimized from three dimensions: knowledge, abilities, and qualities.

3.2. Enriching Teaching Resources

Based on the spirit of documents such as the “National Standards for the Quality of Undergraduate Foreign Language and Literature Education in General Higher Education Institutions” and the “40 Measures for Higher Education in the New Era”, the selected textbook and reference teaching materials for the course are “English Writing Tutorial” and writing materials published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, which feature materials from authoritative publications in English-speaking countries, rich subject matter, and diverse genres.

A network teaching resource platform is established to integrate information technology with classroom teaching: The platform includes the Lighthouse Reading Platform, the Wisdom Tree Platform, China MOOC, and an excellent case resource library.

With the support of the textbook and guided by the talent cultivation philosophy of fostering character and integrity, the ideological and political elements in the textbook are thoroughly explored and organically integrated with the course content, forming a module-based approach with ideological and political education. Cross-disciplinary business knowledge is introduced through multimodal means such as images, videos, and texts, effectively addressing the pain points of low student interest and engagement in learning activities.

4. Four Classrooms Cultivate Students’ Critical Thinking Abilities

By integrating the first classroom, second classroom, third classroom, and fourth classroom, the four classrooms promote the synergistic effect of cultivating critical thinking abilities. The first classroom, which focuses on ideological and political education, serves as the “main battleground” and “main channel”. The second classroom is activated, while the third classroom is based on the needs and expands through internships and teaching practice. The fourth classroom provides auxiliary support. Modern information technology is fully utilized for teaching and learning, forming the four classrooms that foster critical thinking abilities.

4.1. The First Classroom

The “Guidance-Integration-Argumentation-Consolidation-Thought” teaching process is implemented in English writing instruction.

Guidance refers to providing pre-class learning guidance to students. Before class, teachers determine

the teaching focus, difficult points, teaching content, and test content based on the course materials. Students are divided into groups, and teaching methods such as project-based learning and task-driven learning are used to assign different roles and tasks to each team member. Industry mentors provide relevant job scenarios and practical cases based on the teaching content. Teachers deliver course resources and practical case resources to students through the online learning platform. Students engage in independent online learning of theoretical knowledge related to the course, communicate with teachers and industry mentors for question and answer sessions, complete tests, and prepare for classroom presentations. Teachers use the online learning platform to monitor students' learning progress and timely remind them. By accurately understanding students' learning situation through online learning behavior data and pre-class self-study test results, teachers can prepare targeted offline classroom instruction to improve students' learning experience and teaching effectiveness.

Integration means integrating elements of critical thinking abilities into the course content.

By introducing controversial topics, teachers select controversial topics or viewpoints as the themes for writing discussions, encourage students to debate different viewpoints and express their own opinions. Such topics can stimulate students' critical thinking, enabling them to learn how to analyze problems, evaluate evidence, and form compelling arguments.

Teachers need to choose high-quality English essays and guide students to read and analyze the structure, argumentation, and viewpoints of these articles. Through analyzing exemplary essays, students can learn about excellent writing techniques and logical reasoning methods, thereby cultivating critical thinking and writing abilities.

Teachers also need to provide real-world problems and scenarios. Teachers design writing tasks related to educational practices, allowing students to apply critical thinking to real-world issues. For example, students may be required to evaluate and analyze an educational policy or teaching method, discussing its pros and cons from multiple perspectives, and cultivating their critical thinking abilities in relation to educational issues.

Argument means conducting seminar-style teaching through multiple channels such as WeChat groups, classrooms, and the intelligent learning platform.

By group collaborative writing, teachers organize students to engage in group collaborative writing, allowing them to communicate and discuss with each other during the writing process, jointly analyze problems, and propose solutions. This type of collaborative writing can stimulate students' critical thinking and cultivate their ability to think and debate in teamwork.

Through speech and debate activities, teachers organize students to participate in speech and debate activities, allowing them to debate and refute on a specific topic or viewpoint. Such activities can enhance students' oral expression and critical thinking abilities, enabling them to present strong arguments and counter opposing viewpoints.

With the methods of correction and feedback, teachers provide detailed correction and feedback after students submit their essays. In addition to addressing grammar errors and writing skills, emphasis should be placed on guiding students to improve their logical reasoning, argumentation, and depth of thinking. Through timely feedback, teachers help students recognize their weaknesses and improve their writing skills and critical thinking abilities.

To encourage active participation and expression of viewpoints, teachers need to create an open and respectful learning environment. Students should feel that their viewpoints are respected and that they can freely express their ideas, even if they differ from others. Teachers can establish some discussion rules, such as active listening, respect for others' viewpoints, and providing evidence-based arguments, to ensure positive and constructive discussions and debates.

Consolidation means strengthening and reinforcing. By combining the course content with the expertise of professional teachers and internship school mentors, relevant practical case questions are provided. Teachers organize students to complete practical tasks through group collaboration and upload them to the intelligent learning platform. During this process, teachers guide students to actively participate in discussions, review and summarize core knowledge and skills, and complete corresponding solutions. This stimulates students' enthusiasm and initiative for independent learning, encourages them to share their learning achievements, and enhances their sense of accomplishment.

Reflection means reflecting and improving. Students write learning reflections, and teachers write teaching reflections based on the course instruction. This reciprocal process contributes to mutual growth. Using task-driven approaches, students are required to summarize the key and difficult knowledge from the class and assess their learning outcomes against the teaching objectives.

4.2. The Second Classroom

Led by senior teachers with doctoral degrees and advanced professional titles, writing clubs are established to engage students in various practical writing activities and participate in writing skills competitions. These activities help students gain insights into cutting-edge knowledge in English writing. Teachers guide students in writing practice reports, fostering students' spirit of exploring the unknown, pursuing truth, and perseverance. Students are encouraged to participate in various English writing competitions, using exemplary models from these competitions to inspire other students.

4.3. The Third Classroom

Each semester, students are arranged to teach pupils for one week; therefore, the third classroom refers to the primary school where students do the internship. Students can develop their critical thinking skills during their internship in teaching positions in the following ways:

By analyzing and evaluating educational issues, students can observe and analyze real-life educational issues, such as students' learning conditions and the effectiveness of teaching methods. They can engage in critical thinking to evaluate the causes of these issues, propose potential solutions, and provide suggestions for improvement.

By independent thinking and decision-making, students may encounter various educational decisions, such as selecting appropriate teaching methods or developing lesson plans. They need to apply critical thinking to assess the pros and cons of different options, weigh their advantages and disadvantages, and make rational and effective decisions.

By analyzing educational resources and materials, students can analyze and evaluate various educational resources and materials, including textbooks, teaching materials, educational technology tools, etc. They can use critical thinking to judge the quality and suitability of these resources and select the most appropriate ones to support their teaching practices.

By problem-solving and addressing challenges, students may face various problems and challenges, such as students' learning difficulties or classroom management issues. They can utilize critical thinking to analyze the nature of these problems, explore potential solutions, and take appropriate actions to address the challenges.

By Reflection and improvement, students can enhance their teaching methods and strategies by reflecting on their internship experiences and teaching outcomes. They can apply critical thinking to evaluate their teaching practices, identify areas for improvement, and develop plans to enhance their educational abilities.

Through practical experiences and educational practices in teaching internships, students can continuously exercise and develop their critical thinking skills, improving their abilities in analysis, evaluation, and problem-solving.

4.4. The Fourth Classroom

Students are encouraged to make full use of the intelligent learning platform, Beacon reading platform, and MOOC platform for resource-based learning. Through articles and case studies, students strengthen their political, ideological, and emotional identification with the Party's innovative theories, and firmly establish confidence in the path, system, theory, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

5. Multi-dimensional assessment Contributes Students' Critical Thinking Abilities

5.1. The Assessment Zhuihuishu Education Platform

Zhuihuishu is an online education platform based in China. Zhuihuishu collaborates with educational institutions, universities, and subject experts to create and deliver high-quality educational content. It utilizes advanced technology to enable personalized learning experiences, adaptive assessments, and data-driven feedback for students. The platform also incorporates features like discussion forums, online communities, and social learning to facilitate interaction and collaboration among learners.

Before class, the teachers in the university and internship mentors cooperate and design the course content. Then they upload the teaching materials and related exercises with accurate and detailed answers on Zhuihuishu Platform and set the concrete requirements. Students complete the learning materials Zhuihuishu Platform by themselves. In this process, they need to study at least one hour and finish

corresponding the related tests. Students' doing these can improve their self-study abilities, information retrieval abilities and cross-cultural abilities. This part accounts for 20% their academic performance. The Platform of Zhuihuishu is responsible for the assessment of students' performance.

5.2. Teachers' Assessment

Teachers' assessment accounts for 40 percent of students' academic performance. The assessment mainly includes students' class involvement, class presentation, interaction, assignments and so on.

5.3. Peer Assessment

In the writing class, students are motivated to participate in groups; therefore, peer assessment is employed to check students' abilities of team cooperation and communication, which accounts for 20 percent of students' academic performance.

5.4. Internship Mentors' Assessment

Internship mentor's assessment refers to the assessment from the mentors of Primary schools and junior schools. They collect their students' English compositions in electronic version and college students correct these compositions according to the given standards. Then internship mentors assess college students' correction, which accounts for 20 percent of college students' writing academic achievement.

6. Conclusion

In order to improve students' critical thinking abilities, the English writing course teaching team has implemented a "online teaching + offline teaching, classroom teaching + on-the-job training, professional teachers + school internship mentors" (three-dimensional) approach. The "three-dimensional dual-track" teaching model involves the active participation of both the school and the internship institution, with a focus on future job positions. Through the aforementioned writing course design, English writing classes can serve as an effective platform for cultivating critical thinking skills among teacher candidates. Students will enhance their critical thinking through activities such as reflection, debate, and analysis, enabling them to better apply and impart this skill in their future teaching practices.

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