

# **Study on the Status Quo and Cultivation Strategies of English Teachers' Classroom Discourse Competence of English Normal Students**

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**Abstract:** The English education reform in primary and middle schools poses a great challenge for English teacher trainees as future front-line teachers. They not only need to master subject-specific knowledge and educational expertise, but also need to have a concept that English subject has played an important role in cultivating students' holistic development. In this context, English teachers with accurate and expressive pronunciation can serve as role models for students, but also lay a solid foundation for beginners' pronunciation. The standardized and appropriate teachers' classroom discourse in achieving teaching objectives and developing various teaching activities should be emphasized, and the research on the strategies on the cultivation of English teachers' classroom discourse competence among English majors in normal universities, also known as English normal students, need to be carried out. In view of this, this paper first clarify the overall objectives of the English curriculum in primary and middle schools, which is the main theoretical basis of this paper, and then explores the effective strategies for cultivating English normal students' classroom discourse competence, based on the observation and analysis of English teachers' classroom discourse proficiency.

**Keywords:** English Normal Students; English Teachers' Classroom Discourse Competence; Status Quo; Cultivation Strategies

## **1. Introduction**

With the continuous promotion of the reform of elementary and secondary school English curriculum, higher requirements have been put forward for English teacher trainees as

front-line teachers in basic education. "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)" and "Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, revised in 2020)" clearly stated that the objective of the English curriculum is to cultivate students' core literacy. Through the study of English courses, students are expected to develop correct values, essential qualities, and key abilities necessary for personal lifelong development and social progress. These encompass language skills, cultural awareness, critical thinking, and learning ability. "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)" integrates language knowledge and language skills from the previous syllabus, placing emphasis on language proficiency. It also incorporates critical thinking, changes learning strategies to learning ability, integrates emotional attitudes into cultural awareness and learning ability, and prioritizes cultural awareness. It highlights the crucial role of the English curriculum in fostering students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication capabilities, aligning with the belief in establishing cultural confidence.

The English education reform in primary and middle schools poses a great challenge for English teacher trainees as future front-line teachers. They not only need to master subject-specific knowledge and educational expertise, but also need to have a concept that English subject has played an important role in cultivating students' holistic development. In this context, English teachers with accurate and expressive pronunciation can serve as role models for students, but also lay a solid foundation for beginners' pronunciation. Foreign language teachers' classroom discourse refers to the discourse produced by foreign language teachers in organizing and

implementing foreign language classroom teaching [1]. It is not only the carrier of knowledge, but also the knowledge and skills that teachers should impart [2]. Profound and infectious classroom discourse can help to create a good language learning environment for students, harmonize teacher-student relationships, enlighten students' minds, develop their potential, and shape their character. This, in turn, contributes to enhancing the quality of education and teaching, and achieving teaching objectives. Therefore, standardizing and enhancing the English classroom discourse level of English teacher trainees is an essential part of their training.

## 2. The Status Quo and Existing Problems of English Teachers' Classroom Discourse Proficiency of English Normal Students

The writer has conducted observation and analysis of English teachers' classroom discourse proficiency of the third-year English normal students in their sixth-semester oral English training course for English teachers of recent three years. Several prominent problems are identified and summarized as follows.

### 2.1 Poor Pronunciation

Pronunciation problems were found to be a significant concern. As most English normal students originate from various dialect regions in Yunnan province, their pronunciation is influenced by local dialects. Furthermore, the uneven teaching levels in different regions have resulted in the development of non-standard pronunciation and intonation during their primary and secondary school education. Despite the provision of phonetics courses and audio-visual oral courses in the university, their long-standing poor pronunciation habits persist, rendering their pronunciation unacceptable. Notable and common issues in this regard include 1) mispronunciation of vowels, such as pronouncing "verb" [vɜ:(r)b] as [veb], "girl" [gɜ:(r)l] as [gil], "unit" ['ju:nɪt] as ['junɪt], "salad" ['sæləd] as ['sɒləd], and "pen" [pen] as [pɛn]; 2) having difficulties in differentiating between [n] and [l]; 3) stressing word endings and habitually adding vowels at the end of words, e.g., pronouncing "home" as [həumu], "bad" as [bædə], and "ask" as [ɑ:skə], among others, habitually adding the sound [ə] to the

voiceless consonants [t] and [s] when they are the ending sound; 4) insufficient pronunciation of diphthongs, e.g., pronouncing "like" [laɪk] as [lek] and "museum" [mju:'ziəm] as [mju:'zəm]; 5) incorrect word stress, such as pronouncing "interesting" ['ɪntrəstɪŋ] as [ɪn'trəstɪŋ]. These are common problems that arise when students pronounce individual sounds in words. Besides, in the flow of speech, students often ignore or even don't realize the liaison between words. For instance, "put it" is read as [put it] rather than [putit], "write it" as [rait it] instead of [raitit].

### 2.2 Non-standard Classroom Discourse

Resulted from the neglect of the accumulation and application of English teachers' classroom discourse and the habitual transfer of Chinese thinking to English language, English normal students often use improper collocations of words and Chinglish teaching instructions, though they can express themselves skillfully in the teaching trial lecture. For instance, look the blackboard, listen a song, let's going to the next part, read the follow sentence, anyone volunteer, there are three points: one is...two is...three is...,etc. If students solidify the non-standard English teachers' classroom discourse, it will have a negative impact on English teaching.

### 2.3 Limited Form and Content

In the recent three rounds of English teachers' oral English training course for English normal students, the classroom discourse practiced was found to be limited in form and lacking in content. Teachers' instructions used by the normal students mainly focused on language training, lacking guidance and interaction, and they did not effectively engage in comprehensive and effective communication and negotiation with the students, missing the opportunity to fully utilize their discourse. For example, procedural classroom phrases like "Good morning/afternoon. How are you today? I'm fine, too. Now, class begins. Read/write/listen to this sentence, please. Finish this exercise in 5 minutes" were frequently used. The evaluation discourse tends to be uniformed, lacking differentiated assessment in students' different learning outcomes and the evaluation targets are general and vague, unable to effectively motivate the students. For instance, phrases

such as "Good job!" and "Well done!" were repeatedly used for students' evaluation and feedback, which sounds perfunctory and less encouraging. The procedural and stereotype classroom discourse demonstrated a narrow understanding of the functional attributes of the teacher's classroom discourse.

#### **2.4 Inappropriateness**

In addition to the problems of non-standardization and unicity of form and content, the teachers' classroom discourse of English normal students is inconsistent with the teaching context and teaching objects. In classroom demonstrations for primary school English and junior high school lower grades, teachers unintentionally use vocabulary and complex sentences beyond the curriculum's scope. For example, phrases like "Let's analyze the sentence pattern. Can you tell me the subject and the predicate of it? Now take out a piece of white paper on the top of which you should write your English name and fold it into two parts so that it's convenient for you to write two paragraphs" were used. Clearly, words such as "analyze," "pattern," "predicate," and "convenient" are beyond the comprehension level of elementary and first-year junior high school students. Additionally, the use of long sentence structures hinders students' understanding. This inappropriate use of difficult words and complex long sentence structures in classroom language leads to poor teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, the lack of authenticity in language is also evident. For example, when teaching Unit 3 "How do you get to school?" from the seventh-grade textbook published by People's Education Press, the teacher only explained and trained the transportation methods listed in the textbook individually, without providing a real-life context for the students, hence students have no chance to express their true situation. Now a large number of students are actually driven by their parents, but this unit textbook does not introduce the expression of parents' pick-up, so the teacher does not supplement it. If teachers can pay attention to the authenticity of classroom discourse, they will actively guide students to express their ways to school according to their real situation, which can well stimulate students' learning motivation. However, teachers do not regard the

communication between teachers and students in the classroom as the real exchange of ideas and information, but only pay attention to the accumulation and practice of language knowledge. If teachers often say some untrue words in class, over time students will not care what teachers say, and students will develop the habit of loose talk [1].

#### **2.5 Lack of Necessary Pause, Repetition and Changes in Intonation and Tone**

English normal students often neglect the necessary pause in the use of teachers' classroom discourse. They usually finish the discourse which need interaction and negotiation with the students without necessary pause and wait. The important and difficult points in the teaching content are also lack of necessary repetition. For example, when teaching the listening part of the second unit *What time do you go to school* of the second volume of the seventh grade of the People's Education Press, one normal student gave such an instruction without any pause and wait for students' response "Now listen to Section A,1b three times. During the first listening, listen and try to understand the meaning. For the second listening, match the times with the actions, and draw lines from the clocks to the pictures. During the last listening, you should check your answers." Only when such a long instruction was given did the normal student add a brief inquiry "Are you clear?" to check for understanding. Such a one-way instruction does not allow students time to think and understand the teacher's classroom discourse, and the role of teachers as a scaffold for students to understand the language is not reflected. Teachers who use such one-way instructions do not pay attention to the interactive negotiation relationship between teacher and students, but only to complete the teacher's established teaching tasks.

### **3. Strategies for Cultivating English Teachers' Classroom Discourse Competence of English Normal Students**

English classroom instructions involve not only linguistic aspects but also encompasses education and psychology. This is attributed to the fact that English teachers communicate with a specific target audience, namely English learners, and engage in a dynamic

communication process known as teaching and learning. Consequently, these unique characteristics differentiate English classroom instructions from general spoken English [3]. Drawing upon previous teaching experiences, the author has identified the following strategies to enhance English normal students' proficiency in using classroom discourse.

### **3.1 Innovation of Teachers' Educational Beliefs**

In the traditional classroom teaching, a "receptive view" towards students' learning has been adopted. This perspective perceives English learning as a process of "receiving" language knowledge, including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, functions, and topics, as well as language skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This process is primarily focused on "attention," "memory," "accumulation" (increasing quantity), and "production." The central aspect of "receptive view" is "memory," assuming that language is automatically generated as learners' knowledge and skills expand through memory. In this type of learning, learners predominantly acquire knowledge and skills from teachers and textbooks, emphasizing the need to memorize the information and methods presented by the teacher. Regrettably, this approach often neglects learners' intrinsic factors such as motivation, existing knowledge, experience, and creativity. The learning strategies employed are mostly centered around "memory" and the belief that practice leads to perfection, including activities like note-taking, vocabulary memorization, and practicing sentences and grammar from texts [4]. Teachers who adhere to this view of classroom instruction primarily employ controlling instructions as their mode of communication and restrict themselves to the content provided in textbooks.

Conversely, teachers who adopt a "negotiating view" perceive English learning as a process of "negotiating" language usage within a specific social context. They believe that language learning and development occur through communication and negotiation with the external environment. In this mode of learning, teachers not only create opportunities for cooperation and communication with students but also act as guides or facilitators for negotiation [4]. Teachers who view

classroom instruction as a means to promote student learning intentionally enrich their classroom discourse by employing its multiple attributes: liveliness, encouragement, and interactivity. Teachers' educational beliefs will affect their teaching practice and teaching effect. Therefore, it is suggested that novice teachers should reshape their teaching beliefs, design classroom discourse according to students' actual language level and existing learning characteristics, break the shackles of examination-oriented and question-intensive tactics, and take improving students' comprehensive language use ability as the teaching goal [5]. English teachers should use strategies to promote the transfer of the right to initiate the triggering step of discourse to students, cultivate students' ability to start, continue, control, shift and end the turns of the speech, and effectively improve their real communicative competence [6]. With the innovation of the view on classroom teaching and learning, English normal students can be equipped with the belief that high-quality teachers' classroom discourse should display the following characteristics and practice them in the classroom teaching: 1) Standard expressions, which can provide the high quality language input; 2) Strong interaction, which can effectively create an interactive context; 3) Highlighted functions (explanation, questioning, feedback and management) , which can effectively promote the achievement of teaching and learning goals [7].

### **3.2 Teaching Reform**

Normally, the oral English training course for English teachers has been conducted in a condensed manner during a specific semester, with limited training time and a narrow focus on standardized instructions. As a result, the classroom discourse of English teachers has been overly formal and abstract, lacking in substance and specificity. To address this issue, it is suggested that the oral English training course for English teachers should be integrated with fundamental theoretical courses.

In alignment with the "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)," practical training on the six elements of primary and secondary school English teaching content should be incorporated into

core language courses such as phonetics, speaking, audio-visual speaking classes, and reading classes. These elements encompass themes, discourses, language knowledge (including pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, and pragmatics), cultural knowledge, language skills, and learning strategies. For instance, the discussion topics in oral English classes for teacher candidates can be selected from the unit topics in primary and secondary school textbooks, diversifying the forms of oral training, such as engaging in children's English picture book reading, English storytelling, English animation dubbing, children's English song singing, and English drama performances. In reading classes, teacher candidates can be assigned to read and explain unit texts from secondary school English textbooks as part of their training.

In terms of the teaching content of cultivating normal students' oral English ability, the traditional two parts of pronunciation and daily communication English are expanded into four modules of pronunciation, daily communication oral English, workplace oral English and classroom oral English, which are promoted step by step to gradually cultivate students' English application ability. The pronunciation module corrects the pronunciation and intonation of normal students through pronunciation training. The module of daily oral English trains students' communicative competence of daily life English by creating daily life situations. Workplace oral module sets up workplace working scenarios, through task-based teaching, to help students use English to solve problems in the process of work [8].

### **3.3 Reform of Learning and Evaluation Methods**

It should be highlighted that English teachers' classroom discourse competence can not be cultivated in a certain period of time but established over the daily learning. Besides teachers' guidance, normal students' autonomous learning awareness and habits are needed. In view of this, the writer has tried a three-stage English teachers' classroom discourse training course, which comprises of online self-study, offline concentrated learning (teacher-student), and group cooperation and individual training. At the first stage of the training course, students are required to take

an online self-study course, "Practical Classroom English" offered by Zhejiang Normal University on the website Chinese University MOOCs. Students should complete online self-study notes, recording the content of and insights into classroom discourse gained from the online self-study course. At the second course stage, the offline concentrated learning, two modules are primarily focused on. Module one delves into a deeper understanding of the significance, functions, and specific content of English teachers' classroom discourse, while module two centers around evaluating and reflecting on English teachers' classroom discourse. At this stage, the teacher first gives the students an elaborate introduction to the definition, importance, functions of English teachers' classroom discourse, and demonstrate existing problems of using it. Then the students work in groups of 6 to 10 to discuss the principles of how to design, use and evaluate effective English teachers' classroom discourse. After the discussion, situational practice is taken, during which, each student group is asked to choose a unit in the junior middle school textbooks, design English teachers' classroom discourse of the unit and present it to other groups. At the third stage, group cooperation and individual training, each group selects a group member as the middle school English teacher and observes his/her English class (about 45min.) collectively. Then the whole group engages in discussions regarding the teacher's discourse during the student's teaching process and eventually submits an evaluation and reflection report. In individual training, students utilize the teacher's oral English manual to accumulate and standardize their own oral English skills. The following table, Table 1, is the classroom discourse assessment form of the normal student's 45 min. class teaching. Normal students are required to work in groups to finish the grading and the comments in the table.

### **4. Conclusion**

This paper focuses on the importance of standardized and appropriate teachers' classroom discourse in achieving teaching objectives and developing various teaching activities. Specifically, it highlights the need to strengthen research on the cultivation of English teachers' classroom discourse



competence among English normal students. Taking into account the current situation of English normal students' classroom discourse competence in our school, the paper explores effective strategies for cultivating their

classroom discourse ability. The findings of this study offer valuable insights and recommendations for cultivating and promoting English normal students' classroom discourse ability.

**Table 1. Assessment Form of English Teachers' Classroom Discourse**

| Group No.  | Group Members  | Lesson Observation       | Student Teacher: Topic: Type: |
|--|--|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Items  | Assessment Content   |                          | Score                         |
| Speaking 40%   | Pronunciation & Intonation 10%                                   |                          |                               |
|  | Correct Grammar 10%  |                          |                               |
|  | Fluency ; Speaking Naturally, Loudly&Clearly 10%                 |                          |                               |
|  | Appropriate Length & Moderate Speed 10%                          |                          |                               |
| Content 50%  | Concise & Clear Instructions 10%                                 |                          |                               |
|  | Correct & Adequate Explanations 10%                              |                          |                               |
|  | Appropriate Cohesion & Proper Language 10%                       |                          |                               |
|  | Effective Interaction:<br>Communication, Questions&Evaluation20% |                          |                               |
| Creativity 10%   | Creative Performance 10%   |                          |                               |
| Total _____  |  |                          |                               |
| <b>Comments on the student teacher's classroom discourse</b> |  |                          |                               |
| Merits   |  | Deficiencies and Causes: | Suggestions for improvement:  |

The ability of English teachers to effectively engage in classroom discourse is of utmost importance for English normal students. English teachers who possess proper pronunciation, tone, and language usage, along with dynamic and interactive communication, have the power to establish an optimal language learning environment for students. Furthermore, such teachers can foster harmonious relationships with their students, inspire their minds, nurture their potential, cultivate their character, and ultimately facilitate the achievement of teaching objectives. The development of English teachers' classroom discourse ability is an ongoing and dynamic process that must be aligned with the background of the new curriculum reform in primary and secondary schools. It necessitates the innovation of teaching philosophies within English normal students and the integration of foundational theoretical courses with oral English training course for English teachers. Additionally, adopting multi-dimensional and mixed methods of training and evaluation at different stages, both inside and outside the classroom, is essential. Emphasizing the "standard, appropriateness, interactivity, and effectiveness" of English teachers' classroom discourse is crucial. Effective training pathways can enhance the professional

qualities of education majors, thereby cultivating qualified teachers who meet the requirements of the new curriculum reform in primary and secondary schools. This paper focuses on the importance of standardized and appropriate teachers' classroom discourse in achieving teaching objectives and developing various teaching activities. Specifically, it highlights the need to strengthen research on the cultivation of English teachers' classroom discourse competence among English normal students. Taking into account the current situation of English normal students' classroom discourse competence in our school, the paper explores effective strategies for cultivating their classroom discourse ability. The findings of this study offer valuable insights and recommendations for cultivating and promoting English normal students' classroom discourse competence.

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