

# The Solutions to “Absence of Critical Thinking” For Non English Majors’ Students

Qinning Wu

*Nanchang Institute of Science of Technology*  
Nanchang, China, 330108  
270835187@qq.com

**Abstract**—This paper focuses on how to overcome the "absence of critical thinking" from the micro-perspective of classroom teaching, teachers and students. fine-tunes the thinking and teaching practice of "teaching and learning" in the teaching environment in order to cultivate students' ability of thinking when the general trend of the Ministry of Education and the teaching syllabus are difficult to change. Europe and America attach great importance to the cultivation of students'critical thinking, and China attaches great importance to the cultivation of comprehensive and innovative talents. Therefore, the cultivation of students' critical thinking becomes particularly important. Critical thinking education can improve the ability of educatees to analyze problems, solve problems and innovate. This paper expounds the strategies of cultivating students'critical thinking and observes such cultivation by means of comparison. From the result, although the students who have consciously trained have more critical thinking characteristics than the students who have not trained, the research is still on the way after that.

**Keywords**—*absence of critical thinking, teaching and learning, thinking ability*

## I. INTRODUCTION

"Absence of speculation" is a common problem among Chinese College students. It mainly manifests itself in the lack of critical thinking abilities, such as listening to lectures without asking questions, back-to-back speeches, illogical composition, lack of discussion center, lack of fluency in thinking, and excessive haste in expression, which ultimately leads to the failure to train qualified innovative talents, and at the same time, which restrict the future development of the country and the nation. However, these studies pay too much attention to the macro-analysis and suggestions from the aspects of curriculum modification, curriculum standard revision, textbook compilation, improvement of teaching methods, teacher training, etc., or in some areas such as writing, literature, graduate students and other application areas, which results in the research too wide to the operability or too narrow to its external validity.

From the micro-perspective of classroom teaching, inside and outside the classroom, teachers and students, this paper explores the thinking and methods of overcoming the "speculative absence" and cultivates students' speculative ability by fine-tuning the thinking and teaching practice of "teaching and learning" in the small environment under the circumstances that the national policy and curriculum are difficult to change.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF "CRITICAL THINKING SKILL"

The term "critical thinking skills" comes from two Greek words: *kriticos* (meaning "the ability to improve, understand, analyze and judge") and *kriterion* (meaning "standard"), which are often translated as "critical thinking skills" in China. At present, the definition of critical thinking skill is not entirely unified, but it is generally believed that critical thinking skill includes a series of typical cognitive skills, and a series of affective dispositions. Thinking ability can make students question input from a broader perspective, and make divergent analysis and judgment, so as to get their own opinions.

Critical thinking, as a purposeful and self-regulated judgment, has always been the cornerstone and goal of western higher education. It is also of great theoretical and practical significance to the comprehensive development of the ability and personality of Chinese college students and the reform of Chinese University education. After a questionnaire survey on critical thinking ability of 87 non-English majors in a key university in Beijing, the data obtained are analyzed. The results show that the students do not have positive critical thinking ability. The neglect of critical thinking in China's education system, the lack of special training of critical thinking for university teachers and the traditional Chinese cultural thought can explain to some extent the reasons for this lack of critical thinking ability.

Nowadays, with the increasing internationalization and deepening specialization, college students are facing challenges in logic, cognition, thinking and strategy. This situation is especially severe for English majors. This is certainly due to the influence of social and economic development and change. However, many experts and scholars also point out that English majors have critical thinking. The deficiency is one of the important reasons leading to the bottleneck of its development. In view of this problem, this paper intends to start with the current situation of critical thinking of English majors, analyze the reasons behind it, and put forward corresponding suggestions and measures to improve the thinking ability of English majors and broaden their development prospects.

Teachers'personal critical thinking ability and consciousness are insufficient. Our educational traditions and teaching ideas pay more attention to the indoctrination, accumulation and inheritance of knowledge, which leads to a considerable number of teachers'inadequate understanding of the importance of improving students' critical thinking ability, unclear understanding of the concept of thinking and its connotation, and lack of ideas and skills to integrate critical thinking activities and contents

into the classroom. Due to the emphasis on students' respect for knowledge and authority and the lack of equal communication between teachers and students, students' doubts and opinions are not given enough attention. In addition, the current education system makes many teachers reluctant to design and interpret teaching creatively because of the task and pressure of teaching and scientific research.

In terms of students, the lack of language ability has greatly restricted the development of critical thinking ability. Although the popularization of English education has made great achievements in the past 40 years. Then, English is always the foreign language of students. In a country where English is a foreign language, students' mastery of English is never comparable to that of their mother tongue. This leads to the fact that students' English level is usually lower than their thinking level. In order to accommodate students' language competence, whether teachers teach or compile textbooks, they tend to design materials and tasks that are lower than students' thinking ability, thus inhibiting the further development of students' critical thinking ability. As the English major's skill training course has long focused on the communicative function rather than the cognitive function of English, the selection of teaching materials usually focuses on the words and situations in oral life, and the purpose of teaching is to use English to accomplish communicative tasks. Therefore, students' cognitive ability has not been effectively trained for a long time, which leads to the stagnation of cognitive ability and even the failure of cognitive ability. Degeneration.

As far as curriculum design is concerned, although the importance of critical thinking has been clearly emphasized as early as 2000 in the Syllabus of English Teaching for English Majors in Colleges and Universities, it still focuses on the training of input skills, lacks the analysis of students' needs and social needs, and neglects the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability. According to the current syllabus, English majors spend nearly 70% of their classes on language skills training, focusing on vocabulary expansion, grammatical rules and appropriate language expression. Due to the small amount of information and low knowledge content of the courses, the issues discussed remain at the level of oral life and general knowledge, while about one third of the professional knowledge courses and language expression. Relevant professional knowledge courses are also courses of linguistic knowledge, cultural generalization and literary appreciation with low speculative content (Li Liwen, 2010), which greatly limits the development of critical thinking ability in foreign language learning.

Secondly, the learning methods of English professional skills courses constitute obstacles to the development of thinking ability. We know that language learning process can not be separated from imitation, memory, repetition and other practice links, which makes students' thinking activities in a state of low-level depression. Once such thinking habits are developed, it will greatly hinder the cultivation of high-level thinking abilities such as analysis, reasoning, evaluation and so on. Two scholars, Wen Qiufang and Zhou Yan (2006:79), also made a very penetrating analysis on this issue: "When foreign language majors enter the university, they rely more on memory, imitation, recitation and retelling in their learning process, and seldom engage in complex and challenging thinking activities. Therefore, their thinking ability has been depressed for a long time, which makes it impossible to get enough. Training and development."

At the same time, in the teaching mode, although many teachers know that teaching should be student-centered, in fact, there are not many teachers who do so. In teaching, the status of students' learning subject has not been fully valued. Traditional teaching mode restricts the development of students' subjective critical thinking. Teachers in teaching form students' habit of thinking mainly by seeking common ground. This kind of educational and teaching environment depresses the initiative and critical spirit of the educatee's subjective thinking. This is particularly evident in English classroom. The emphasis of teaching is on the explanation of language points and the practice of language skills. It is easy to ignore the needs and personalities of students, and pay little attention to improving students' ability of independent thinking, analysis and judgment. This kind of teaching mode makes the thinking development of foreign language majors in disadvantageous conditions and environment from the beginning of their enrollment.

### III. RELATED RESEARCH SUMMARY AT HOME AND ABROAD

As a rich and changing concept, critical thinking can be traced back to Socrates. His "maieutics" teaching has always been regarded as a model of critical thinking teaching. From the Middle Ages to the 20th century, many scientists and thinkers have expounded and demonstrated the importance of critical thinking in their respective ideological systems, thus enriching the research of critical thinking. At the same time, researchers have also defined critical thinking in terms of logic, psychology and pedagogy.

The study of critical thinking in western countries has already been at the forefront, and there are many kinds of research results. In the 1950s, Benjamin Bloom, a famous American educational psychologist, proposed a far-reaching taxonomy of educational goals. He divides educational goals into emotional goal, motor skills goal and cognitive goal. The main goal of university education should be the cultivation of cognitive ability at the third level. Lorin Anderson (1990) improved the former theory and proposed a six-level model (Fig.1):

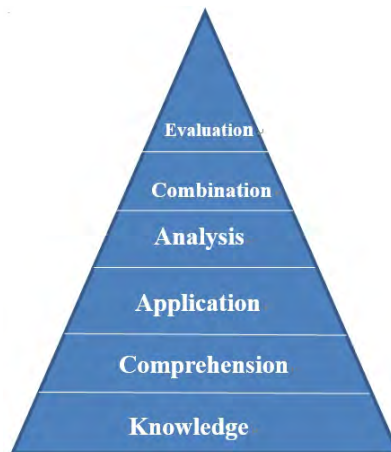


Fig.1. Bloom-Anderson Cognitive Model Classification Map

The research on critical thinking in China started in the 1980s, and the relevant experts also put forward a series of valuable theoretical and practical foundations.

For example, Professor Huang Yuanshen first put forward the concept of "absence of critical thinking" in 1998. The critical thinking skill of college students has been paid more and more attention. The problems exposed by the phenomenon of lack of critical thinking of college students are becoming more and more common and serious. Many scholars have analyzed the causes of "absence of critical thinking" from different perspectives, and put forward corresponding suggestions and solutions for improvement.

Looking at the current situation of College English teaching, we will find that educators have been advocating language skills in the past few years, while listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation skills are still at the level of "memorization" and "understanding". Few teaching contents enable students to jump out of the framework of knowledge learning and enter a higher level of ability accumulation. The highest expression of critical thinking skill is human's ability to analyze and criticize a pair of objects and creativity, not just the mastery of a certain skill. Therefore, the essence of the current English teaching and cultivating the ability of thinking is contrary.

In the field of education, Dewey, who systematically studied critical thinking earlier, called critical thinking reflective thinking. After several reforms in oral English teaching for non-English majors in China, great progress has been made in students' expressive ability, pronunciation, intonation and listening ability. However, little attention has been paid to the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability, which leads to obvious problems such as narrow content and confused logic when they communicate or express their opinions. According to the oral English teaching situation of non-English majors in the teaching school, this paper puts forward a training plan to improve students' critical thinking ability from three aspects: language input, information processing and language output.

#### IV. AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION OF ENGLISH TEACHING

In the analysis of the causes of the absence of speculation, most researchers first analyzed the internal laws of the discipline itself, believing that foreign language learning requires a lot of recitation and memory, while improving memory, its speculative ability is therefore abandoned. The reason does exist, but Wen Qiufang and others show that the phenomenon of "absence of speculation" exists not only in the field of foreign languages, but also in Chinese students.

Therefore, we can't just look for the rules of foreign language learning. Non-foreign language majors have the same problems. However, compared with Chinese students, the western students seldom lack this kind of "speculation". So scholars turn to the study of the influence of the gap between Chinese and Western history and culture on "speculative absence". They think that the traditional Chinese culture has not paid much attention to the cultivation of speculative ability since ancient times. The educational outlook that binds our whole society directly leads to the absence of speculation, while the West has always emphasized the cultivation of speculative and logical abilities.

The author is a teacher to the basic course of college English teacher. In 2013, the school started to carry out a comprehensive teaching reform in response to the call of the Ministry of Education. In the course of nearly four years' reform, the author believes that the process of teaching reform implementation, like the formation and develop QAASent of skills, must go through four stages, namely, the embryonic stage → high-speed development stage (introduction) → the recession stage → the recovery stage → the high-speed development stage (maturity).

Throughout the past four years of teaching reform in the school, we have made great innovations in classroom design, textbook selection, training mode and many other aspects. However, the performance in cultivating students' thinking ability is not satisfactory. However, as a qualified modern undergraduate, knowledge is not enough. More importantly, it is necessary to have the ability to discover, analyze and solve problems, as well as the ability to criticize and innovate. Therefore, the cultivation and development of students' critical thinking ability has become the top priority of the new round of teaching

reform in Colleges and Universities throughout the country. At present, the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability mostly starts from the teacher's point of view, and seldom takes into account the students' autonomy. The author has done a survey on students, when asked what is the students' speculative ability? What is the importance of speculative ability and the relationship between speculation and language? Most of the students' answers to these questions are ambiguous and vague. They don't even know why to cultivate people's thinking ability. So, how can students who have no knowledge of speculative ability use it? This is even more impossible to talk about. Therefore, to cultivate and strengthen students' thinking ability, the first task is to make students have the consciousness of thinking ability, and the second is how to cultivate it.

A standard pronunciation and intonation, English basic knowledge of non-English majors, when communicating with others or stating their views, but there are some problems such as empty and narrow content, language repetition, logical confusion and so on. Language and thinking are inseparable, and they promote and influence each other. Our oral English teaching for non-English majors should be free from the simple training of language skills. We should attach importance to students' language skills as well as their thinking ability, especially the cultivation of critical thinking ability. Compared with other subjects, the instantaneity and communicative features of oral expression have higher requirements on learners' critical thinking ability.

The author believes that the cultivation of speculative ability should be based on the following points:

#### *1. Developing heuristic questions for students*

In teaching, teachers should encourage students to express their opinions more, and give timely and accurate evaluation and feedback to students' performance, so that students are willing to express their opinions, so as to expand their thinking space. For example, when the author teaches Food and Drink, Unit 3 of Let's Talk, the students are taken as groups, and each of them comes up with a most representative home cuisine to translate into English, and look for other translations on the Internet. Then the author leads students to discuss and elaborate which translation method is better. And why? Students can express their opinions in the course of discussion, and the classroom atmosphere is very warm. In this way, under the influence of positive emotional factors, students' English language skills and critical thinking ability can be trained.

#### *2. Content-oriented, combined with subject learning and language learning*

In classroom teaching, teaching content is the dominant way to learn foreign languages. Language is only used as a learning tool to acquire content. Meanwhile, through learning teaching content, language skills and speculative abilities can be improved to complement each other. Through content-oriented teaching, students' ability of analysis and judgment as well as innovative ability can be exercised by combining speculative ability with subject knowledge, so as to achieve the goal of common progress of subject knowledge and language ability.

#### *3. Strengthen self-regulated learning and emphasize individualized learning*

Independent learning is essentially a way to cultivate students' self-mastery of learning content, learning progress, good learning habits and improve learning ability. Students with strong autonomous learning ability have independent thinking, decision-making and action ability in some ways. Knowledge indoctrination is not the purpose of learning, so that students have a good ability to learn independently in order to benefit students for life.

#### *4. Innovation of evaluation methods*

Curriculum evaluation is an extremely important part of teaching work, and also a key way to test the teaching effect of teachers and students' learning level. Since the focus of our teaching is to cultivate students' critical thinking ability, the evaluation methods should also have corresponding tendencies: a) the evaluation forms should be diversified, and attention should be paid to subjective tests, such as group discussion, performance, demonstration, etc.; b) clear test purposes, focusing on testing students' critical thinking ability; c) formative evaluation mechanism should be adopted.

### V. CONCLUSION

Experts and scholars analyze the reasons and propose solutions from a macro perspective, which has academic value and guiding significance. This paper aims to improve and treat "speculative absence" from a micro perspective, especially classroom thinking and activities. To sum up, speculative ability is a person's comprehensive ability to deal with problems, compared with a single knowledge of learning, cultivating speculative ability is more important. However, the cultivation of speculative ability is not an overnight task. It must be cultivated slowly in daily life. Teachers should infiltrate into the ordinary teaching process, and combine various effective teaching methods and means to gradually improve students' speculative ability.

The development and progress in the field of education have made remarkable achievements in the teaching of various subjects, both in teaching concepts and teaching methods. As an important teaching subject in education, English teaching plays a very important role in the cultivation of students' knowledge, thinking and other aspects. Especially in recent years, the cultivation of critical thinking for non-English majors is particularly prominent.

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