

# Cultivation Strategies of Senior High School English Core Competencies Under the Background of New Curriculum Reform

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**Abstract:** With the deepening of the New Curriculum reform, the purpose of improving students' core competencies has been put on the agenda. It is found that there are various challenges in high school English teaching, such as teachers' superficial understanding of the New Curriculum Standards, outdated evaluation methods, and exam-oriented teaching objectives. Therefore, a series of strategies are proposed, including integrating classroom teaching into real life, optimizing the content and form of teaching materials, adopting activity-based approach and improving teachers' professionalism. These strategies aim to offer some help to improve the overall quality of senior high school English teaching, and to improve students' core competencies.

**Keywords:** New curriculum reform; High school English teaching; Core competencies; Cultivation strategie

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## 1. Introduction

In order to adapt to the changes of talent training requirements in the new era, the English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 edition) focuses on the development of students' core competencies, which include language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity, and learning ability. Core competencies are the excellent character and key ability that students need to possess to adapt to the needs of the times. However, China's cultivation of English core competencies are still in its early stage without systematic and professional analysis and research. In addition to guiding students to deeper understand English in senior high school English teaching, students' core competencies should be shaped to promote the overall development of students' comprehensive ability by setting up comprehensive and systematic courses.

## 2. Contents of Core Competencies

### (1) Language ability

Language ability is the ability to understand and express the meaning in a social contexts by listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. Regarding the connotation of language ability, there are three points that deserve special attention. Firstly, language ability emphasizes the context and theme. Language ability is represented by students participating in language activities related to the theme in a specific context. Secondly, language ability emphasizes the use of various strategies of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge. Thirdly, language ability is aimed to understand and express meaning. Understanding and expressing meaning are usually realized with the help of relatively complete discourse in a given context (Cheng et al., 2024).

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## **(2) Cultural awareness**

Cultural awareness includes understanding both Chinese and foreign cultures, recognizing outstanding cultures, and intercultural cognition, attitudes, and behaviors. National English curriculum standards put cultural awareness in the key position of the core competencies and values of English subjects for several reasons. Firstly, the cultivation of cultural awareness plays an important significance in cultivating students to enhance students' national identity, strengthening cultural self-confidence. Secondly, with the globalization of the world economy and the popularization of international exchanges, understanding different cultures is crucial for being a responsible global citizen in today's interconnected world.

## **(3) Thinking capacity**

Thinking capacity represents the cognitive aspect of core competencies, reflecting the level of students' ability in understanding, analysis, comparison, inference, criticism, evaluation, creation, etc. The biggest difference between humans and animals is that humans have the ability of thinking (Ma, 2021). Cultivating thinking capacity helps students enhance their ability to analyze and solve problems, which is essential both in learning and in life. Developing students' thinking capacity also contributes to improving students' learning effectiveness because they can understand the knowledge more deeply and apply it to different contexts.

## **(4) Learning ability**

Learning ability refers to students' ability and awareness to use and adjust English learning strategies actively, and to expand English learning channels so as to increase the efficiency of English learning. The cultivation of students' English learning ability can help them form a good sense of self management. Developing learning ability helps students manage their English learning autonomously, develop good learning habits, acquire learning resources. People with high learning ability can master knowledge more systematically. In this fast-changing information era, it is essential to build a sense of life-long learning and to develop independent learning skills, which will lay a solid basis for lifelong development.

# **3. Dilemma of Cultivating Core Competencies**

## **(1) Exam-oriented teaching objectives**

English teaching objectives are key to ensuring teaching effectiveness and achieving learning outcomes. However, in today's educational landscape, exam-oriented teaching objectives have become a dominant force in shaping English language education. Many English courses primarily focus on preparing students for standardized tests rather than developing their overall language proficiency. Students are often encouraged to memorize vocabulary lists, grammar rules, and formulaic expressions to perform well on exams. This approach prioritizes short-term memory retention over long-term language acquisition. As a result, it is difficult for students to adapt to real-world challenges.

## **(2) Superficial understanding of the new curriculum standards**

Since the implementation of the New English Curriculum Standards for senior high schools, English teachers have strived to implement the New Curriculum Standards in practices. However, their understanding of the New Curriculum Standards remained at the superficial level. Most schools do not have the time and resource to train teachers, and due to a lack of support in relevant educational knowledge, teachers think that it is difficult for them to operate the New Curriculum Standards. Teachers may implement the New Curriculum Standards entirely based on literal understanding or their own teaching experiences, which can lead to a very serious issue that teachers may overlook core competencies emphasized in the New Curriculum Standards.

### **(3) Out-dated evaluation methods**

The importance of teaching evaluation in English course goes without saying. But classroom teaching evaluation has many problems in most authentic English classrooms (Long, 2023). First, the out-dated teaching evaluation does not take the comprehensive development of students' core competencies as the standing point. Second, the existing teaching evaluation pays little attention to the main role of students. Third, the out-dated teaching evaluation fail to adopt a variety of evaluation methods and means. Formative assessment and summative assessment, qualitative evaluation and quantitative evaluation should be combined, making the evaluation comprehensive, accurate, and flexible.

## **4. Cultivation Strategies of Core Competencies**

### **(1) Integrating real-life contexts**

The New Curriculum Standards emphasize that life is the curriculum, requiring teachers to focus on connecting students' daily life in teaching (Li, 2020). Real life provides a real context for language learning. Teachers should create a context for teaching English by combining the content with real-life and social situations. In this context, students can practice their language comprehension and train their language skills (Ma, 2023). In addition, teachers should emphasize the integration of life phenomena to build real-life language situations, guide students to develop their thinking and imagination to memorize and use language knowledge, express their thoughts in English. In this way, students can be stimulated to have a positive emotional experience, enhance their interest in learning and stimulate their learning potential.

### **(2) Adopting activity-based approach**

The New Curriculum Standards put forward a teaching approach pointing to the core competencies called the activity-based approach. Activities are the main way for students to understand and express meaning, develop thinking, cultivate their cultural awareness and gradually form learning ability (Mei, 2018). Activities reflect students' understanding of the theme meaning and discourse from shallow to deep, reflecting the development from low level to high level in students' thinking (Gao, 2023). Therefore, activities make English teaching more flexible, engaging, and meaningful. Through participating in various activities, students develop lifelong learning abilities such as autonomous learning, cooperative learning, and critical thinking, improving their core competencies.

### **(3) Improving teachers' professionalism**

Teachers should constantly reflect on their teaching practice and identify areas for improvement through peer assessment and self-assessment, enrich their practical experience and enable them to understand why certain methods are effective and apply them flexibly in practice, constantly update their teaching concepts and broaden their horizons. Senior high school English teachers should also understand and master information technology, use information technology flexibly to provide students with a more diverse classroom experience (Zulhafizh, 2023). Schools should also provide more opportunities and possibilities for English teachers to improve their teaching professionalism, such as organizing pre-service and in-service training, clarifying teachers' development goals and pathways and providing support and resources to help them achieve their goals.

## **5. Conclusion**

During the crucial moment of enforcing the New Curriculum reform, the cultivation of English core competencies has become the focus of English teaching. Core competencies are an important concept that has very far-reaching implications for educators. Promoting education reform and development with core competencies is a hot topic.

However, the dilemma of cultivating core competencies cannot be ignored. Right now, teaching situation in senior high school English teaching still has many problems. Students in such an educational environment are impossible to become talents with core competencies. But the imperfect situation of cultivating core competencies can be changed. This paper has prosposed some useful strategies to cultivate core competences. Hopefully, the research in this paper can provide feasible suggestions to implement the requirements of the New Curriculum reform, and truly cultivate students' English core competencies.

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