

# Study on the Discourse Optimization of English Classroom Teachers from the Perspective of Subject Core Literacy

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## Abstract

Subject core literacy is the key goal of English learning in the new era. As a medium of language and education, classroom discourse contains rich humanistic functions and plays an important role in the cultivation of core literacy. However, there are still many problems in the usage of classroom discourse, such as excessive quantity, mechanical repetition, single form of questioning and feedback, etc. These questions are not conducive to the development of the core quality of English subject. Therefore, this paper analyzes in detail the promotion effect of English teachers' discourse with humanistic functions on students' language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability, and puts forward optimization suggestions on teacher consciousness, content extraction, question design and classroom feedback. This research will be used to improve the quality of classroom teaching discourse and provides some constructive ideas and methods for the cultivation of core literacy of English subject.

## Keywords

English Core Literacy; English Classroom Discourse; Discourse Optimization.

## 1. Introduction

The New English Curriculum Standards further condensed the four core qualities of English subjects, including language ability, cultural awareness, quality of thinking and learning ability, and clearly defined that the core qualities are the correct values, essential qualities and key abilities, which was formed by students through learning. The cultivation and development of students' core quality of English subject cannot be separated from teachers' knowledge transmission in the classroom, and knowledge transmission cannot be separated from teachers' discourse. Cheng Xiaotang (2017) thinks that classroom discourse is an important means of effective communication between teachers and students in the classroom, as well as an important carrier of developing the core quality of English subject and carrying out the fundamental task of cultivating morality and educating people. The humanistic function contained in classroom discourse is the key to the development of language ability. It can not only enhance the cultural awareness but also cultivate the quality of thinking of students. In addition, it is also helpful to improve the English learning ability. On the contrary, teachers' discourses in English classrooms still have many problems such as excessive amount of teachers' discourses, mechanical repetition, and single form of questioning and feedback, which are not conducive to the development of core literacy. Therefore, based on the promoting effect of classroom discourse on core literacy, this paper puts forward optimization suggestions on the four aspects of classroom teachers' discourse, including teacher consciousness, content extraction, question design and classroom feedback, and puts forward corresponding implementation countermeasures to improve the efficiency of classroom teaching.

## 2. The Humanistic Function of Teachers' Discourse in English Classroom

Cheng Xiaotang (2009) expressed that classroom teachers' discourse is all the discourse produced by teachers in the classroom and teaching process, including classroom greetings, classroom instructions, questions, interaction, feedback and other types of discourse. Li Siqing (2022) and other researchers proposed that teachers' discourse has humanistic functions. About the type, the humanistic functions of teachers' discourse can be summarized into the following aspects: classroom management and behavior specification functions, classroom management and social communication functions, and classroom norms and identity functions. Guo Lili (2007) believed that, on the functional level, classroom teachers' discourse can cultivate students' high-level thinking, social ability and quality, improve civic consciousness and enlighten thoughts, so as to promote the cultivation of students' core qualities. Xia Xuemei (2019) emphasized the humanistic function of high-quality teachers' discourse, which is conducive to improving students' English language ability. The improvement of English language ability relies on the improvement of cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. Therefore, high-quality teachers' discourse is of positive significance to the formation of core literacy.

## 3. The Significance of Teachers' discourse on Subject Core Literacy in English Classroom

High-quality classroom discourse of teachers can create a language environment to develop language competence. Teachers can input target language culture to enhance cultural awareness. High-quality discourse can build scaffolding to promote the development of thinking. In addition, learning strategies can also be developed to improve students' learning ability. Therefore, it is of positive significance to cultivate students' core literacy of English subject.

### 3.1. Teachers' Discourse is the Key to Developing Language Competence

In the core quality of English subject, students' language ability is the foundation. Classroom discourse is the key factor to promote the development of students' language ability. High quality of teachers' discourse can create a necessary language environment for students' language learning and provide appropriate language input to build support for language learning and error correction.

Classroom discourse provides appropriate language input. Guanglu Zhang (2017) proposed that language input has the functions of language demonstration and language component reserve, such as the vocabulary and grammatical form of the target language contained in language input. It also has cognitive effects, such as triggering the intrinsic language learning mechanism and making students produce intrinsic language processing. In the English classroom, teachers' discourse is the main source for students to obtain comprehensible target language input. When giving instructions or asking questions, teachers will adjust the speed, intonation and voice according to the situation of students, or repeat or explain the instructions. So that students can recognize and understand, and finally achieve the comprehensive input of the target language.

Guanglu Zhang (2022) also proposed that classroom discourse has built a multiple support for inspiring learning and language error correction. Knowledge is a process of construction. Teachers' questions, interactions, restatements and instructions can inspire and guide students to respond, so as to achieve language output. At the same time, teachers' feedback can verify the effect of students' output, encourage students or correct mistakes, and help students complete their self-correction.

English classroom discourse can create a necessary language environment for students' language learning. In modern English class, teachers' classroom instructions, interaction, feedback and real language resources can simulate a real environment and provide motivation for students' learning.

### **3.2. Teachers' Discourse is an Important Source of Cultural Awareness**

In the context of foreign language teaching, teachers' discourse is also an important source of learning target culture. Teachers can accumulate and prepare lessons according to their own culture, and convey culture intuitively and vividly through discourse. In classroom teaching, teachers' ways of greeting and feedback can reflect cultural transmission. For example, the different greeting ways of English and Chinese can be expounded by comparison, so that students can realize the cultural differences through the different expressions of discourse. These discourses are not only sentences used by teachers in class to implement teaching, but also show language forms under different cultures. In addition, according to the research of Guoqiang Liu and Hua Wang (2018), through context creation, teachers' discourse can also reflect the occasions in which the target language is used, including polite views, time views and public etiquette views. In the English class, students can comprehend the cultural values behind the language and develop cultural awareness.

### **3.3. Teachers' Discourse is the Catalyst to Improve the Quality of Thinking**

Zehang Chen, Qiang Wang and Xiaofang Qian (2019) believed that the quality of thinking refers to the ability and level of thinking in logic, criticality, innovation and other aspects. Teachers' discourse is embodied in classroom interaction, instruction, inspiration and question. It contains rich logic and thinking qualities. In English class, teachers' questions can build a support for students' thinking development. Reference questions can promote the development of students' ability of analysis and evaluation.

In addition to teachers' questions, teachers' inspiration is also the catalyst to induce students' thinking development. Teacher inspiration has a typical scaffolding function, which can guide students' existing thinking and cognition. Students can produce high-level thinking and eventually form good thinking habits and qualities.

### **3.4. Teachers' Discourse is an Important Guide to Improve Learning Ability**

Fen Zhu (2018) defined students' learning ability as their awareness and ability to use and adjust learning strategies, broaden English learning channels, and strive to improve the efficiency of English learning. Learning ability includes not only learning strategies, but also motivation, emotional attitude, cooperative learning, and language use. In the English classroom, language learning strategies are one of the important contents of teachers' discourse in class, which is manifested as instruction and explanation. For example, some teachers attach importance to students' English reading, because reading aloud can train their English fluency and help their pronunciation and intonation. Some teachers attach importance to grammar explanation and learning, through which students can cultivate the accuracy of language. Some teachers pay more attention to students' learning of vocabulary. These examples show that teachers' discourse contains not only linguistic knowledge, but also learning strategies, which is the key to students' language learning.

Teachers' discourse contains rich emotional attitude, which is helpful to improve students' learning motivation and awareness. The emotional goal of English curriculum is not only reflected in the teaching content, but also reflected in the teachers' discourse. The emotional attitude in teachers' discourse mainly refers to the encouraging or positive feedback in class. Encouragement and affirmation can significantly improve students' learning interest and motivation, and effectively stimulate students' participation and enthusiasm.

## 4. Current Situation of Teachers' Discourse in English Classroom

High-quality teachers' discourse in English class can promote the development of students' core literacy. According to the analysis, the promotion effect of teacher's discourse is mainly realized through the way of knowledge presentation, teacher and students' interaction, teacher's questioning and their feedback. But in real class, there are still many problems in teachers' discourse. The teacher-led way of knowledge presentation leads to excessive amount of teachers' discourse, mechanical repetition of interactive discourse, and single form of questioning and feedback. These problems are not conducive to the cultivation of the core quality of English subjects.

### 4.1. The Amount of Teachers' Discourse is Excessive

In a study devoted to the quantity of teachers' discourse, it was found that in the second language teaching class, teachers' discourse generally accounted for two-thirds of the total talking time, while the discourse of students only accounted for a small part in the classroom. Obviously, this is a traditional teacher-centered class. Teachers' discourse takes up most of the time in class, leaving little time for students to practice. This will lead to students have less time in participating in class activities. According to the requirements of core literacy of the subject, in terms of knowledge ability, classroom discourse needs to provide appropriate language input, and build a multiple support for inspiring learning and language error correction. This requirement emphasizes the appropriateness of teachers' discourse and its role as a support for students' knowledge learning, rather than leading the whole classroom. Therefore, the present teachers' discourse in English class is too much, which is not conducive to the development of students.

### 4.2. Mechanical Repetition of Interactive Discourse

Zhengjun Lin and Sha Zhou (2011) pointed out that repetition can be divided into mechanical repetition, reactive repetition and partial repetition. Mechanical repetition is designed to reinforce information word by word. In actual teaching, teachers often use mechanical repetition in class, and this kind of mechanical repetition is very easy to distract students' attention. According to the promotion effect of teachers' discourse on core literacy, good interaction between teachers and students can guide students to participate in class and improve their cultural awareness and learning ability. However, mechanical discourse repetition cannot mobilize students' initiative. And it will have a negative impact on students' emotional attitude and other aspects, which is not conducive to the cultivation of core literacy.

### 4.3. Teachers' Questions are Mostly Display Questions

Liqun Xu (2010) defined the presentation question as the answer to the question that the teacher already knows before asking. For this type of question, students can usually find the answer in the textbook and the answer to the question is usually fixed. Teachers should attach great importance to the cultivation of students' thinking quality when asking questions. In terms of the cultivation of thinking quality, teachers' questioning can set up the support for students' thinking development. Reference questions can promote the development of students' analysis, evaluation and comprehensive ability, and trigger the output of students' thinking ability. However, most of the presentation questions can only test the students' basic knowledge, and the training of divergent, critical and logical thinking is insufficient. Teachers do not use classroom questions adequately and effectively.

### 4.4. The Validity of Positive Feedback is Insufficient

Positive feedback can promote students to form a positive emotional attitude and create a more relaxed learning environment, thus promoting the improvement of learning ability. In English class, teachers will respond to students in the form of positive feedback most of the time.

Teachers hope to help learners improve their own behavior, but the effect of general, mechanical positive feedback is not very good. Teachers lack a dialectical attitude to praise, thus giving insufficient feedback to students' specific ability and progress. This kind of feedback cannot form an evaluation with practical significance and lacks validity.

## **5. Suggestions on Discourse Optimization for English Classroom Teachers**

From the perspective of core literacy, high-quality classroom teacher discourse is characterized by rationality, content refinement, effective questioning and adequate and timely feedback. However, according to the existing problems in teachers' discourse, teachers' discourse cannot fulfill its due role, and there are still some differences with high-quality discourse. Therefore, it is necessary to optimize teachers' discourse to promote the cultivation of core literacy. The following will be optimized from the aspects of teacher consciousness, scene creation, classroom design and evaluation and feedback, so as to realize the role of target teacher discourse and promote the formation of core literacy.

### **5.1. Improve Teachers' Awareness and Balance Teachers' and Students' Discourse**

Under the background of advocating the cultivation of students' core literacy, teachers should first enhance their own teacher consciousness, including the awareness of the connotation of the core literacy of English subjects and how to fully embody students' consciousness of the subject in teaching. Different from the traditional indoctrination teaching mode, the current teaching puts more emphasis on allowing students to practice comprehension skills through listening in class, so as to improve their language ability. At the same time, students' productive skills can also reflect their cultural awareness and thinking ability to a certain extent. Therefore, English teachers should adjust the quantity of teacher's discourse and student's discourse according to the actual situation. Teachers should always have the teaching consciousness that students are the main body. At present, class is the only environment that can provide target language output for students. Therefore, controlling the number of classroom languages and guiding students to produce more languages can promote the development of students' language expression and communicative competence. In addition, teachers need to carry out detailed discourse planning in the lesson preparation stage, and make presupposition of the language required by teachers and the language that students should produce at a certain stage. Only in this way can they provide sufficient language output environment for students in a planned and conscious way to improve their language ability.

### **5.2. Create Real Situations to Enrich the Diversity of Teachers' Discourse**

From the perspective of the authenticity of teachers' classroom discourse, teachers should try their best to create close to real communicative context for students to communicate with them. In this process, both teachers and students play the role of participants in the topic discussion. The opinions expressed by teachers are not authoritative or directional, but just show their own views on the problem. Students can refute the teachers' opinions and reasons and put forward their own views. Teachers and students can express their opinions in this situation, produce a variety of words and avoid repeated mechanical dialogue. This requires teachers to do a good job of preparation before class, and create a situation which students are familiar with. Secondly, teachers need to prepare enlightening words that can guide students' thinking. In addition to active class, teachers also need to provide guidance, so as to guide students to complete established teaching objectives, improve their own language ability and cultural awareness, and form a positive learning attitude.

### 5.3. Optimize the Teaching Design and Realize the Optimization of Classroom Questions

In English classroom teaching, different teaching designs can lead to different teacher discourse. Teachers need to extract teaching themes and contents for cultivating students' cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication ability and thinking quality, so as to provide content basis for raising problems. At the same time, teachers need to set clear goals and have a full understanding of students. This includes an understanding of students' cognitive level, interests and characteristics. Therefore, the question can be more in line with the students' reality, to meet their needs. The use of reference questions and display questions should be analyzed on a case-by-case basis, rather than blindly increasing or reducing the number of certain kinds of questions. For the class with a good foundation, teachers can set up more reference questions according to the students' mastery of the classroom content, so that students can know more knowledge beyond the text. For the class with relatively weak foundation, teachers should set up more demonstration questions, so that students can better grasp the basic knowledge such as books. By making full use of different types of questioning, students can obtain information according to teachers' questions, further explore the profound connotation of knowledge, compare similarities and differences, and cultivate students' divergent, critical and creative thinking qualities.

### 5.4. Pay Attention to the Characteristics of Students and Put Forward Targeted Evaluation and Feedback

Good evaluation and feedback can stimulate students' interest in learning and arouse their enthusiasm when taking part in classroom question-and-answer activities. Effective feedback needs to be accurate and can be used according to the different feedback object. Specifically, in the process of correcting mistakes, teachers' feedback should be combined with the learned content. For example, when explaining language points, the teacher should clearly point out where the language points are and tell the students' mistakes in this content. However, it should be noted that teachers should not talk too much, so as to explain and give feedback on the next content.

In addition, when using classroom feedback language, teachers should use different feedback language according to different feedback objects. This requires teachers to understand each student, observe the performance of different students in class, and identify the individual differences between students. For example, some students have a good English language foundation but are a little proud. Teacher should use less incentive feedback to avoid that too much praise will lead to students arrogant. On the contrary, some students have average English language ability but are diligent and studious. Teachers should give them more positive feedback to build their confidence. Based on this, students can form correct and positive learning attitude.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the humanistic function of teachers' classroom discourse, it can be seen that teachers' discourse contains rich content of language, culture, thinking and learning strategies. It is a key ability of language development, an important source of forming cultural awareness, a catalyst of thinking quality and an important guide of learning ability. Compared with the effect of high-quality teachers' discourse, there are a lot of problems in real class, which is not conducive to the development of core literacy. Therefore, based on the research summary of high-quality teachers' discourse, this study puts forward the optimization strategies of improving teacher consciousness, creating real situations, optimizing questioning methods, and designing targeted evaluation and feedback. Effective teachers' discourse can cultivate students' language

ability, thinking quality, cultural awareness and learning ability, and improve the quality of English classroom teaching.

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