

Construction of English Competence Model for College Students in Context of New Liberal Arts

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Abstract

This paper aims to construct a comprehensive model of English competence of college students in the light of new liberal arts, from perspective of culture, language and mindset. This integration of the three aspects are to be expected to facilitate the development of core capabilities for college English learners in terms of value guide, academic qualification and advanced critical thinking. The ultimate goal is to provide an practical reference for talents cultivation in context of new liberal arts, who can be qualified as the inheritors of Chinese culture, the advocate of Chinese voice, and the pioneers of China's future.

Keywords

English Competence; Model; College English Learner; New Liberal Arts.

1. Introduction

On November 3rd, 2020, the Director of the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education delivered a keynote report on "Planning and Building Momentum, Understanding and Adapting to Change - Comprehensively Promoting the Construction of New liberal arts" at the New Liberal Arts Work Conference. The report emphasizes that liberal arts education is the main battlefield, the main position and the main channel for cultivating self-confidence, pride and autonomy, producing influence, charisma and shaping force, and ultimately forming the national cultural consciousness. The fundamental task of the construction of new liberal arts is to cultivate new talents of the new era and for the new ear while the fundamental requirement is to achieve a leading value. In other words, the construction of new liberal arts actually focuses on the quality of talent training and cultivation. Taking this as the starting point, this paper makes an innovative research on the construction of English competence of college students.

The Ministry of Education's University Language Teaching Guide (2020) on students' English ability requires that it is essential to cultivate students' English application ability, enhance cross-cultural communication awareness and communication ability, develop independent learning ability, improve comprehensive cultural literacy, and be able to effectively use English in study, life, social communication and future work, with the ultimate goal of meeting national, social, school and individual development needs.

In the context of the new liberal arts construction, the problems faced by the training of students' English competence demonstrate themselves. On the macro level, there is still a certain gap between the demand-oriented guidance and the initiative to serve the national strategic development needs in the new era; on the micro level, the effect students' core quality and ability based on university characteristics seems not quite obvious, and there is still a certain gap with school-based characteristics; in depth, the cultivation model of critical thinking ability needs to be further explored and improved in view of students' replicate cognition of knowledge and skills.

In this light, college English teaching should take the construction of new liberal arts as an opportunity, in order to build students' English competence and construct the model from three aspects of culture, language and thinking. The main purpose of this design is to more clearly serve the strategic needs of Chinese culture becoming global, highlight the characteristics of the university by integration into the academic discipline, and strengthen the communication power and discourse ability. In addition, it focuses more on the critical abilities of students' growth and development, namely the critical qualities and cognitive skills. By strengthening value guidance, enhancing academic connotation, and tempering high-level thinking, we will drive the overall realization of the systematic goal of competence improvement, implement the fundamental mission of cultivating people by virtue, and ultimately foster the inheritors of Chinese culture, the advocate of Chinese voice, and the pioneers of China's future.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Research on the Construction of Chinese Cultural Transmission Capacity

The Guidelines for Ideological and Political Construction of Curriculum in Colleges and Universities clearly point out that students should be guided to deeply understand the core socialist values, and consciously carry forward the excellent traditional Chinese culture, revolutionary culture, and advanced socialist culture. It is proposed by the country that enhancing the communication power and influence of Chinese civilization is an urgent need to lift up China's international discourse power. It is also an inevitable requirement for exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations to promote the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. According to the characteristics of English courses in our university, this paper is to construct students' Chinese culture transmission ability from two aspects, namely cultural extraction and cultural communication. The students are to be enabled to tell Chinese stories well in English, advocate Chinese voices well, and gives full play to the cultural connotation and educational function of college foreign languages.

2.1.1. Refining of the Excellent Culture of China and the World

In the process of foreign language acquisition, the fine culture of China and the world is supposed to be profoundly understood, which lays a solid foundation for mutual learning among civilizations. Strengthening of the excellent cultural knowledge of China and the world facilitates the cultivation of an international perspective and understanding of diverse cultures as well as achieving cultural confidence. Whether students can extract and refine the valuable ideas, humanistic spirit and moral norms contained in the excellent Chinese culture in the process of English learning is a necessary prerequisite for sticking to the stand of Chinese culture and strengthening of Chinese cultural confidence; whether students can appreciate the cultural similarities and differences in the world, respect the cultural diversity of the world, and gain cross-cultural understanding between Chinese and foreign civilizations is an important basis for carrying out exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and foreign civilizations and cultivating the awareness of a community with a shared future for mankind.

2.1.2. Interpretation of Chinese Excellent Culture

In the process of foreign language acquisition of English, we should always stick to the position and stand of Chinese culture should be always and firmly adhered to, so that the Chinese stories are to be told well in English. For a long time, the misunderstanding between China and the West, to a certain extent, stems from the huge differences of the Chinese and Western cultures in concept of values and world outlook. Strengthening the transmission power of Chinese civilization serves as an important way for the international community to have a deeper understanding of China and the Chinese nation, and it also help form a solid right for international discourse via accelerating the construction of Chinese discourse and Chinese

narrative system. In the process of English learning, students should be trained to be able to tell Chinese civilization in a way that is easy to understand and accept, explain China's positioning and relations with the world; they are also to be trained to be able to tell Chinese stories, especially in an excellent and explicit way. This is to secure the purpose of letting the world see China and understand China, by exerting influence, appeal and shaping power. It is an important mission and goal for students to avoid aphasia of Chinese cultural transmission by learning English.

2.2. Research on English Competence Construction based on Academic Application

Based on the career needs of college students, this paper identifies the cultivation of academic English capability as the entry point in language application, for the sake of English language serving specialty learning. Academic English, as a branch of English for Special Purpose, is designed to "help foreign language learners to study and research in professional fields"[1]. This kind of interdisciplinary, academic and extended language learning can effectively improve students' ability in respect of academic writing and translation, professional materials reading, picture illustration and literature review. This helps students master their own argumentation methods, research procedures and value judgments of professional disciplines from the perspective of foreign languages. It aims to further improve the future professional qualification for future career for college students, enhance the efficiency of specialty study via English learning, giving full play to the practical role of foreign language ability in professional fields.

2.2.1. Academic Discourse Ability

Academic discourse ability, as the core of academic language output, is to accurately convey the information expressed in academic papers and documents. It not only includes the correct use of technical terms, but also covers the ability to organize and express ideas, opinions and research results. That is to say, it is expected to enable students to express their academic views clearly via sound arguments and logical reasoning to support academic ideas. In fact, this academic discourse ability proves to be a power of persuasiveness of academic opinions.

Practically speaking, academic competence can also facilitate the integration of English language learning and specialized subjects, and get rid of poor learning autonomy, especially for college students who have passed College English Test of Band 4. the final goal is to gradually realize the progress in the same direction of English learning and professional learning.

2.2.2. Academic Influence and Professional Credibility

With the development of globalization, academic research and exchanges are becoming increasingly international. The ability of academic discourse is the key factor for further study and career development. It directly affects the communication efficiency and professional image and influence in academia and the workplace. In professional dialogue, accurate use of terminology, and expressions in line with the academic norms of the relevant field will definitely improve academic voice and professional credibility. on one hand, it improves China's international academic transmission capacity is regarded as part of the construction of China's international transmission power and international discourse system; on the other hand, it tends to build the power o leadership, competitiveness, innovation and communication academically.

2.3. Research on the Construction of Critical Thinking in English Learning

The essence of language is exactly critical thinking, which is unique in cultivating mental enquiry. "Language, used as a means to develop thinking skills, should not be confined to language study only for language's sake, but go beyond language for thinking ability"[2]. The College Language Teaching Guide (2020) has been revised in aspect of the general description

of teaching requirements, which adds requirements for critical thinking skills and emphasizes the effectiveness of foreign language applications. For example, the basic goal is revised to "understand the main idea, clarify the facts, opinions and details, understand the intentions and attitudes of others, and then judge and express according"; the development goal is "to conduct in-depth exchanges and discussions on topics related to specialized subjects, and effectively describe, state, explain, argue and evaluate". College English learning should focus on higher cognitive abilities such as communication ability, critical ability and innovation ability, which prove to be the key capabilities for individual students to succeed in adapting to specific environment, creativity in problem solution, and realization of lifelong development.

2.3.1. Cross-cultural Critical Thinking Ability

Cross-cultural critical thinking stands as an even higher requirement for English language competence for application-oriented talents in the new era. Cross-cultural competence refers to the ability to use language knowledge and skills, social history and cultural knowledge, etc to properly and effectively communicate with people from different language and cultural backgrounds. Critical thinking ability refers to independent, rational, objective and fair exploration, analysis and evaluation of backgrounds, concepts, facts and methods. Cross-cultural competence of critical thinking refers to the ability to summarize, evaluate and speculate about different cultures on the basis of cross-cultural knowledge and to deeply understand and evaluate cultural differences, so as to achieve effective communication. The exterior value of foreign language learning is instrumental and humanistic, while the inherent value is to construct new thinking and improve thinking power.

2.3.2. Academic Critical Thinking Ability

Academic critical thinking is to integrate the training of critical thinking into the specialized field of learning, which promotes the transfer of critical thinking ability in different fields. Academic critical thinking requires the ability to decode, construct, use and analyze information or text, the critical ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate all kinds of information, and the innovative ability to raise and solve problems. To integrate critical thinking ability into subject learning is likely to promote students' active and in-depth thinking, and comprehensively improve students' academic qualification and critical thinking capability.

3. Literature References

Research on English competence has been conducted in various contexts these years, demonstrating different aspects of language acquisition and proficiency. Research shed lights on the challenges in evaluating students' oral English competence faced by college English teachers and advocated the introduction of self-assessment to improve language proficiency[3]. The effects of English achievement, self-confidence and motivation were also explored concerning learners' satisfaction and cognition, which reveals the importance of such factors in the context of language learning[4]. Difficulties in developing English-language competence were studied for the sake of effective strategies to overcome challenges in foreign language mastery, especially in reading[5]. The construct of English competence for non-English major postgraduates was defined, focusing on the significance of various skills and strategies in academic, linguistic, and intercultural contexts[6]. Further zooming in, the self-efficacy of non-English lecturers in using English as an academic language, employing a mixed-method study to analyze their confidence levels[7]. A cross-cultural comparison of the level of critical thinking was conducted, highlighting the importance of considering cultural differences in assessing critical thinking skills[8]. In addition, the significance of teaching cross-cultural education was underscored to enhance students' critical thinking and cross-cultural communication skills in a complex cross-cultural environment[9].

Overall, these studies contributed to a comprehensive understanding of English competence across different settings. However, the specific model of English competence was still vague, under the circumstances of new liberal arts, typically to train Chinese cultural advocates and speakers. This paper tries to construct an overall and effective model of English competence involving cultural transmission, academic application and critical thinking.

4. Summary

4.1. Purpose

In terms of purpose, this paper seeks to solve the problem that English competence is not systematic enough to serve the orientation of "Chinese culture going global". Cultural extraction in English learning was limited to the theme of one single unit, so the training of competence in this respect turned out to be relatively scattered, less-correlated, weaker overall planning. consequently no resultant force is formed to fully display the needs of English language competence, failing to maximize its benefits.

4.2. Content

In terms of content, it is supposed to relieve the problem that the college-based characteristics and academic atmosphere in English learning are not prominent enough. On the one hand, after passing CET-4 and CET-6, students' interest in college English learning is relatively weakened, and some students with big potential and strong needs find it hard to pin down the leading direction to continue with their foreign language learning. On the other hand, the English learning is not yet closely related to their specialty research, remaining a gap for a support for further major study.

4.3. Depth

In terms of depth, this paper aims to solve the problem of insufficient training of English competence of critical thinking. College English study lays much emphasis on the cultivation of students' language skills, cross-cultural communication and ideological and political education, whereas there is insufficient research on the cultivation measures and methods of higher-level thinking capability, and clear awareness of developing the key cores and adaptability required for students' subsequent growth.

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