College English Teaching Based on the Theory of Core Competencies[*]

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The core competencies of college students can influence their further learning, employment, and personal development. This paper explores college English teaching from the three aspects of core competencies: cultural foundation, self-development, and social participation. Adapting to the challenges posed by the new era for the cultivation of foreign language talents, the paper aims to improve students' cultural literacy, independent learning, the ability of problem discovery and problem solving, and critical cultural thinking, so as to make them more competitive in employment and entrepreneurship.

Keywords: core competency, cultural literacy, self-development, social participation

Introduction

The theory of core competencies had been initially put forward by an Englishman and then it was widely discussed all over the world. It has been frequently used in the field of education, and many European and American countries have changed their outdated education methods and started inviting experts from all walks of life to help schools construct core literacy system, with the purpose of facilitating the efficiency of classroom teaching.

In 2006 the European Union proposed the cultivation of core competencies as talents training target in order to implement the "lifelong learning strategy". According to *The Core Competencies for Chinese Students' Development* released on September 13, 2016, core competencies include three aspects: cultural foundation, independent development, and social participation. They are comprehensively manifested as six qualities: humanistic heritage, scientific spirit, learning to learn, healthy life, sense of responsibility, and innovation in practice. To be more specific, it consists of 18 basic points: humanistic accumulation, rational thinking, information awareness, social responsibility, international understanding, technological application, etc. There is a close relationship between core competencies and students' further learning, employment, and personal development. The cultivation of core competencies can enhance students' cultural literacy, helping them better adapt to the social environment, establish good interpersonal relationships with others, and better participate in social activities, and also help them develop self-confidence and self-management abilities, and enhance their individual development potential. This paper intends to explore college English teaching from three aspects: cultural foundation, autonomous development, and social participation, aiming to meet the needs of English learners in the new era.

Cultivating Cultural Literacy in College English Teaching

Extracting and organizing cultural elements from the language materials can help to cultivate students' cultural literacy. It is best for the language teaching to be integrated with the teaching of the culture of English speaking countries, in order to strengthen students' cultural awareness. Many of the contents in the textbooks are related to the culture of European and American countries, including diet, education, ecological environment, tourism, and so on. Teachers can guide students to understand the texts beyond the language level. Teachers first identify the cultural elements from the English language, design teaching questions from the perspective of culture, and help students realize the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and comment on these differences. All these can help students form effective values and improve their aesthetic abilities, thus enabling them to understand diverse cultures. Cultural elements include both the tangible and the intangible aspects. Tangible cultural elements cover various material products and cultural heritage, such as architecture, clothing, food, etc. Intangible cultural elements involve religion, philosophy, science, art, and various ideological concepts, which are often deeply rooted in material culture. The concept of values and the ethical standards are the basis for the behavioral norms and value judgments of people in a certain culture, and they have a significant impact on individual and social behavior. In short, cultural elements encompass a wide range of fields from material to spiritual, from individuals to society, and together they constitute the uniqueness and complexity of a culture.

The cultivation of critical cultural thinking will help to avoid cultural paranoia and discrimination. While learning language, students can explain and evaluate the emotions, attitudes, and values reflected in it. The evaluation of cultural phenomena requires students to have not only logical and critical thinking, but also a sense of community for mankind, along with a correct sense of values and healthy aesthetic tastes. The cultivation of cultural awareness should try to avoid simplification. We should not accept and adore the behavioral patterns, moral thoughts, and sense of values of the target language region without differentiation, and should not deem one culture superior to another. The cultivation of cultural awareness should not stop at the level of perception and memorization of cultural phenomena. Teachers should also guide students to learn to think from different perspectives, to face cultural diversity with a respectful and tolerant attitude, and not to make value judgments hastily. It is important to avoid generalizing cultural phenomena in a biased way, i.e. to give a general brand for the entire group on the basis of specific impressions or ways of thinking while ignoring the observation and judgment on individuals (Gao, 1995, p. 36). Avoiding stereotypes is particularly important in the current trend of anti-globalization, when the discriminatory discourse and behavior are becoming secondary disasters in the post COVID-19 era (Li & Liu, 2021, p. 64). Byram pointed out that not questioning one's own experience and not valuing the experiences of others may lead to biased interpretations on values (Oberste-Berghaus, 2024, p. 9). Language learners may encounter great difficulties when communicating with native English speakers, as they may tend to judge other cultures based on their own value systems in the small world around themselves. They have already formed unshakable beliefs and are prone to ignoring the value of the concepts and norms in the target culture. Overcoming the paranoid beliefs requires educators to consciously strive to create a safe and inclusive learning environment, cultivate students to critically reflect on stereotypes and biased attitudes, and to avoid the narrow cultural centrism. Educators should promote experiential and reflective learning, emphasize the importance of self-awareness and empathy, help students identify, control and manage their emotions, cultivate their ability to handle cultural differences with a respectful attitude, and minimize the possibility of disrespectful behavior.

The Cultivation of Independent Learning Ability and Self-development Among College Students

In students' self-directed learning, the role of a teacher becomes a facilitator, maintaining the learning environment by providing courses, various materials and tools, allowing students to freely use the resources, and continuously monitoring their own progress. Learning facilities should meet the needs of learners to stimulate their interest and motivation. Autonomous learning can allow students to make their learning plans based on academic strengths and personal interests, and monitor their own achievements. In self-directed learning and self-training, what is important is not "learning", but "learning to learn".

Learning strategies are important for the autonomous learning of college students, and strategies for cognitive and meta-cognitive powers, for managing resource and for communication have been proven feasible and effective (Wang & Han, 2020, p. 96). Cognitive strategies refer to the processes and behaviors that learners use to promote their learning or memory abilities, especially the skills to complete specific classroom tasks and activities. Learners need to process and organize information, effectively extracting information from memory. Retelling, summarizing, associative memory, making charts and so on will enhance memory effectiveness and establish an efficient learning mode. Meta-cognitive strategies can enhance students' control over their own learning process, supporting students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning. In the planning phase, learners set their own goals and decide how to achieve them. During the monitoring phase, learners observe and monitor their learning process. During the evaluation phase, learners evaluate learning outcomes after using certain strategies. Learners with good learning plans and process management are more likely to adjust their learning plans and improve the learning process based on actual situations. Therefore, they can overcome the difficulties in online learning, control their behavior, maintain their best learning state, and achieve better grades (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990, p. 35).

Resource strategy is becoming more and more important in the Internet era. With the rapid development of digital technology and the Internet, there are plenty of rich resources on the Internet, and people can easily have access to them. Students who participate in e-learning are more likely to perform better than those who participate in traditional learning, mainly in language education (Khan, Ali, & Alourani, 2022, p. 5). Surrounded by abundant English learning resources, students with learning autonomy will have the awareness to choose appropriate learning materials and organize the necessary information. Therefore, students can select beneficial online resources based on their learning objectives. Teachers should provide well-chosen online resources to create conditions for students to learn independently. Based on the characteristics of the course and the needs of students, teachers can design and enrich course resources, and use teaching platforms to provide electronic texts, videos, recordings, online courses, etc., to create a good online language practice environment for students to learn independently. Teachers can cultivate students' habit to use online resources for self-directed learning efficiently, and according to the requirements of formative assessment of the course, encourage students to use online resources for a large amount of practical training in listening (online audio materials), speaking (recordings), reading (online reading), and writing (online communication).

Communication strategy refers to learning interaction, which can not only help to solve the learning problems, but also plays an irreplaceable role in the emotional development of learners. Collaborative learning mode can potentially help learners develop higher-level thinking patterns during the learning process. Relative studies have confirmed a significant correlation between learning interaction and online learning performance

(Hrastinski, 2009, p. 78), and learning interaction plays an important role in improving online learning performance. Interactive self-directed learning mode can enhance students' willingness and resilience to learn. The interactive self-directed learning model can help students establish learning goals and effectively achieve them through goal-orientation and self-monitoring. This kind of learning can also enhance students' psychological resilience and ability to cope with stress, providing personalized learning ways and collaborative learning opportunities, thereby enhancing their teamwork and interpersonal communication abilities.

In summary, the interactive self-directed learning model can promote students' learning resilience and efficiency from multiple perspectives, which can effectively improve their learning outcomes and accelerate their enthusiasm for continuous learning and personal growth.

Cultivation of the Ability and Awareness of Social Participation

The activities for social participation of college students can cultivate their abilities of independent thinking, problem discovery, and problem solving in the real social environment, making them more competitive in employment and entrepreneurship. In addition to graduation internships, forms of social participation include the establishment and strengthening of practice courses, the development of second classroom teaching, etc.

We should combine on-campus practice with off-campus practice to enrich the content of practice teaching, establish and strengthen practice courses, such as vocational English proficiency training, translation and communication courses, etc. Firstly, we will update the content of the courses by putting some real cases from enterprises into the courses, regularly evaluating and renewing course content to ensure that it is synchronized with industry needs. We will introduce the latest industry knowledge and skills to cultivate students' ability to cope with the changes and challenges. In teaching, students can be first required to conduct simulation practice based on actual situations, such as simulated on-site interpretation, simulated English tour guide, simulated English teaching or other practices, and then go to the actual workplace to carry out operation. For example, in the forms of pictures, text, animations, or videos teachers can present the real-life scenes encountered by tour guides, and then divide students into groups to engage in real dialogue in English. Later teachers can act as foreign tourists and ask various questions related to the culture of scenic spots, encouraging students to answer them. Finally, teachers provide answers. The teaching method of using multimedia to simulate real scenes can not only increase students' perceptual knowledge and stimulate their learning interest, but also enable students to communicate proficiently in English, which will help to lay a solid foundation for their future work.

The form of the second-classroom activities should be colorful and diversified to meet the interests and needs of different students. Educators can organize various social practice activities for students, such as volunteer translation services, English competitions, cultural festivals of English-speaking countries, producing English radio programs, or recording English videos, etc., to enrich students' knowledge, and cultivate their sense of social responsibility and practical abilities. These activities are the supplements and extensions to the formal classroom teaching, providing them with a better language environment and more language practice opportunities, and enhancing their interest in learning English. Before making an English video, firstly students can write down the content of a selected topic in English, and they can do it individually or in small groups. The topics for the video can be rich and diverse, including university life, tourist attractions, local customs, history and culture, etc. After the repeated oral practice and the familiarization of the content, students can go to the real location for video recording. For the cultural festivals of English-speaking countries, rich cultural products from different countries can be displayed, and it is an opportunity to exercise students' organizational and management skills,

and provide a micro window for them to know more about the cultures of various countries around the world. This activity can be organized by some classes, with each class representing one English speaking country. Each booth can prepare the representative cuisines, cultural products, and cultural performances of a certain country, allowing students to experience the unique cultures of different countries. Students are encouraged to participate in competitions and projects, and by focusing on the breakthroughs in key points and overcoming difficulties, students can develop their ability to discover and solve problems, enhance their teamwork and self-learning abilities, and facilitate their overall development level. It has been proven that students who have participated in competitions and projects have higher competitiveness in job market than other students.

Conclusion

From the exploration of college English teaching based on the theory of core competencies, we can see that teachers are recommended to pay attention to sorting out the cultural elements embedded in language in our teaching, and cultivate students to develop their critical cultural thinking, to respect cultural differences, and avoid narrow cultural centrism and stereotypes. The application of cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, resource strategies, and communication strategies can effectively enhance the autonomous learning ability of college students and their potential for self-development. To improve the core competences of college students, teachers are recommended to strengthen the cultivation of students' awareness and ability to participate in the society, by combining on-campus practice with off-campus practice, enriching the second-classroom activities, updating the content in practice teaching, etc. Thus, students can strengthen their ability to discover and solve problems, and become more competitive in employment and entrepreneurship.

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