

Test Paper Analysis from the Perspective of English Key Competence

-- A Case Study of an English Test Paper in Senior 3

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Abstract

The education reform of various countries is in full swing. It is the competition of talents that becomes a new war all over the world. In China, more and more people begin to research curriculum reform based on key competence. English is a compulsory subject in high school education in China. And key competence of English subject can affect the overall quality of students. In fact, key competence has always been emphasized in English teaching. However, the application of it is sometimes ignored when setting questions in the test. The design of the test paper is related to the purpose, type and specific environment of the test and it is necessary to follow certain principles to grasp these relations. This thesis just takes an English test paper in Senior 3 as an example to analyze the quality of the test paper, which is based on the perspective of key competence.

Keywords

Key Competence; Test Paper Analysis; Language Ability; Cultural Awareness; Thinking Quality; Learning Ability.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Nowadays, the competition among countries is no longer the competition of productivity level, but the competition of talents. Therefore, there is no doubt about the importance of education, which is reflected in many countries. The term “key competence” was first put forward by OECD, and after that many countries competed to propose curriculum reforms based on it (Tan Zhen, 2018). In September 2016, Key Competence of Chinese Students' Development was officially announced. However, teachers had a misunderstanding in their understanding of key competence, which resulted in improper cultivation and ineffective consequence (Li Xiang, 2020). The teaching reform based on key competence is in progress now, and English also needs it. Mastering English enables more talents to go to the world, adapt to the economic globalization, and achieve greater development.

1.2. Research Purpose

It is for improving students' English scores. The content arrangement of the examination paper is not casual, but follows certain principles. The test of elementary English education in China aims to evaluate key competence of English. If the test paper is made on such a principle, students' English performance will slowly progress.

It is for enhancing teachers' ability of designing test papers. An excellent English teacher should not only teach a good course, but also have the ability to design test paper, which is one of her necessary skills. This task takes a lot of time and energy. So teachers ought to design the

examination paper with key competence as the overall goal, which will exercise the ability to set questions on tests.

1.3. Research Significance

It is conducive to students' active learning. Some teachers conceive of English papers with no principle, and they know nothing about the theory of the language test. When students are doing such examination papers, their enthusiasm is not high. However, with examination papers based on English key competence, students can really find their own shortcomings, and then improve their initiative in learning.

It is good for teachers to improve the quality of teaching. Low-quality examination paper is a mere formality, and its result doesn't scientifically reflect students' abilities. Worse still, it tends to mislead the teacher's understanding to students' ability. However, using key competence in tests will correctly reflect the learning level of a class. Then teachers change the shortcomings in teaching according to the test results.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition

Key competence is the concentrated embodiment of discipline education value, and it is the correct value concept, necessary character and key ability gradually formed by students through discipline learning. It mainly includes language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2017).

2.2. Study at Home and Abroad

2.2.1. Study at Home

Zhu Fen (2018) suggested that the four elements of key competence refer to the education of knowledge and skills, process and method, emotion, attitude and value, and have clear guiding value of education. Ding Liyun (2018) claimed that the evaluation of key competence should focus on real situation and real problem solving. Moreover, Ren Meiqin and Wu Chaoling (2020) said that education reform is from knowledge-based to competence-based. And Zhang Fengshuo (2021) claimed that in China, English teaching runs through the stage of basic education and higher education, so key competence has been repeatedly emphasized. Besides, Zhao Lianjie (2021)) thought that the proposal of English key competence means higher requirements for English examination and evaluation in the stage of basic education. In short, there are many studies on English key competence, but there are few studies on the relationship between key competence and English test.

2.2.2. Study Abroad

Larsari (2011) thought that because of insufficient authentic resources and the need to use the target language, EFL learners generally encounter difficulties developing communicative competence. Marcinkiewicz, Kobylarek and Gulanowski (2016) pointed to four types of competences necessary in understanding the social, cultural and civilizational changes brought about by the development of the internet society. Furthermore, Adaba and Kaygin (2016) determined the key competence levels of postgraduate students in lifelong learning. Ojiambo, Mwaura and Majanja (2017) said that English linguistic competence and proficiency continues to matter because it is a global language of instruction. Barrioluengo & Cantón (2017) said that English communicative competence is based on the use of the language as a tool of communication, both oral and written, of representation, of interpretation and of reality comprehension. To put it simply, there are few foreign studies on English testing in China, nor on English key competence. However, foreign researchers often mention different competence,

which has something in common with the connotation that key competence in China wants to express, and has reference significance for domestic researchers.

3. A Case Study

3.1. Language Ability

It refers to the ability to understand and express meaning in listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing in social situations, as well as the language awareness and language sense formed in the process of learning and using language. English language ability constitutes the basic element of key competence of English discipline (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2017). Language knowledge includes phonology, grammar, vocabulary, discourse and pragmatic knowledge. Among them, discourse and pragmatic knowledge is more important (Su Pan, 2017). In this test, there is a reading text called *Developing Interpersonal Relationships* that requires students to choose five options among seven given options for the purpose of making an essay complete. What should be noted is that this question is used to test students' discourse competence which is an embodiment of language ability. Only students have a clear understanding of the structure of the discourse and have a logical thinking, can they give the right answer. Besides, take a listening question for example, this is the conversation—— What did the woman plan to do this weekend? A. Go hiking. B. Have a swim. C. Camp in the mountains. The dialogue presents a situation in which students are possible to understand the meaning by listening. Only when the context is valid and the use of language is real, can students' language ability be better examined (Kang Pingping, 2020).

3.2. Cultural Awareness

It is the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and the identification of excellent cultures. It is the cross-cultural cognition, attitude and behavior orientation of students in the context of globalization. Cultural awareness reflects the value orientation of English key competence (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2017). The first passage of the reading comprehension is about the London Pass®. The author explains its basics and how to use it, how long people can use it, and how to select number of days. The reading comprehension has something to do with British culture. Specifically, it relates to the British tourism culture. When visiting Britain for a holiday, one must visit London. As an international city, London receives a large number of tourists from all over the world every day. During the peak tourist season, people have to queue up for a long time at a scenic spot, resulting in a lack of enjoyment. To be honest, after reading the passage, students know that they can use the London Pass® to save money and time on their future trips to London. In addition, the second passage of reading comprehension is also about Christmas in the West. It is touching to conclude with a Christmas spirit which is to remember the time with your family. This is also a kind of positive belief that western culture conveys. Just like Jiang Cimei (2018) has said that cultural awareness is malleable so that teachers should attach importance to it in daily teaching.

3.3. Thinking Quality

It measures the ability and level of thinking in logic, critical, innovative and other aspects. Thinking quality reflects the mental characteristics of key competence of English subject (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2017). There is a question type in the examination paper—— Correcting the wrong words. And there are 10 blanks in this part, each with 1.5 points. Students can choose to add, delete or modify words. This question exercises students' critical thinking in their thinking quality which emphasizes rational analysis based on facts and appropriate criteria. Thus, students can doubt the correctness of the sentence according to the grammar rules, and use it as a standard to find mistakes. Moreover, as for the writing part, it lets students imagine that during the summer vacation, they and their classmates in the community will

spend a day to decorate the environment of the community. Finally, students should write an essay for the school English newspaper. In order to write the composition, students need to give full play to their creative thinking and imagine what they will do in the whole day, such as repainting the wall, sweeping the floor and so on. This shows innovative thinking. Xia Guming (2018) said that language learning itself is innovative and the language in which students express their ideas cannot be obtained directly from textbooks or teachers. Liu Daoyi (2018) claimed that knowledge needed to be explored and accumulated for the purpose of making it from implicit and invisible into explicit and visible, from surface and low-end to deep and high-end.

3.4. Learning Ability

It shows students' awareness and ability to actively apply and adjust English learning strategies, broaden English learning channels and strive to improve English learning efficiency. It constitutes the development condition of key competence of English subject (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2017). Learning ability mainly covers three dimensions. Namely, they are the use of learning strategies, resource management and students' learning motivation and interest (Ji Xiaoting, 2017). The level of learning ability is mainly showed in the process of learning. A set of examination papers can indirectly indicate students' learning ability. For example, This test paper has various types of questions--listening comprehension, reading comprehension, choosing five options among seven options, cloze filling, changing word form, correcting mistakes and writing. And the test questions also mentions tourism, festivals, science and technology and other content, among which some are very rich in humanistic feelings and educational significance. This arrangement can keep students motivated and use different strategies to study.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Results

Key competence of English is a necessary and basic quality for high school students, which creates conditions for their lifelong development of English learning. It points out a new direction for educational reform. The design of examination papers is an extremely complicated and arduous project. An English teacher should not regard having a good class as the only requirement. A mature English teacher needs to have the ability to set the questions which are new and carefully prepared in tests.

When designing test questions, teachers need to examine language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. These four elements complement each other, though sometimes they can't be neatly shown in a single paper. It should be noted that key competence should not only be reflected in the class, but also need to be reflected in the test paper. It can be said that it is a kind of reinforcement. Class is the process of cultivating key competence, but the test paper is the process of detecting. These two links provide a guarantee for the implementation of key competence. Only in this way can the educational value of English key competence be brought into full play.

4.2. Limitations

All the above is just about describing the test paper. However, if there is some data about the specific score and performance of every different question, the final analysis will be more complete and better. Due to the lack of student' real examination grades and learning performance afterwards, there is no real feedback and concrete data, which is not conducive to the reflection and further research. So the author hopes this test will be done by some students in the future.

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