

Practice of Production-Oriented Approach on the Cultivation of Critical Thinking Ability of College English Learners

Pu Zhao¹

¹*School of Foreign Languages, Northeast Petroleum University, Daqing, Heilongjiang 163318, China*

**Corresponding author. Email: PuZhao@nepu.edu.cn*

ABSTRACT

The development of critical thinking is an essential task of the education system. However, it turns out that a number of teachers are not competent enough in this area. The purpose of this study was to identify the impact of the practice of Product-Oriented Approach (POA) on cultivating college English learners' critical thinking ability. The essence of POA is to accurately understand "output scenario guidance" and "input driven output", and teaching links design according to output objectives. The characteristics of POA are objectives production, scenario setting, teacher's role and teaching procedure. It turns out that learners' feedback is positive after the teaching implementation.

Keywords: *critical thinking ability, Product-Oriented Approach, college English learners*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, many countries have taken critical thinking ability as one of the training objectives of higher education. In China, the focus on critical thinking began in 1998. Since then, scholars have been participating in relevant researches. In the field of higher education, whether English majors or non-English majors, the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability is clearly stated in the syllabus. However, as far as the current college English teaching is concerned, we still pay too much attention to the characteristics of College English as a tool, overemphasize the cultivation of students' language skills, and ignore the characteristics of College English as a humanities discipline of "extensive understanding of various ideas, creative thinking and fluid expression". Foreign language curriculum should not only achieve the instrumental goal of improving students' comprehensive ability to use English, but also achieve the humanistic goal of higher education, such as improving students' critical thinking ability, autonomous learning ability and comprehensive cultural literacy (Department of Higher Education, Ministry of education, 2007).

2. OVERVIEW OF CRITICAL THINKING ABILITY

Critical thinking ability refers to an individual's ability to use appropriate evaluation criteria with conscious thinking in order to determine the real value of something, and finally make a reasonable judgment [1]. The ability of thinking is the ability of thinking and analysis. The so-called thinking encompasses thinking activities such as analysis, reasoning and judgment; the so-called discrimination refers to the discrimination and analysis of the situation, category and reason of things. First of all, critical ability is an abstract thinking ability. It includes critical personality disposition and critical skills, which is the basis of innovation ability.

The research on critical thinking ability at home and abroad has formed a certain accumulation, which is manifested in the coexistence of several theoretical frameworks. There are four modes of thinking that have far-reaching implications. At abroad, In the two-dimensional structure model (Delphi project team) [2], the critical thinking ability should not only be limited to the level of "critical thinking skills" or "cognitive ability", but also cover seven dimensions of "emotional traits", such as openness, maturity and so on. In Paul & elder, the critical thinking ability includes not only 8 "thinking elements", such as purpose, information, reasoning, etc., but also 10 "thinking standards" to test

thinking elements, such as motivation, breadth and depth, etc., as well as 8 “intelligence characteristics” to develop with the development of individual thinking ability, such as independence, compassion and justice.

In domestic area, Wen Qiufang and Wang Jianqing [3] draw lessons from the above models and integrate a hierarchical model in line with China’s foreign language education, which subdivides the critical thinking into two levels: meta critical thinking and critical thinking. The first level is meta speculation, which refers to the skills of planning, checking, adjusting and evaluating one’s own speculation. The second level is the speculative power composed of cognitive and emotional elements. Among them, “Cognition” includes three core skills: “analysis, reasoning, evaluation” and five standards. There are five emotional traits, including curiosity, openness, self-confidence, integrity and perseverance. The author favours Wen’s model and applies it to the teaching implementation.

Table 1 The hierarchy theory model of critical thinking ability

Meta critical ability (self-control ability) — the first level		
Critical thinking ability—the second level		
Cognition		Affection
Skills	Skills	Curiosity, Openness, Confidence, Integrity, Perseverance
Analysis, Reasoning, Evaluation	Clarity, Relevance, Logic, Depth, Flexibility	

3. PROBLEMS IN THE CULTIVATION OF CRITICAL THINKING ABILITY IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

3.1. Outdated Teaching Ideas

Many college English teachers are still bound by the traditional exam oriented education concept in their normal teaching, and they do not correctly position their roles with students, and they do not realize that students are the main body of learning activities, and they are only the organizers of the classroom. Because of this, they may have a wrong understanding of students’ actual learning needs, and they just blindly explain theoretical knowledge.

3.2. Paying More Attention to Language than Content

For a long time, the cultivation of comprehensive application ability of English has been overemphasized in College English teaching, and even many colleges and universities combine the quality of College English teaching with the passing rate of CET-4 and CET-6. Therefore, the first concern of students in College English

learning is how to get good results in exams. In daily teaching, students can't write compositions, so they have to recite templates to meet the test requirements. If their reading ability is not high, they teach some reading skills to apply and guess to improve their grades. If the classroom atmosphere is not active, some entertainment materials are introduced into the classroom. The misconception “language over content and imitation over creation”, makes the focus of teaching simply stay in the acquisition of language knowledge and skills, and the focus of students' learning only stay in the level of memorization and simple understanding, which can easily lead to students' closed thinking, narrow vision, lack of comprehensive judgment and reasoning ability, and the language is deficient in simplicity, logicity and accuracy.

3.3. Single College English Curriculum

It is crucial to cultivate students' critical thinking ability through the effective interaction between compulsory courses and elective courses. At present, the College English curriculum system is mainly based on general English knowledge, which is set up in the freshmen and sophomores. In the curriculum system, the interdisciplinary and personalized curriculum has not been given due attention, or are not enough, the quality is not high. The systematic College English curriculum system need improving and the complementarity and integration of College English courses are not well integrated.

3.4. No Reflection of Critical Thinking Ability in Assessment

In the evaluation system of College English teaching, standardized examination still occupies the dominant position. “The whole foreign language teaching seems to be narrower and narrower, more and more knowledgeable, more and more standardized, more and more examinational. The richness of students' mind is also weakened in this process, and their curiosity, sensitivity and desire to explore the unknown are degenerated. This evaluation system completely ignores the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability, students' curiosity and exploration spirit are not encouraged, which leads to students’ low interest in learning, unable to think, lack of stamina and improvement.

Therefore, what is an urgent problem to solve is how to build an effective mode of thinking guidance, a reasonable teaching process, a variety of assessment models, and integrate the cultivation of critical thinking ability into language knowledge learning, so as to improve the effect of language learning from a higher level.

4. PRODUCT-ORIENTED APPROACH

With the great efforts of the Product-Oriented Approach research group guided by Professor Wen Qiufang [4] [5] [6], POA theory has been constantly optimized and practice has matured in recent years. Figure 1 shows the three parts of POA theoretical system and their relationship. Among them, “teaching idea” is the guiding ideology of the other two parts; “teaching hypothesis” is the theoretical support of “teaching procedure”; and “teaching procedure” is the way to realize “teaching idea” and “teaching hypothesis”. At the same time, the intermediary role of teachers is reflected in each link of “teaching procedure”.

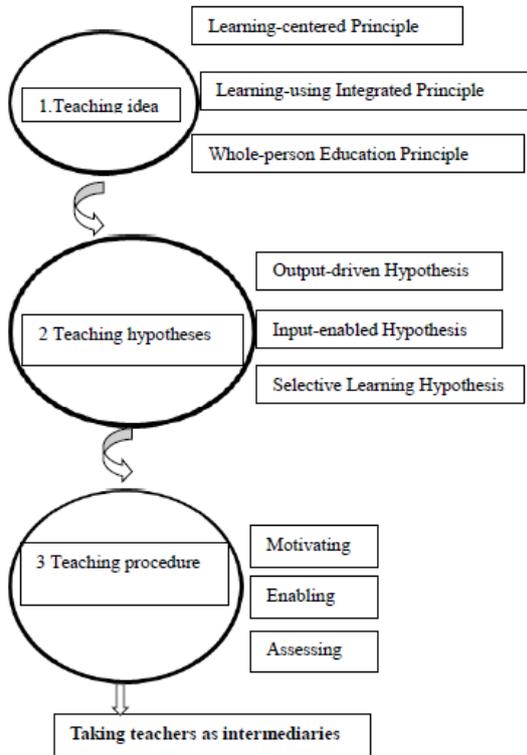


Figure 1 the Framework of POA [6]

“Learning-Centered Principle” advocates that teaching must achieve teaching objectives and promote effective learning. When designing every teaching link or task, POA pays attention to what students can learn. It means whether the teaching objectives is achieved in each class. In “Learning-using Integrated Principle”, the purpose of learning is to use. The integration of learning and using is input first, then output, and completed synchronously in the classroom. “Whole-person Education Principle” means that education should take into account human intelligence, emotion, morality and other aspects in order to serve human’s all-round development. Meanwhile, it embodies the humanistic goal of Higher Education: to improve students’ critical thinking ability.

“Output-driven Hypothesis” advocates that output is not only the driving force of language learning, but also the goal of language learning. Output learning can stimulate students’ learning desire and enthusiasm more than input learning, and achieve better learning effect. “Input-enabled Hypothesis” indicates that providing appropriate input can promote output in time and achieve better learning effect. Selective leaning Hypothesis refers to selecting useful parts from input materials for deep processing, practice and memory according to the needs of output.

POA procedure covers three phases: 1) motivating; 2) enabling; 3) assessing, in which the teacher must take the intermediary role whose function lies in guide, design and scaffolding etc.

5. TEACHING IMPLEMENTATION

The POA instruction presented in this paper was conducted in the year 2020 in my course “New Horizon College English”, in one of the universities of Science and Engineering in Heilongjiang Province. Among the freshmen, 61 students, 35 were boys, and 26 were girls. Before registering the course, the students take part in the English proficiency test, which is divided into three grades: A, B and C according to their English scores. The author teaches students in Class A. The following part is the practice of POA. The discussion topic is “Speech freedom cannot touch the moral bottom line.”

Table 2 Teaching content

Teaching Procedure	Contents
Motivating	1. Communication scenario Presentation 2. Production attempt 3. Teaching objectives
Enabling	1. Language: insulting words test-oriented education discriminate; patriot Ways: teacher’s explanation; diversified exercises 2. Content: speech freedom moral bottom line loss of morality patriotic education Ways: information arrangement; topic discussion reading materials driven by questions and exercises 3. Structure: articulate a clear position; prove your viewpoints Ways: essay demonstration; structure extraction; imitation
Assessing	1. Students assessment standards: teachers’ explanation 2. Tasks completion by students: writing an essay or making a statement in class 3. Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment: before class, in class, after class

In the three phases of “Motivating”, “Enabling” and “Assessing”, students can achieve the common development of critical thinking, emotion and cognitive skills, and their meta thinking can be improved

simultaneously. The teaching effect is relatively satisfactory. Follow the “step by step” process design, the students complete the less difficult cognitive language exercises, and then gradually experience transition to the more difficult cognitive language exercises. The previous exercises pave the way for the later exercises, and the students improve little by little until they complete the final output task.

6. CONCLUSION

POA is a great challenge to teachers’ personal quality and classroom control. The teaching method of student-centered classroom and participatory learning needs teachers’ full guidance. Educators make students realize that language is not only the superposition of words, but also the deeper meaning behind it. Then, through the analysis of examples, they guide students to develop their critical ability. Finally, our college students will grow into qualified builders and successors who can think independently and have strong awareness of judgement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported by Northeast Petroleum University Innovation Fund for Art, Physical Education & Foreign language majors (2020YTW-W-07).

REFERENCES

- [1] Pau, R.& L. Elder. *Critical Thinking: Learn the Tools the Best Thinkers Use*. New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006.
- [2] American Philosophical Association. *The Delphi Report Executive Summary: Research Findings and Recommendations Prepared for the Committee on Pre college Philosophy*. ERIC. Doc.No.ED 315423, 1990.
- [3] Wen, Q. F, Wang, J. Q. Constructing the theoretical framework of the measuring instrument for the critical thinking ability of foreign language majors in China *Foreign Language World*, (1), 2009, pp. 35-43.
- [4] Wen, Q. F. On the output-driven hypothesis and reform of English-skill courses for English majors. *Foreign Language World*, (2), 2008, pp. 2-9.
- [5] Wen, Q. F. Application of the output-driven hypothesis in college English teaching: Reflections and suggestions. *Foreign Language World*, (6), 2013, pp. 14-22.
- [6] Wen, Q. F. Developing a theoretical framework of production-oriented approach in language teaching. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, (4), 2015, pp. 547-558.