

A Brief Analysis of the Application of English Subject Core Literacy in IELTS Speaking Teaching

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ABSTRACT

With the introduction of the new curricula and textbooks in Henan high school, the four major English competence - language competence, cultural cultivation, thinking quality, and learning ability are given more emphasis. For students in Chinese-foreign cooperative programs who have completed their national curriculum and will take IELTS international English exams like this, integrating these learning achievements into IELTS instruction is necessary. Based on relevant articles and teaching practice, the paper studies the application of core literacy in IELTS speaking teaching, which includes enhancing language ability through logical expression and extraction of key information; improving cultural awareness by incorporating national conditions and traditional culture; cultivating the quality of thinking by making use of mind maps and debates, and developing learning ability by adopting shadow reading and analyzing videos.

KEYWORDS

English subjects; Core literacy; IELTS speaking

1 Introduction

Starting from 2021, the public high schools started to use new textbooks that emphasize core literacy, especially in English, using large unit teaching design and ongoing teaching evaluation. Although only grade 10 began using the new materials, it is necessary for all grades to include core literacy.

In an international department of a public high school, students follow general English up to Grade 11 and begin with international courses such as IELTS starting from Grade 11. Therefore, the core literacy implementation should be extended from general English classes to international English classes.

In the beginning, teaching IELTS Speaking to students who are preparing to study abroad is difficult because students are not used to the type of class skill based listening, speaking, reading, writing. In English teaching, embedding English core literacy in teaching design, teaching process and teaching evaluation can make students adapt to the success.

Our goal is to produce globetrotting people who can contribute to the nation's progress. Give students their core competencies and Chinese cultural identity.

2 Research status

2.1 Overseas research status

Foreign literature rarely uses the term "English core literacy," but research on teaching English as a second language has always focused on the student's ability to use it and the specific contexts of its learning. Ducasse & Brown (2009) looked into IELTS speaking interactivity and student preparedness in an Australian university setting. Kun An (2021) researched about applying AI to English language learning through British/American literature. Mallillin(2017)quantified the results of combining IELTS modules with General English foundation courses.

2.2 Domestic research status

Domestic scholars have studied core literacy very well in some areas of English teaching, but there is little research on IELTS speaking. Ren Shenghua provided strategy on how to develop core literacy in oral English: stimulating interests, using the multi-media, student-centered class. Huang Liangyu carried out specific teaching design and assessment of core literacy in middle school oral English, showing a task-based approach. Zheng Qingmao explored oral teaching based on the core literacy perspective, namely basic practice and autonomous learning and situational teaching.

3 Application status

Core competences are important objectives for curriculum design and reform. application from macro curriculum design to micro teaching design is universal, but when it comes to international programs, international English courses in particular, its application is neglected.

3.1 Overview of core literacy

Core literacy is made up of core qualities and key abilities for students' lifelong growth and contributions to society. Studying it is important for practicing moral education and boosting China's competitive advantage in education. English subject core literacy contains four interrelated aspects.

3.2 Language competence

This is the ability to understand and express meaning in social situations through listening, speaking, reading, viewing, and writing, including language knowledge. It develops from the two basics to the three-dimensionals, where the former includes knowledge and skills and the latter includes knowledge/skills, process/method, and emotional attitude/value.

3.3 Cultural consciousness

It means understanding China and understanding the world, recognizing both positive and excellent parts. It represents cross-cultural cognition, attitude, and behavior, indicating values. Cultivation improves the nation's identity, cultural pride, and a sense of a common future for humankind.

3.4 Thinking quality

This refers to logical, critical, and innovative thinking abilities, which represent the intellectual traits of core literacy. It helps students analyze/solve/cross-cultural value judgments. Cultivation is also about classifying information, analysing logic, and rationally expressing it in English.

3.5 Learning ability

This was the awareness and ability to use and alter English learning strategies, open up more channels, and enhance efficiency. metacognitive, cognitive, communicative, emotional strategies are involved; it improves self-management and lifelong learning habits.

4 Introduction to IELTS speaking

4.1 Test content

The IELTS speaking test is a one-to-one, recorded conversation with an examiner, which is divided into 3 parts: introduction / interview, individual long-turn, and two-way discussion.

4.2 Test method

Tests are given face-to-face or online by video. Both need to listen, understand, and express naturally and fluently.

4.3 Band descriptors

Grading criteria are: Fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, pronunciation.

4.4 Students' difficulties

Challenges: No environment to immerse in; Difficult to remember and use sentences in context; Interference from Chinese grammatical thinking; Insufficient phonetic practice; Not familiar with abstract Part 3 topics, such as economy and culture, resulting in absurd answers; Lack of understanding of how important listening is in the speaking exam.

5 Application strategy

5.1 Improve language competence

In the real IELTS speaking teaching context, we could apply various strategies to the corresponding core competence of English subjects. We will begin with the language ability first.

5.1.1 Grasp key information

Language is a practical tool for communication and during the test, candidates will get nervous to some extent. However, it is the priority to understand the questions and grasp the key information from the examiner. In the part one and three of IELTS speaking, students need to do more practice for concentrating on the important words, especially adjectives, adverbs, verbs and nouns.

For example, one of the questions in part one is "what places do you most like to visit?" Students always answer the places they like to go to and neglect the word "most", or they will talk about the place they want to visit in the future. Afterwards, the related questions will be about how often you go there and whether the place is popular with other

people. If you do not catch the key word in the first place, it is awkward to be faced with the subsequent questions.

Another example is in part three. When students were asked "how is it important for children to learn traditional products in a country?" They might discuss like this: "It is vital because tradition is the symbol of our history and culture." which does not focus on children and products at all. They are urgent to answer the questions and do not focus on the key information given.

In part two, candidates will be given the question on a piece of paper as well as a mark pen used to take notes for one minute. Usually they are too nervous to cherish the time to write a large quantity of clues but forget the key words in the question. In the part two "Describe a positive change you have made in your life", students are familiar with the change in the daily life and then might speak about sleeping late in the senior high school which is not a positive but negative change. Therefore, in the daily exercise, I would ask students to circle the key words in the part two first of all and then only list the main points include what, when, where, how and why.

5.1.2 Express own ideas

Language competence is about understanding and expressing abilities in social contexts. Once students grasp related phrases and expressions, they are able to transfer those collocations in different topics. These are the common expressions students prefer to use: "it is very convenient", "it can reduce my stress", "it can help us express our patriotism", "it is very lively and energetic".

They would make most of these sentences in various questions which sound reasonable at first and then boring for the repetition.

Aimed at this expressing difficulty, I ask students to give the specific responses in real topics. For example, when we discuss our favorite color, I will ask related reasons based on different colors including black, white, pink, blue, green and so on. Students then will think about the corresponding information: black makes us calm and is mysterious; white is pure and clean; we always connect pink to princesses which indicates very cute; blue is the color of sky and sea, which reflects friendly and profound; lively spring occurs to our mind when we think of green.

Similarly, we could transfer this method to the topic music. We can not just say that listening to music is a good stress-reliever. Instead, I will give different adjectives including touching, lively and energetic, fast-paced, slow and calm, soothing and relaxing, catchy. Then I will ask students to match these expressions to diverse kinds of music, for example, pop music, classic music, light music, jazz, country music, traditional music, and so on.

5.2 Enhance cultural consciousness

Cultural awareness is of high significance for students in the international department of senior high schools. There are two main reasons. For one thing, they will study abroad after three-year study and they need spread China's excellent culture to the world and contribute to our motherland after their graduation. For another, they are high school teenagers and not mature enough. During the process of growth, they need to learn to become more responsible and civilized world citizens.

5.2.1 Connect to our country

When talking about some broad topics in IELTS speaking, students can be led to connect those responses to our own country China, including social, technological, festive, cultural topics. This will help students express the patriotism and also advertise our traditional culture.

For example, when students are asked to describe a time when they did not enjoy the music, they would discuss the ear-splitting noise of the square dance which is extremely popular in China. In some western media, these middle-aged and retired women are referred as "dancing grannies". However, this phenomenon is being relieved due to the policy of government about controlling the volume of the music and the time of dancing.

In part two, there is a question called "describe an invention that has changed the world in a positive way". Students tend to discuss the lights, telephone like this. Instead, if they connect this topic to our own country, there are a number of inventions in our history, such as the four great inventions, saws, and so on, which will certainly improve their national pride.

When students are required to describe an important event they have celebrated, they prefer to think about our traditional festivals including Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, etc. It is because they are familiar with the activities in these traditional festivals and also the history origin.

5.2.2 Introduce national culture

It is well known that China has a long history of five thousand years, and breeds a rich mixture of culture. Students learn about it from their parenting, school curriculum, and field trips to different museums as well. For the senior high school students who will study abroad in the near future, it is an urgent need to disseminate our culture.

An example question in part two is about describing a traditional product in your country. Students came up with a

variety of traditional products they are interested in. For the musical instrument, they thought about Erhu or Pipa. Traditional products could include traditional food such as mooncake, rice dumpling, etc. Handcraft is also a symbol of Chinese tradition containing paper-cutting, pottery, embroidery and so on. These traditional products are usually the gifts that students choose when going abroad to overseas universities.

When students are asked to describe a celebrity they know in part two, I encourage them to select the heroes of China who are also the role models of teenagers. The father of rice, Yuan Longping set a good example for our younger generation. Zhong Nanshan, who has saved our country from the epidemic especially in Wuhan deserves our respect and admiration.

It is also true given the example of the city that you think is very interesting. Students could attach importance to the typical cities in China. For instance, the metropolises including Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou can be described specifically. Besides, our hometowns are also attractive due to the culture, buildings or environment. In this way national culture could be demonstrated by the young generation.

5.3 Promote thinking quality

Logical, critical and innovative thinking are considered as the performance of quality of students' thinking. It is represented during the mental process of input into output. Besides, diversified students are more likely to show different levels for thinking competence, which poses big challenges for teaching. There are several ways to contribute to the improvement of thinking abilities.

5.3.1 Use mind map

This method is beneficial for developing students' logical and critical thinking, especially divergent thinking. Mind map is an organic combination of both pictures and words, which enables us to present affiliation and categorical relations. It is essential for students to utilize functions of both left and right brains thus enhancing logical thinking and imagination as well as unlocking the potential. With the use of mind map, we will make our thinking visualize. What is more, on every intersection of mind map, we can continue to spread until it is shaped like a tree or a map.

It is true given the example of the topic social media in part three. Students will be motivated to spread their thinking by demonstrate the activities we can do, preference by people of different ages, appropriate time spent on social media, and comparison with non-social media including television and newspaper. Based on these branches, students will find it easier to come up with more ideas and then respond to every related question.

Another example of using mind map is about job. We could begin with the difference between working in big and small companies. In addition, working environment is a crucial factor for people to achieve satisfaction. Another branch can be related to how employees should be motivated or whether it is easy to find a satisfactory job.

5.3.2 Organize debate

Debate contest contributes a lot to critical thinking. In the real teaching context, we can ask students to draw lots to decide which is positive or negative side. Or it is suggested to change the side after the first process of the competition which will help students practice how to organize their proofs and evidence promptly, which is referred as the performance of critical thinking.

The teacher needs to encourage students to find supporting material on their own.

For instance, students need to choose what musical instrument they prefer to learn, piano or violin. For the positive side which supports piano learning, they can explain that long fingers are the advantage while left-hander is more suitable for studying violin. More supporting ideas could be shown like whether places are appropriate or how elegant it is to play the instrument.

One of the most typical example is discussing whether tourism is beneficial for a city. If students agree with the point, they tend to present the benefits for economic development, cultural transmission, people's awareness to protect the city. By contrast, the negative side could choose to claim the environment pollution, overdevelopment, especially the effect made by the epidemic.

It is also an appropriate topic about living in the city or countryside. Several factors could be mentioned such as educational resources, living cost, healthcare facilities, life pace and so on.

5.4 Boost learning ability

In order to improve learning abilities, students need to adjust their learning strategies flexibly. It is also essential for them to broaden the learning channels. English learning efficiency will be boosted with the improvement of learning quality which can be of good use in their lifelong time including university, work or life.

5.4.1 Practice shadow reading

Shadow reading refers to the learning method that learners read every English sentence right after the audio. If

students read correctly as the script and intonation, that is like a shadow between them and the listening. This is an effective way to practice pronouncing. This method can also help students enhance the awareness of English language which will enable students speak more fluently and naturally. If they do more exercise in shadow reading, students will be able to think in the way of English instead of translating from Chinese into English in the mind.

For instance, one application called Everyday English Listening is an effective platform for shadow reading. It provides a wide variety of learning resources for practice ranging from high school English to international English. What is more, the APP could score your reading based on your performance which will give a target for students and help them feel the progress. By this means listening will also be boosted together with speaking.

5.4.2 Appreciate video clips

One of connotations of learning ability is being capable of using multiple resources among which video is an attractive way for the reason that students are nowadays immersed in short videos with the development of information era. They always spend their spare time on scanning short video clips which provide the foundation of interests. Viewing has been added into the learning strategies of English besides listening, reading, writing and speaking. It combines images with sound effectively and is available almost everywhere anytime. Teachers are advised to select those video resources that are closely connected to students' daily life so that they would concentrate on the video clips. Subtitles could be deleted as students make progress in listening and comprehending to practice their concentration. Teachers could encourage students to summarize the general idea and even comment on the video.

There are plentiful materials of videos online for this teaching method. To begin with, it is documentary that contains a wide variety of information and learning resources, for example, contents about nature, animals, food, aerospace, and so on. Besides, introduction to some overseas universities could also be played to help students set a goal and be motivated to achieve their dream. What is more, clips of movies could lead students to make comments by speaking or predict the scripts. Last but not the least, teachers could introduce some moving or inspiring songs to students and then sing out the lyrics by practicing pronunciation.

6 Conclusion

There are several ways to integrate core literacy in IELTS speaking teaching. The four Cs are related to each other and can be addressed simultaneously in a single activity. Implementing core literacy is complex but necessary. It can also inspire more students going abroad through the further exploration and summary of practical teaching experience.

About the Author

Ruijia Guo, born in 1989, female, Han ethnicity, from Henan Province, holds the professional title of Secondary School Teacher (Level II), has a master's degree, and her main research directions include international education, English language teaching, etc.

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