

The cultivation of critical thinking ability among English major students in English speech and debate courses

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Abstract: Speculative ability is an important component of human intelligence and comprehensive qualities, and plays a crucial role in the growth and development of college students. Through the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability in English speech and debate courses, they can master the relevant knowledge of speech, debate, speech and debate, cultivate their language expression ability, and improve their thinking quality. Therefore, this study discusses the significance of cultivating critical thinking ability, and then focuses on English speech and debate courses, proposing effective ways to cultivate the critical thinking ability of English major students. The aim is to help teachers choose appropriate teaching content and methods based on the characteristics of different grades and majors, to cultivate students' critical thinking and innovative thinking, actively guide students to analyze, judge, and reason, and make students become English major talents with innovative spirit and thinking ability.

1. Introduction

With the development of social economy, higher education is increasingly focusing on cultivating students' innovative spirit and critical thinking ability, improving their comprehensive quality and employment competitiveness, and critical thinking ability is an important component of innovative spirit and comprehensive quality. Speculative ability refers to the ability of people to analyze, reason, judge things using their acquired knowledge, and draw conclusions. With the acceleration of economic globalization and the advancement of science and technology, innovation has become an important force driving social development. The spirit of innovation and critical thinking ability are of great significance for cultivating high-quality talents. At present, the training of English professionals in Chinese universities mainly focuses on English application skills, and students cannot meet the demand of social development for English professionals. Therefore, cultivating high-quality English professionals with innovative spirit and critical thinking ability has become an important issue facing the current English teaching reform in Chinese universities[1].

2. The significance of cultivating critical thinking ability

Speculative ability refers to a person's ability to understand things in activities such as observation, thinking, analysis, and judgment, including their views, attitudes, and evaluations of things.

Speculative ability refers to a person's correct view of things in cognitive activities, which is the result of their thinking activities, including analytical ability, reasoning ability, and judgment ability. The cultivation of critical thinking ability is mainly reflected in cultivating students' critical and innovative thinking, but currently many students have shortcomings in both aspects[2].

The Opinion on Deepening the Reform of the Education System and comprehensively Improving the Quality of Compulsory Education points out that "cultivating students' ability to analyze and solve problems in education and teaching, and stimulating their innovative spirit.". Innovation is the soul of a nation's progress, the inexhaustible driving force for a country's prosperity and development, and the inexhaustible source for a country's prosperity and development. As the main force in social innovation activities, it is of great significance to cultivate the innovation ability of college students. Speculative ability is an important component of the comprehensive quality of college students, and it is also a relatively weak link in current university education. Cultivating students' critical thinking ability in English speech and debate courses can promote their ability to analyze, solve problems, and comprehensively apply learned knowledge for creative activities, enhance their thinking quality, and lay a solid foundation for their future professional work[3].

3. Effective ways to cultivate students' critical thinking ability in teaching practice

3.1. Debate

Debate is a typical speculative activity. Debate is different from speech, as it requires both parties to engage in arguments on certain issues based on thorough preparation. Debate is both a language communication activity and a thinking activity. In English speech and debate classes, teachers can use forms such as group debates, individual debates, and positive and negative debates to provide students with ample opportunities for language expression. In specific practice, teachers should pay attention to the following points:

Firstly, when designing debate topics, efforts should be made to consider the professional background and knowledge structure of students, so that they can better leverage their strengths.

Secondly, when designing questions, attention should be paid to the level of difficulty, and not all students should be required to be able to answer them. Teachers can allow students with weaker foundations to answer simpler questions, while students with better foundations can answer more difficult questions. During the entire debate, attention should be paid to giving students ample opportunities to speak up and showcase themselves.

Thirdly, teachers should encourage students to constantly question, criticize, and reflect on their own viewpoints during the debate process, transforming them from passive knowledge acquisition to active knowledge acquisition[4].

Fourthly, teachers can also adopt other ways to improve students' critical thinking abilities. For example, training can be conducted through forms such as debate competitions. This kind of competition can be held both in the classroom and outside of class. This form can not only stimulate students' interest in learning English but also improve their oral and written English expression abilities.

Fifthly, teachers can organize classroom debate competitions, which are an important form of English speech and debate courses and place higher demands on students' critical thinking abilities. There are generally two forms of debate competitions: one is a debate competition led by one party and cooperated by the other party, and the other is a debate competition led by both parties, with one party being the affirmative and the other being the opposing. In debate competitions, students need to present their own viewpoints and arguments in English, and refute the other party's viewpoint through logical reasoning. During this process, students can not only improve their English expression and logical thinking abilities, but also enhance their understanding of social issues and cultural

backgrounds. Teachers can combine these two forms of debate competitions to gradually cultivate students' critical thinking skills during debates. For example, teachers can provide students with materials related to social hot topics for debate. On this basis, teachers can have students engage in group discussions and choose their preferred side for debate[5-6].

3.2. Provide good evaluation guidance

During the student debate process, teachers should evaluate the student's performance and guide them to summarize the problems that arise during the debate. Firstly, teachers should guide students to analyze the problems they encounter during the debate process, and then make correct judgments based on different situations. Secondly, teachers should also guide students to compare their own debate viewpoints with those of others and come up with their own viewpoints. Finally, teachers should evaluate the questions raised by students during the debate process. Teachers should pay attention to the evaluation of students' critical thinking ability when evaluating, while respecting the questions and viewpoints raised by students and fully respecting their views and opinions. In the evaluation process, encouragement should be the main focus, recognizing their strengths and progress in a timely manner, and encouraging them to develop towards higher levels[7-8].

3.3. Adopting diversified teaching methods

Teachers should adopt diversified teaching methods in specific teaching, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Diversified teaching methods

Name	Specific teaching methods
Task-based teaching	A teaching method in which teachers provide students with a specific learning task, allowing them to continuously improve their English proficiency and critical thinking abilities while completing the task
Case analysis method	Teachers collect and analyze cases to help students understand language use and thinking patterns, and promote in-depth thinking on relevant topics
Moot court	It refers to a teaching method of hearing and adjudicating cases in specific situations, and delivering speeches and debates to the audience of the parties involved

Task based teaching, case analysis method, and mock court. Task based teaching has been widely applied in the teaching of many courses. This method is mainly suitable for students with poor foundations. Through task-based teaching, students can understand the basic process of English speaking, stimulate their interest and enthusiasm in learning English speaking. Case analysis method is also a commonly used teaching method, which helps to cultivate students' practical and problem-solving abilities. Through case analysis, it can help students understand the requirements of different forms of debate for their critical thinking ability, and cultivate their expression and critical thinking abilities in specific debate situations. Mock court refers to a teaching method that involves hearing and adjudicating a case in a specific context, and delivering speeches and debates to the audience of the parties involved. The mock court has a prominent effect on exercising students' critical thinking ability. Through simulated courtrooms, students can understand various forms of debate and the various knowledge and skills involved, and master the thinking methods required for debate. In addition, simulated court teaching can be used to improve students' oral English proficiency, promote the development of their thinking and innovation abilities, improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching for teachers, and cultivate students' sense of teamwork[9-10].

3.4. Key points during cultivation

"English Speech and Debate" is a course that integrates language expression and thinking training. It aims to train students in various aspects such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing through various means, enabling them to have strong English expression and communication skills, laying a solid foundation for their employment. This course can be offered separately or together with other courses. Due to the significant differences in course content between English majors and other courses, teachers can choose appropriate teaching methods based on actual situations in teaching practice, combining the characteristics of English speech and debate with the future employment needs of students, and providing targeted training for students.

In specific practice, teachers should pay attention to the following matters:

Firstly, teachers should clarify teaching objectives and key points, and determine the teaching content well.

Secondly, teachers should choose appropriate teaching content based on the characteristics of students in different grades and majors, including topics, debate forms, skill training, speech skills, etc.

Thirdly, when selecting specific teaching content, teachers must fully consider relevant factors, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Relevant factors to pay attention to when selecting teaching content

Attention factors	Concrete content
Individual student factors	Consider the current level of students in different grades of the course. This course can set corresponding content and difficulty levels based on the mastery of English knowledge and skills by students of different grades, while also taking into account the knowledge structure and ability level of students from different majors
Requirements for cultivating critical thinking ability	Consider the requirements for students' critical thinking ability in different forms of debate in this course. Improving students' critical thinking ability through debate is one of the important ways to cultivate their critical thinking ability in this course
Selection of teaching methods	Teachers should choose appropriate teaching methods based on the characteristics of students in different grades of the course. In the teaching process, it is important to emphasize student-centered approach and respect individual differences among students
Design of teaching content	Emphasis should be placed on thinking training, language training, and introduction of cultural background knowledge; To promote innovative thinking and innovative abilities; Encourage students to actively participate, think critically, have the courage to challenge and question

4. Conclusion

The Speech and Debate course is a practical course that integrates speech, debate, and language skills, playing an important role in enhancing students' critical thinking abilities. Therefore, in English speech and debate courses, teachers should focus on cultivating students' critical thinking abilities and enabling them to master knowledge in speech, debate, language expression, etc., enhancing their language expression ability, logical thinking ability, and innovative spirit.

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