

The Cultivation of Cross-cultural Thinking Skills of English Majors in Colleges

-- Take English Debate as an Example

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Abstract

In recent years, the lack of cross-cultural thinking skills is a common phenomenon faced by English majors, and it is also an important problem to be solved. English debate is an activity that effectively cultivates students' thinking ability. It requires students to analyze, reason, and evaluate information. From the perspective of cross-cultural thinking skills and English debate, this paper analyzes the effectiveness of English debate in improving cross-cultural thinking skills.

Keywords

English Debate; Cross-cultural Thinking Skills; English Majors.

1. Introduction

In the last twenty years, western scholars have attached great importance in critical thinking skills. The most well-known researches are the two dimensional structure model of critical thinking skills proposed by the Delphi research group of American Philosophic Association, Paul-Elder Critical Thinking Model, Bloom's taxonomy and Anderson's taxonomy, etc. In China, the concept of critical thinking was introduced in the 1980s. And recently, with the popularization of the idea of critical English teaching, there is a gradually increasing consensus on the necessity and feasibility of cultivating students' critical thinking skills blended with language ability. Now, according to the National Outline for Medium-and-Long Term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020), it has become a core objective of Chinese higher education, which shows the importance of critical thinking in college English teaching.

Presently, in China, English majors relatively lack the cross-cultural thinking skills, which can be seen on many occasions. For example, when there is a need for English majors to talk about controversial issues, or to discuss their views in writing, they often go blank and feel that they have nothing to say, which is largely resulted from the inadequacy in thinking ability.

In order to solve this problem, many scholars have begun to explore how to effectively combine the cultivation of cross-cultural thinking skills with English learning. Subsequently, English debate, as a learning activity that cultivates students' argumentation ability and language expression ability, has gradually received more and more attention. Students need to reason about the topic in the process of preparing for the debate, and also make corresponding analysis based on the opponent's point of view during the debate. Therefore, English debate can broaden students' knowledge and improve students' comprehensive English ability. More importantly, English debates can also strengthen students' critical thinking.

2. Definition of Cross-cultural Thinking Skills

Cross-cultural thinking skills mean correct thinking in the pursuit of relevant and reliable knowledge about the world in cross-cultural context. Another way to describe it is reasonable, reflective, responsible and skillful thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. In other words, it is the ability to reconstruct the knowledge in a certain field, internalize it logically and judge independently by using the cognitive skills such as explanation, analysis, deduction, induction and self-adjustment, etc. It includes two concepts, which are thinking and discriminating. Thinking refers to the process of analyzing, logical reasoning, and judging in different cultural backgrounds. While discriminating refers to analyze the situation, categories and reasons of things discriminately, taking cultural factors into consideration.

Critical thinking is the prerequisite of cross-cultural thinking skills, and cross-cultural thinking skills are the embodiment of critical thinking. The two complement each other. All in all, cross-cultural thinking requires not only to master knowledge of different cultures, but also to think critically and to conduct in-depth analysis, reasoning and evaluation of cultural differences.

3. The Application of English Debate to Cultivate Cross-cultural Thinking Skills

The process of English debating is a process of thorough understanding and logical output. By investigating and researching debate topics, students can understand the relevant background knowledge and expand their knowledge. In addition, through English debates, students can analyze, synthesize and condense their own views, thereby also deepen their understanding of different knowledge, which is conducive to the development of students' critical thinking.

3.1. The Application of English Debate to Increase Knowledge Reserve

In addition to the ability of analysis and logical reasoning, cross-cultural thinking skills also require a large amount of cross-cultural knowledge especially the knowledge of English and American cultures. The formats of English debate are mainly British and American. In order to debate in English, students would have to learn the knowledge about parliaments in the U.K. and the United States respectively. In addition, English debate is rich in content, that is to say, the motions cover different fields and different countries as well, which requires a wide range of knowledge. Therefore, teachers can use English debate to promote students to learn more about the knowledge in different fields and in different countries and to think differently in different cultural contexts. If students want to finish the assignment on English debate, they have to spend more spare time in reading and thinking, comparing, and thus deepen their understanding of the things around them, which naturally will increase their knowledge reserve.

3.2. The Application of English Debate to Improve Analytical Ability

Analytical ability is one of the characteristics of cross-cultural thinking skills. Improving analytical ability can also help strengthen students' cross-cultural thinking skills. In English debate, analytical ability can be regarded as the primary ability to determine whether the debate can be successfully carried out, because after seeing the motion, the debaters must analyze the motion and give a specific and correct definition of the key words in the motion to ensure that the debate is on fair grounds. Then by using their knowledge reserve and analysis ability, they build arguments from different angles. Analyzing the motion differently may lead to different results of the debate, so the students should treat it seriously. Therefore, English debate can stimulate students to conduct a multi-angle and multi-dimensional analysis on one question, which is not trained in their professional course learning.

3.3. The Application of English Debate to Improve Logical Reasoning

Logical reasoning is very important in English debate. In debate, debater puts forward a series of questions related to the motion of the debate, and through constant logical reasoning, seeks the core issues of the debate. According to Toulmin model, an argument should contain three elements: claim, data and warrant. The students are not used to give warrant due to Chinese thinking pattern. Warrant means the analysis that puts the claim and data together and makes sense of the argument. In the process, logical reasoning plays in vital role. It may be easy for them to give claim and find supporting material, but it will be difficult for them to trace the logic between them especially when it is not explicit. Asking students to do English debate is equal to pushing them hard to do logical reason if they are to argue for their sides. Students will start from the motion itself and start reasoning in different directions, such as society, country, individual, public opinion, etc., to conduct a more comprehensive and objective analysis of the topic. They continue to push their inferences forward, bringing their cognition of the debate into a deeper stage, from which they can seek the most core point of view.

3.4. The Application of English Debate to Improve Critical Thinking

Critical thinking emphasizes the re-examination of viewpoints and the in-depth exploration of viewpoints, so critical thinking is permeated throughout English debates. English debate is a process of constantly overthrowing old arguments and rebuilding new ones. The debater conducts further research on the problem. In the cycle of "argument-rebuttal-defense", the debater can form clear critical thinking. In the process of constant analysis and rethinking, the students can finally have a clearer and deeper understanding about the issue they are arguing because they have to consider the matter from the view of the opposite side in order to find their logic reasoning fallacies. Obviously, this process can cultivate critical thinking ability well, which can also promote the effective improvement of cross-cultural thinking ability.

4. The Effects of English Debate on Cultivating Cross-cultural Thinking

In order to deeply investigate the influence of English debate on cultivating cross-cultural thinking ability of English majors, the authors did a questionnaire and surveyed 158 English major students who have had the course of English debate for 8 weeks. From the data collected, it can be seen that English debated have helped them to perform better in the following aspects concerning cross-cultural thinking ability.

4.1. Increased Cross-cultural Knowledge Reserve

According to the survey, 92.31% of the respondents believe that English debate expand their knowledge and increase their knowledge reserves. It shows that English debate is an easy and quick way to increase students' knowledge reserve in a relatively short period of time. Indeed, English debate involves many different types of motions. In dealing with every motion, students have to read a lot, search for the related materials and at the same time learn as much knowledge as possible, not only about different fields but also about cross-culture. During the debate, the debaters of the two parties can also exchange knowledge with each other. So in summary, English debate can effectively increase English major students' cross-cultural knowledge reserves.

4.2. Improved Analytical Ability

According to the questionnaire, 71.35% of the respondents believe that their ability to analyze things has been strengthened after learning English debate, which is a proof to show the effectiveness of English debate on students' analytical ability. Only a small fraction of the respondents think that there is no obvious improvement in analytical ability. It is acceptable because it not so easy to change the thinking habits of a person. They learned English debate

only for 8 weeks, and if they are not so interested in it, or they have difficulty in understanding all the mechanism in debating, they cannot feel the change.

4.3. Improved Logical Reasoning Ability

According to survey data, 61.54% of the respondents said that their logical reasoning ability has been improved after learning English debate. When talking with interviewees, it is not difficult to find that their statements are more logical, and when expounding things, their thoughts are not only on the surface and they can talk something deeper from a larger range of perspectives. These are indications that English debate can improve the logical reasoning ability of English major students.

4.4. Improved Critical Thinking

Most of the students think that they are more critical when judging problems after learning English debate. This part of the population accounts for 69.23% of the total survey participants. Therefore, it can be concluded from the data that English debate has a strengthening effect on critical thinking. Questioning and examination are two main parts of the critical thinking. When conducting an English debate, the debater should question and examine the debate, analyze its advantages and disadvantages, and choose a more reasonable direction. So in this process, questioning and examination are the key steps. Such steps run through the entire debate, so students critical thinking has been trained a lot, and thus has been improved.

5. Conclusion

According to the survey, 67% of the participants think it is necessary to learn English debate because most of them think in learning English debate their English level has been improved and a large majority agree that their cross-cultural thinking skills has been improved. From the data, it also can see many people attach great importance to the cultivation of thinking ability. In the methods of improving the ability of thinking, some students suggested that it could be English speeches training, and some thought that it could be reading more books, but most of the answers put forward by students are debates, or a form related to debates. Therefore, it is concluded that the use of English debate mode to improve cross-cultural thinking skills has been supported by most students. In summary, the ability of cross-cultural thinking is a very important ability for English majors. It can not only make students' thinking clearer, but also make them more cautious in putting forward their opinions and more comprehensive in analyzing problems. Participating in English debates can not only improve students' cross-cultural knowledge reserves, but also improve their cross-cultural thinking skills and promote all-round development.

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