
A Practical Research on Enhancing Students' Critical Thinking through English Reading Teaching under the Guidance of Core Competencies

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Abstract: Core literacy is the core cultivation goal of the current high school English curriculum, and its requirements related to thinking quality are highly in line with the cultivation of critical thinking. This paper first explores the logical connection between the four dimensions of core literacy and critical thinking, clarifying the educational value of cultivating critical thinking in English reading teaching. Secondly, by combining specific teaching cases, it proposes practical paths that can be implemented from three aspects: creating problem scenarios, guiding text deconstruction, and organizing diverse dialogues. Finally, it builds multi-dimensional assessment indicators to analyze the problems existing in current teaching, such as the lack of students' questioning awareness, the imbalance of teachers' guidance scales, and the insufficient adaptability of texts, and provides corresponding optimization directions. The research results can provide a reference for the upgrading of educational value in high school English reading teaching and promote the regular cultivation of students' critical thinking.

Keywords: Core Competencies; English Reading Teaching; Critical Thinking; Teaching Optimization

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1. Introduction

The English curriculum standards for ordinary high schools have established core competencies as the core cultivation goals of the English subject, requiring that teaching should take into account the coordinated development of four dimensions: language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. English reading, as a composite carrier of language input and thinking training, is the core field for implementing the requirements of core competency cultivation. Critical thinking, as the core component of thinking quality cultivation, its implementation effect directly determines the quality of achieving the educational goals of the English subject. Currently, most English reading teaching focuses on the teaching of language knowledge points and the extraction of surface information, resulting in a significant lack of cultivation of students' deep thinking ability. This not only fails to meet the requirements of core competency cultivation but also makes it difficult to support the long-term development of students' comprehensive abilities. By focusing on the intrinsic connection between core competencies and critical thinking, and by organizing practical paths based on specific teaching scenarios, analyzing existing difficulties and proposing optimization solutions, this provides a

reusable reference framework for the upgrading of high school English reading teaching, and promotes the implementation of core competency cultivation requirements.

2. The Value of Critical Thinking in English Reading Teaching under the Perspective of Core Competencies

2.1. The Intrinsic Fit between Core Competencies and Critical Thinking in English Reading Teaching

The English Curriculum Standards for General Senior High Schools clearly regard core competencies as the core cultivation goals of the English subject, covering four closely related dimensions: language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. In the cultivation process of the language ability dimension, the decoding and organization of text information as well as the logical calibration of meaning output inherently involve the screening and judgment of information rationality, which forms a natural fit with the information discrimination requirements of critical thinking. The cultivation of the cultural awareness dimension focuses on the perception and analysis of diverse cultural connotations, requiring learners to judge the value of cultural phenomena from a multi-cultural perspective, which echoes the multi-cultural perspective requirements of critical thinking. The cultivation of the thinking quality dimension focuses on the systematic training of logical reasoning, dialectical judgment, etc., providing direct goal orientation and training framework for the implementation of critical thinking, and breaking down the advanced requirements of thinking levels into implementable training nodes. The cultivation of the learning ability dimension focuses on the transmission of methods such as independent exploration and information integration, which can provide reusable method support for the routine application of critical thinking. English reading teaching, as a composite carrier of language input and thinking training, bears multiple functions such as text interpretation, content exploration, and value analysis, and can integrate the cultivation requirements of each dimension of core competencies and the training goals of critical thinking organically.

2.2. The Educational Value of Cultivating Critical Thinking in English Reading Teaching

In line with the fundamental educational requirements of fostering moral character proposed by the General High School English Curriculum Standards, the cultivation of critical thinking can provide support for the advancement of students' comprehensive abilities at the individual development level. From the perspective of the cognitive process of text interpretation, critical thinking can guide students to break free from the limitations of extracting surface information and actively explore the latent value orientation and narrative stance of the text, gradually constructing a reasoning path that is compatible with the logic of the English language. In the process of information discrimination and meaning differentiation, students can form independent thinking consciousness and avoid indiscriminate acceptance of external viewpoints. From the perspective of the implementation of teaching objectives in the subject, the cultivation of critical thinking can embed the requirements of the four dimensions of core literacy into all aspects of reading teaching, while also aligning with the comprehensive educational orientation, providing a unified connection carrier for the consolidation of language ability, the deepening of cultural awareness, the upgrading of thinking quality, and the optimization of learning ability, and promoting the educational attribute of the English subject from a single transmission of language knowledge to a systematic cultivation of comprehensive qualities^[1].

3. The Current Situation of Cultivating Critical Thinking in Students' English Reading Teaching

3.1. Creating problem scenarios to stimulate cognitive conflicts in critical thinking

In English reading classes guided by core competencies, teachers use problem scenarios as the engine to activate critical thinking. They need to set up real issues that are close to the text and have controversy and openness, and

organize the problem chain from simple to complex to trigger cognitive conflicts. Based on the four-layer structure of concept clarification, evidence discrimination, value weighing, and position transformation, teachers integrate language understanding and thinking exploration, and use text information and life experience to promote students to form a regular classroom routine of continuous questioning and rational analysis.

Take the reading lesson “Protecting the Yangtze River” as an example. In the introduction part, the teacher used pictures of river ecology and key words such as dam, hydropower, habitat, biodiversity to focus the topic on the tension between the protection and development of the Yangtze River. The class began with a question that triggered cognitive conflict: “Is it necessary to build dams on the Yangtze River even if it affects wildlife?” This question led students to organize the factual information in the text using sentences like should, may, and however, such as the obstruction of the finless porpoise’s habitat, the alteration of spawning routes, and the social demands for flood control and energy supply. Then, the problem chain was advanced to the evidence level, requiring students to locate the evidence in the text and use because, therefore, and on the other hand to construct cause-and-effect and contrast. They also associated factors such as endangered species, industrial pollution, and illegal fishing. The discussion was then extended to the value and balance level, prompting students to propose criteria for weighing economic growth and ecological balance, and to present testable hypotheses using if...then and unless sentence structures. In the closing link, tasks of position transformation and solution generation were set, requiring students to use “We recommend, It is acceptable to... , We should limit...” When a compromise solution is proposed, such as ecological compensation and seasonal opening of sluice gates, the teacher integrates the students’ viewpoints with the discourse of the text, facilitating the triple alignment of language expression, evidence support, and value judgment, and forming a defensible classroom conclusion^[2].

3.2. Guiding the textual deconstruction and deepening the logical analysis of critical thinking

In the classroom training of critical thinking, the teacher regards text deconstruction as the core stage; Section, aiming at identifying the structure, analyzing the argumentation, and revealing the implicit stance. Text deconstruction refers to the systematic analysis of the text structure and the author’s viewpoint. The teacher needs to guide students to mark the propositions, evidence, and counterarguments, evaluate the relevance and sufficiency, and present these elements in an argumentation structure diagram. The argumentation structure diagram refers to connecting the propositions, evidence, counterarguments, and conclusion into a schematic diagram, which is convenient for observing the logical chain and potential assumptions.

In the study of the text “Protecting the Yangtze River”, the teacher takes the visualization of the main sentence of the text and the argumentation thread as the entry point. First, the teacher guides students to mark the author’s proposition at the introduction and the topic sentence of the paragraph, such as “It is necessary to protect the Yangtze River”, and use different colors to mark the signal words “however”, “therefore”, “on the other hand” to indicate the contrast and causality. Then, at the factual statements, mark the key information, including the obstruction of the finless porpoise’s habitat, the change of spawning routes, the decline of biodiversity, and the reasons for industrial pollution and illegal fishing, and evaluate the relevance, sufficiency, and typicality of the evidence. The teacher places the proposition at the center of the argumentation structure diagram, connecting the supporting items of “endangered species” and “habitat loss” on the left, and the opposing demands of “energy supply” and “flood control” on the right. Then, use “because”, “therefore” to connect the evidence and the conclusion, and use “on the other hand” to mark the response path^[3]. To test the implicit assumptions, students are required to propose sentences such as “Unless economic demands are balanced, protection will be compromised”, to expose the prerequisite conditions and falsifiable points. Finally, the teacher requires students to use “We argue that” and “Not only... but also...” Restate the position and propose revised claims, and form a closed logical chain by integrating the text structure, the quality of evidence, and the analysis of the position.

3.3. Organize diverse dialogues to expand the dimensions of critical thinking perspectives

From the perspective of the reading teaching objectives driven by core competencies, the function of diverse dialogues

in expanding the boundaries of thinking lies in being carried out in heterogeneous positions. The teaching design needs to integrate role differences, turn norms, and evidence rules into a whole, construct a cycle of listening, questioning, defending, and reconstructing, and the teacher maintains an equal share of discourse, provides scaffolds for concessions and ambiguous sentence structures, and incorporates group consensus and individual reflection into the output.

In the classroom, the teacher organized the entire class into a tripartite dialogue circle, with each group taking the positions of environmental expert, government official, and local resident. The teacher set up a framework for discourse, such as I acknowledge, nevertheless, whereas, it seems that, might, could, should, as well as in the long term and in the short term, to support concession, contrast, and vague expressions. When the dialogue began, each party needed to refer to the text information and key words such as stakeholder, trade-off, feasibility, enforcement, compensation, biodiversity, hydropower, habitat, and connect their claims with evidence, such as based on the text mentioning the obstruction of finless porpoise and the change in spawning routes, pointing out the coupled influence of industrial pollution and illegal fishing. The teacher stipulated that each round included two actions: questioning and defending. The questioning used Could you clarify the evidence for and What would happen if, and the defense used According to the text and From my community's perspective for responses. To avoid the fixation of positions, a position shift was arranged in the middle, requiring each party to propose a compromise solution using while, yet, and provided that, such as seasonal opening, migration corridor, stricter regulation, and ecological compensation combinations. In the consolidation stage, the group integrated their viewpoints into a joint statement, using We propose and It should be limited to to construct trade-offs and priorities, and then each student completed the position shift reflection by saying I used to think, now I would argue that, and aligned the discourse evidence, dialogue interaction, and language expression in three directions^[4].

4. Evaluation and Practical Reflection on the Effect of Cultivating Critical Thinking in English Reading Teaching under the Perspective of Core Competencies

In current English reading teaching, the assessment of critical thinking is mostly limited to the correctness of language output, and no dedicated assessment system matching the cultivation goals has been established. This makes it difficult to truly reflect the actual advancement of students' thinking levels. In line with the implementation requirements of core literacy, a systematic assessment index system can be built from three dimensions: cognition, skills, and attitude. This will provide an operational tool for the review and optimization of teaching effects. The cognitive dimension anchors two core observation points: the depth of text analysis and the accuracy of logical reasoning. The assessment work is carried out by using the interpretation reports submitted by students, focusing on the degree to which students explore the hidden narrative stance of the text and the degree of correlation and compatibility between the evidence and the conclusion in the reasoning process. It excludes the interference of low-level thinking manifestations such as extracting superficial information, ensuring that the assessment results can truly reflect the cognitive advancement level of students^[5]. The skill dimension covers the assessment of three types of abilities: questioning, argumentation, and reflection. The assessment process is carried out based on the full-scenario records of classroom discussions, focusing on the frequency of students' raising differentiated questions, the adaptability of the use of evidence in the argumentation process, and the extent of adjustment of original viewpoints after completing the discussion interaction. The attitude dimension points to the willingness to think actively and the awareness of respecting different viewpoints. The information collection work is completed using a structured questionnaire survey tool, focusing on the behavioral tendency of students actively questioning text viewpoints during reading and their willingness to accept and analyze heterogeneous positions.

5. Conclusion

The cultivation of critical thinking is the core driving force for the transformation and upgrading of English reading

teaching under the framework of core literacy. It not only can connect the cultivation links of the four dimensions of core literacy, but also helps students develop the awareness of independent thinking and the ability to analyze from multiple perspectives, effectively fulfilling the fundamental requirement of cultivating moral character in the English subject. The cultivation of critical thinking is a long-term and systematic project. It requires continuous iterative adjustment of adaptation plans in daily teaching practice, and gradually build a reflective cultivation system that conforms to the cognitive development laws of students, laying a solid foundation for their lifelong development.

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