

# A Study on the Cultivation of Thinking and Discursive Ability of Students in University English Course

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**Abstract:** Discursive ability is a comprehensive reflection of the level of thinking and personality quality of university students. The cultivation of students' critical thinking skills by teachers in university English teaching can help to achieve the goal of cultivating talents in a comprehensive manner. However, there are problems in university English teaching that emphasize knowledge but not connotation, tradition but not transformation, teaching materials but not current affairs, and results but not process. The following strategies can be used to cultivate students' critical thinking skills in university English teaching: improving teachers' quality and enhancing the critical thinking power of education implementers; clarifying teaching objectives and integrating curriculum thinking; creating teaching processes and enhancing students' self-learning awareness; developing teaching approaches and extending offline classroom teaching contents; adjusting assessment methods and increasing the proportion of formative assessment.

**Keywords:** Critical thinking; University English teaching; Curriculum thinking

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## Introduction

The teaching concept of Curriculum Civic Science and Politics takes the establishment of moral education as the starting point, focuses on the ideological education, course teaching and ability cultivation of college students, and focuses on integrating ideological and political education into the whole process of teaching and education, aiming at cultivating socialist builders and successors with both moral and talent and comprehensive development.

### 1. Overview of critical thinking

Critical thinking is also known as critical thinking, which is translated from the English word "critical thinking". According to the famous American Delphi Report, critical thinking includes both cognitive skills and affective traits. Cognitive skills include interpreting, analysing, evaluating, reasoning, explaining and self-regulating. Emotional traits include curiosity, confidence, cheerfulness, flexibility, honesty, prudence and understanding. Chinese scholar Wen Qiufang also points out that discursive ability is the ability to make purposeful and rational judgments about an event or opinion based on certain criteria, and includes two dimensions: affective disposition and cognitive skills. The state thus shows that the ability to think and discern is both a reflection of the level of thought and a demonstration of personality qualities.

### 2. The current situation of cultivating students' critical thinking skills in university English teaching

#### 2.1 Emphasis on knowledge, not connotation

Traditional teaching has long been influenced by the exam-oriented education model, which focuses excessively on the scores of subject tests. This is more often reflected in university English teaching in university English course exams and university English level 4 and 6 exams. Teachers themselves have long been influenced by traditional teaching, and in university English teaching, they focus too much on isolated explanations of language forms, such as phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, syntax and other knowledge points, as well as more on explanations of test-taking methods and problem-solving techniques for listening, reading, writing and translation. However, thinking and language are inextricably linked, with the content of thinking using language as a carrier and the

logical form of thinking relying on language. Traditional teaching rarely touches on the connotations of language, its historical roots and its practical use.

## **2.2 Emphasis on tradition, not transformation**

University English teaching is aimed at college students who have just entered university. Most of them are used to the traditional teaching mode, such as the “indoctrination” teaching method and the “nanny” teaching management. It is difficult for students to break out of their comfort zone mentally and psychologically, to be disciplined, to learn on their own and to think on their own. In university English, students are used to dictation exercises, receptive teaching activities, meticulous note-taking and problem-solving exercises, but rarely make and implement plans on their own, use a wide range of resources for independent learning, and neglect the development of self-learning habits and skills. At the same time, most students rarely read and apply English outside the classroom, ignore open-ended thinking and discussion activities, and miss the opportunity to have a dialogue of ideas.

## **2.3 Emphasis on textbooks, not on current affairs**

At present, university English teaching is mainly based on existing textbooks. In order to successfully complete the teaching tasks, teachers mostly follow the framework of the textbooks in a step-by-step manner. Moreover, due to the limitation of class time, the number of textbooks chosen for classroom teaching is limited, and teachers only select parts of the textbooks for teaching, and seldom cover supplementary contents beyond the textbooks. In addition, the existing textbooks have been in use for many years and their objectives have not been updated or explicitly integrated into the development of critical thinking skills. The content of the textbooks is fixed and lacks adaptability and currency. The textbooks cover a limited range of topics and types of texts, with insufficient attention paid to classical literature in different fields and little relevance to students’ specialisms, and lacking in interest and application. The after-school exercises in the textbook focus too much on the isolated memorisation of language knowledge and mechanical exercises, lacking in challenge and innovation, and lacking in relevance to students’ real-life situations, which is not conducive to arousing students’ empathy, inspiring them to discuss, and enhancing their critical thinking skills.

# **3. Strategies for cultivating students’ discursive skills in university English teaching in the context of curriculum thinking and politics**

## **3.1 Improve the quality of teachers and enhance the discursive power of education implementers**

Teachers are the leaders of students’ growth and success. In order to cultivate new-age talents with high quality and profound knowledge, teachers themselves need to have higher moral cultivation and humanistic literacy. In the current context of “Greater Thinking and Politics”, teachers need to have solid professional knowledge as well as higher-order thinking skills and stronger critical thinking skills if they are to cultivate students’ critical thinking skills and teach professional courses well.

One example of improving the quality of teachers and enhancing the discursive power of education implementers can be seen in Finland. In Finland, teachers are required to have a master’s degree in education before they can teach. This ensures that teachers have a strong understanding of educational theory and practice, as well as subject knowledge. Additionally, Finnish schools have a high level of autonomy in decision-making, allowing teachers and principals to collaborate and make decisions together. This enhances the discursive power of education implementers, as they are able to shape the curriculum and teaching approach to best suit the needs of their students. As a result of these policies, Finland consistently ranks highly on international assessments of student achievement and is often cited as an example of a successful education system.

## **3.2 Create a teaching process to enhance students’ self-learning awareness**

The main subject of teaching activities is the learner, and the teacher should be the guide and inspirer of teaching. Only by stimulating learners’ motivation to learn can teachers ensure that the teaching process is carried out in an orderly and lasting manner.

One example of creating a teaching process to enhance students’ self-learning awareness is incorporating reflection activities into the classroom. After each lesson, students can be given a prompt to reflect on what they learned, how they learned it, and what questions they still have. This encourages them to think critically about their learning process and take ownership of their education. Additionally, providing opportunities for students to set their own learning goals and track their progress can also foster self-learning awareness. By giving students more control over their learning experience, they are more likely to take an active role in their education and develop lifelong learning skills.

## **3.3 Develop teaching methods and extend offline classroom teaching content**

The teaching time and content of university English courses are very limited. It is difficult for teachers to effectively achieve the goal of comprehensive education and improve students’ critical thinking skills by simply teaching the material in the classroom.

Therefore, teachers must find diverse ways of teaching and expanding the wide range of content available. Students can only really improve their critical thinking skills if they are constantly exercising them in practice. Online learning platforms and teaching-related apps can provide a huge amount of effective resources for teaching and provide a convenient communication channel for teaching practice.

For example, a language teacher wants to develop a more interactive approach to teaching vocabulary in the classroom. In addition to using traditional flashcards and worksheets, they decide to incorporate online games and activities to engage students and make learning more fun. They also create supplementary materials such as podcasts and video lessons that students can access outside of class to reinforce what they have learned in the offline classroom. By developing these new teaching methods and extending the classroom content beyond the physical space, the teacher is able to provide a more comprehensive and engaging learning experience for their students.

## Conclusion

At present, the assessment of university English courses is still based on students' mastery of basic knowledge such as vocabulary and grammar. This is not conducive to teachers urging students to pay attention to the improvement of their overall abilities. Therefore, teachers should pay more attention to the formative assessment of students. Firstly, teachers should observe students' performance in terms of preparation before class, class performance, post-class summaries, individual tasks, group work and teacher-student communication, and record them objectively and fairly. Secondly, teachers should incorporate the assessment criteria for critical thinking skills into formative assessments so that the assessment of critical thinking skills can be based on evidence, so that students can internalise the critical thinking criteria in the learning process, always pay attention to the development of their own ways of thinking and always urge themselves to train their critical thinking skills.

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