

Brief Analysis on the Cultivation of Critical Thinking in Senior English Reading Teaching

Hong Tu

China West Normal University, Nanchong, 637001, China

Abstract

With the implementation of the National English Curriculum Standards of Senior High School (2017), the objective of English curriculum in senior high school has become to develop students' key competences. From the perspective of key competence, critical thinking is an indispensable part of thinking quality, and reading is one of the important paths to develop students' critical thinking. However, there are numerous problems in senior English reading teaching that are not conducive to the development of student's critical thinking. For instance, the teaching contents are fragmental and limited to language knowledge, the teaching methods are outdated and the teaching assessment is relatively single. Therefore, through consulting relevant literature, the paper analyzes the causes of cultivating students' critical thinking in senior English reading teaching and eventually concludes the strategies to cultivate students' critical thinking in English reading teaching of high school from three aspects, namely, cultivating question awareness, using comparison chart and learning to evaluation. These strategies are supposed to help teachers improve the current problems of English reading teaching, enable students to form critical thinking, which lay a solid foundation for student's lifelong learning.

Keywords

Critical Thinking; Senior English; Reading Teaching.

1. Introduction

As the new National English Curriculum Standards of Senior High School (NECS, 2017) put forward the key competence of English subject, increasingly attention is paid to developing students' thinking quality [1]. Moreover, the newly published curriculum standards highlight the significance of cultivating students' thinking quality and divide it into three levels, including logic, criticalness and innovation, which suggests that students' critical thinking needs more attention. It is widely accepted that there is a close relationship between language and thought. Only with the help of thinking can the learning and using of language can be realized. Meanwhile, learning and using language, especially a foreign language, can enrich the way of thinking and further promote the development of thinking [2]. Reading is an important way for people to access information and it's the process of communication and constructing meaning for readers and texts, which is connected with the development of thinking. Therefore, it is necessary for English teachers and students to attach great importance to combine the development of critical thinking and reading teaching. In present, there are numerous domestic researches about testing the level of students' critical thinking. However, few researches pay attention to the cultivation strategies of students' critical thinking. Besides, the researches show that the level of students' critical thinking is not high. Therefore, this study aims to explore the practical strategies to cultivate students' critical thinking in senior English reading teaching. The study tries to find out reasons why the development level of students' critical thinking is not high. Moreover, the study intends to provide some helpful suggestion for English teachers

to improve students' critical thinking in senior English reading teaching. The significance of this study can be divided into two aspects. From the perspective of theoretical significance, this study can closely combine reading teaching with critical thinking to enrich reading teaching theory. In addition, it can also enrich the ways of cultivating students' critical thinking from a new perspective, English reading teaching. From the perspective of practical significance, this study can help more teachers aware of the importance of students' critical thinking and pay more attention the development of students' critical thinking. Besides, what is more important is that this study provides some practical and useful suggestions for teachers to cultivate students' critical thinking in senior English reading teaching.

From the perspective of practical significance, this study can help more teachers aware of the importance of students' critical thinking and pay more attention the development of students' critical thinking. Besides, what is more important is that this study provides some practical and useful suggestions for teachers to cultivate students' critical thinking in senior English reading teaching.

2. Problem Identification

2.1. Critical Thinking

Critical thinking may be dated backed to the "question-and-answer method" adopted by Socrates in his early teaching practice [3]. He emphasized discovery learning, that is, in conversation and debate, instead of giving answers to questions directly to the other ones. What's more, he guided others to find problem and generate their own thinking by constantly asking questions. By taking the way of questioning constantly, the students should think deeply about the teaching content, instead of simply accepting the knowledge which is universally accepted as the truth. American modern educator John Dewey (1933) proposed "reflective thinking", which stresses the thinking process of finding evidence to support the hypothesis definition through observation, analysis, experiment and other steps, and then draw the conclusion [4]. Nowadays, definitions about critical thinking are various, but there is still a consensus. Foreign scholars argue that critical thinking is the skill or ability to use anti-logic thinking to deal with everything. Critical thinking skills are the essential part in the critical thinking study. Facione (1990) defines critical thinking as a combination of affective disposition and cognitive skill and announces that it has these six cognitive skills, including interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, self-regulation and explanation [5].

Domestic researchers also have their different ideas about the definitions of critical thinking. Zhu Zhixian and Lin Chongde (1996) thought that critical thinking is an ability to analyze and deal with problems individually [6]. Luo Qingxu (2000) believed that critical thinking is a critical literacy of knowledge, skills, attitudes and methods in the learning process [7]. Wen Qiufang (2009) believed that critical thinking is a purposeful rationality of things or ideas according to standards, highlighting the main role of self-regulation in critical thinking [8]. Li Rui (2016) believed that critical thinking, as an important way to explore the world, is a process of intellectual training such as observation, evaluation, integration, application, analysis, reflection, experience and reasoning, intervening in the thinking pattern and reflecting on ourselves and others [9]. Mei Deming & Wang Qiang (2018) believed that critical thinking is the attitude and behavior of questing and verifying through the right way to verify the truth of things [10].

2.2. The Causes of Student's Low-level Critical Thinking

The current situation of English reading teaching is not beneficial to the cultivation of students' critical thinking and ignores the development of their critical thinking. In China, due to the influence of traditional culture and the limitation of the educational system, such as teacher-

centered education, many students are accustomed to accepting the knowledge from teachers passively. They seldom question the reliability of the content taught by teachers and presented in textbooks. In order to get high scores in exam-oriented education, rote memorization is a common method for students to use. It is difficult to develop students' critical thinking in this context. In the process of English reading teaching, most teachers pay too much attention to the explanation of language knowledge points and the translation of texts. Separating language points from the text makes the students acquire more fragmentary language knowledge but is not conducive to help students develop critical thinking. However, the development of thought is closely related to language learning. Reading teaching is an important way to help students cultivating their critical thinking. Therefore, in order to promote the development of students' critical thinking, it is necessary for teachers to attach great important to how to cultivate students' critical thinking in reading classes.

In addition, the teaching method of senior English reading teaching is outdated. Teachers use grammar-translation method to help students understand the meaning of the text. Meanwhile, the method of evaluation for students is single. They focus on the evaluation of students' English grades and ignore their thinking development.

3. Measures Taken to Cultivating Student's Critical Thinking

3.1. Cultivating Students' Question Awareness

The experiments show that high school students with strong question awareness usually develop new ideas through their own efforts, and bravely question and dispel doubts can also make students experience the interest of English learning. Therefore, in senior English reading teaching, teachers are supposed to cultivate students' awareness of question, which can lay a foundation for the cultivation of critical thinking. Meanwhile, it is very important for teachers to play roles as guiders to lead students to find out problems and put out questions.

The process of critical reading is also the process of analyzing, questioning and evaluating on the basis of understanding the text content. Teachers need to consciously cultivate students' ability to analyze, distinguish, reason and judge according the text information so that the understanding for texts can be sublimated and the authors' real intention can be analyzed and evaluated. In reading teaching, questions should be designed carefully to guide students reasonably question the reading text. Besides, in English reading class, teachers can design question chain to cultivate students' critical thinking by the steps of first figuring out the main clue, then processing the important information and digging into the connotation, and finally asking critical questions on the key points.

Questioning is an essential means to inspire students. However, many researchers have found it a common phenomenon that teachers' questioning in English reading class mostly remained at the level of lower-order thinking. In this way, students' higher-order thinking hardly achieves improvements. To change the situation, it has been constantly advocated in recent years that teachers' questioning should direct to higher-order thinking such as critical thinking. Question chain is an effective tool to cultivate students' critical thinking. More open questions and higher-order questions, including synthesis, analysis and evaluation, should be designed to activate students' thinking.

3.2. Using Comparison Chart

In senior English reading teaching, comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences is a common activity and it is also one of the basic ways to cultivate critical thinking [11]. The comparison and contrast chart can be used to help students find out similarities and differences between two or more objects through comparison and guide students to pay more attention to the commonalities and differences between objects, which helps students improve their ability

of comparative analysis and critical thinking. Take PEP Book 4 Unit 2 Chemical or Organic Farming as an example. The text mainly introduces the advantages of using organic fertilizer and disadvantages of using chemical fertilizer. In order to help students quickly grasp the differences between two farming methods, teachers can introduce the comparison and contrast chart to guide students to extract the corresponding comparison items. Students summarize three comparison items including soil health, health of crops and people's health, which can cultivate students' logical thinking. Then, teachers propose the question: How can we change disadvantages of chemical farming into advantages? Through reading and comparison, students have a deep understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of using chemical fertilizer and organic fertilizer in farming, understanding why it is good to use organic fertilizer and its benefits, understanding what are the shortcomings of the use of the chemical fertilizer. What is more crucial is how to change shortcomings into benefits. This process of comparison and contrast can challenge and cultivate students' critical thinking and exercise students' more comprehensive and rational thinking ability of analyzing questions.

3.3. Developing Students' Evaluation Ability

The ability of evaluation thinking in critical thinking refers to the ability to judge and evaluate the credibility of factual information and the rationality opinions argument based on the interpretation, analysis and reasoning [12]. Analyzing and evaluating the text is an important way to promote the development of students' critical thinking. It is found that in the process of English reading teaching, teachers guide students to evaluate the authors' opinions, writing content, writing intention, language expression and text structure, which is conducive to the cultivation of students' critical thinking. Therefore, taking advantages of students' individual expression or peer interaction and other ways to critically evaluate the language and structure of texts as well as authors' attitudes and extend to self-evaluation need to be adopted to cultivate students' critical thinking. Meanwhile, students are encouraged to express their own opinions for things and people.

4. Conclusion

In senior English reading teaching, thinking and language are important elements throughout the whole class. The cultivation of students' critical thinking is not only a necessary way to reform senior English reading teaching, but also an indispensable method to achieve the cultivation of key competence. Cultivating students' critical thinking can change the tedious atmosphere of traditional reading classes, motivate their learning interests for reading and stimulate the emergence of thinking spark. Meanwhile, it can promote students' development of language ability and learning ability. There are three strategies to cultivate students' critical thinking in senior English reading teaching. First of all, teachers need to consciously develop students' question awareness and design question chain carefully to help students treat things dialectically and learn to think deeply and critically. Secondly, teachers can take advantage of comparison and contrast to assist students find out the similarities and differences between things. At last, teachers can guide students to evaluate the text such as language and structure as well as the authors' intentions and attitudes. What is more important is that students should have their own opinions for things and use evidence to argument their opinions.

There are still some limitations for this study. For one thing, there is no empirical data to verify the current situation of students' critical thinking, and the literature is not convincing enough. For another, the strategies are demanding for teachers' ability and they need more time to test the effectiveness.

References

- [1] The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China: The National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School (2017 version) (People's Education Press, China, 2017).
- [2] W.C. Chen, P. Yan: A Guide For English Teachers in Basic Education, Chongqing University Press, China, 2019) p.50-55.
- [3] Paul, R.: Critical Thinking in North America: A New Theory of Knowledge, Argumentation, Vol. 34 (1989) No.3, p. 197-235.
- [4] John Dewey: How We Think: A restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process (Boston: D. C. Heath & Company 1993), p.89-93.
- [5] Facione, P. A. The Delphi Report-Critical Thinking: A Statement of Expert Consensus for Purposes of Educational Assessment and Instruction (Millbrae CA: The California Academic Press 1990).
- [6] Z.X. Zhu, C.D. Ling: Psychology of Thinking Development, (Beijing Normal University Press, China 1996).
- [7] Q.X. Luo: On the Cultivation of College Students' Critical Thinking, Tsinghua Journal of Education, Vol. 4 (2000) No. 4, p. 81-85.
- [8] Q.F. Wen: The Theoretical Framework of Constructing Chinese Foreign Language College Students' Critical Thinking Ability, Foreign Language World, Vol. 1 (2009) No.1, p. 37-43.
- [9] R. Li: Research on the Cultivation of Critical Thinking Under the Constructivism Teaching Mode, Overseas English, Vol. 23 (2016) No. 23, p.73-74.
- [10] D.M. Mei, Q. Wang: The Interpretation of National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School (2017 version) (Higher Education Press, China 2018).
- [11] X.D. Liu: The Significance and Connotation of Critical Thinking, Higher Normal Education Research, Vol. 32 (2000) No.1, p56-61.
- [12] Y. Dong: Reading Teaching Design of Senior High Based on Critical Thinking Skills, Foreign Language Teaching in Schools (Middle Version), Vol. 56 (2018) No.3, p.17-22.