

The Manifestation of Core Competencies in English Education

Jia Liu*

Tianjin Binhai New Area Tanggu No.13 Middle School, Tianjin 300451, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

Copyright: © 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: The core competencies of the English subject represent the concentrated embodiment of its educational value. They encompass the correct values, essential character traits, and key abilities that students gradually develop and enhance through English curriculum learning to meet the demands of the information age, knowledge society, globalization, and their lifelong personal development. Comprising four key elements—linguistic competence, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability—the core competencies of the English subject represent an integrated set of skills that are mutually permeating, interacting, and developing harmoniously. They constitute the educational goal of cultivating students' moral character through English education and serve as the evaluation criteria for the effectiveness of high school English education and students' academic performance in English. This paper emphasizes the design of teaching objectives centered around the core competencies of the English subject and the enrichment of the teaching process. By placing students at the center, deeply integrating the concept of core competencies, and innovating teaching methods, the paper aims to achieve an organic combination of knowledge transmission and competency cultivation.

Keywords: Integration of core competencies into classroom teaching; Student-centered approach; Innovative teaching methods

Online publication: October 16, 2025

1. Introduction

According to the “General High School Curriculum Plan (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020)”, the overall goal of high school education is summarized as “fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering virtue and nurturing talent.” The overarching educational goal outlined in the “English Curriculum Standards (2020 Revision)” is “to further promote the development of students' core competencies in the English subject on the basis of compulsory education, cultivating socialist builders and successors with Chinese sentiment, international vision, and cross-cultural communication abilities.” So, how can subject core competencies in English courses be implemented?

2. Understanding the manifestation of cultural awareness in ideological and political education

The manifestation of cultural awareness is particularly crucial in ideological and political education. On one hand, ideological and political education should guide students to understand the characteristics and values of different cultures, fostering their cultural consciousness and self-confidence. On the other hand, ideological and political education also needs to leverage the power of culture to influence and shape students' ideologies, beliefs, and behavioral habits, guiding them to develop an appreciation and respect for traditional culture and understand the importance of cultural awareness.

Cultural awareness embodies the value orientation of the core competencies in the English discipline. In the process of developing language proficiency, enhancing thinking quality, and improving learning abilities, it is essential to remain true to the original purpose of education, which is to help students foster a sense of belonging to the community with a shared future for mankind, strengthen their national identity and patriotism, learn to be a good person and to conduct themselves properly, and grow into individuals with cultural literacy and social responsibility. In English teaching, the cultivation of cultural awareness should mutually promote and permeate with the cultivation of other core competencies in the discipline, achieving a coordinated and comprehensive development of students' overall core competencies in the subject.

Taking the return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 as an example, senior high school students faced the challenge of adapting from online learning to offline learning upon returning to the classroom. Teachers can design emotional education-themed courses to guide students to cherish their learning opportunities while integrating the cultivation of cultural awareness. For instance, by comparing domestic and international responses to the pandemic, teachers can emphasize national identity and patriotism, helping students foster a sense of belonging to the community with a shared future for mankind. Such instructional designs not only enhance language proficiency but also achieve the goal of cultural education. The first lesson back at school should focus on emotional education, encouraging students to study hard, never give up, and move forward towards their goals. The following is a demonstration of the instructional design for an English lesson themed "Returning to School":

2.1. Teaching objectives

Enable students to cherish everything they have now, do the most important things during the most beautiful time, and simultaneously assess their writing and expression abilities.

2.2. Teaching process

- 1) The theme of this lesson is "Back to School." Returning to school for the first time, students are bound to feel a sense of novelty and excitement. The lesson will commence with the song "Juvenile" to arouse students' interest and resonate with the theme.
- 2) Through posed questions, students will be encouraged to reflect on what they have gained during the 100 days at home and consider the reasons for their successes and failures during this period of contemplation.
- 3) By comparing online learning experiences, students will recognize their shortcomings and strengthen their resolve to study diligently. Examples will be presented, such as the perseverance of students like Huang Yuting from Wuhan, who, despite being diagnosed with COVID-19, continued to prepare for

exams diligently in a makeshift hospital amidst physical and mental stress. Some students, lacking internet access at home, would borrow their neighbors' Wi-Fi on rooftops from dawn till dusk to complete their academic tasks. Students will also be prompted to reflect on their behavior during online classes.

- 4) Taking a global perspective, the achievements of our motherland and the praise for medical workers will be highly commended, emphasizing the preciousness of our happy life. Simultaneously, key grammar structures and sentence patterns will be reviewed to prepare students for the final composition of the lesson.
- 5) Encourage students to contemplate how they should spend their remaining time at school.
- 6) Guided by selected famous quotes and aphorisms, students will write a composition titled "Are You Still the Same Boy/Girl You Used to Be?" This will prompt students to deeply reflect on whether they remain the same youthful selves as before. Have they stayed true to their original aspirations and consistently pursued their dreams? Or have they undergone struggles and changes, becoming mature and resolute? Or perhaps they remain unchanged, maybe even unwilling to change.

Through comparative images from the pandemic, both domestically and internationally, students will understand that some countries have adopted a laissez-faire approach to the pandemic, while other regions are plagued by continuous warfare and widespread suffering. In contrast, in China, soldiers and doctors fulfill their duties with dedication and selfless commitment, always upholding noble principles. While facing various crises and challenges, they should always prioritize the safety and interests of the people. Students are greatly inspired and feel even prouder to be Chinese. During the teaching feedback session, teachers learned from letters commemorating graduation that some students found the English class to be profoundly educational, akin to a class meeting, leaving them deeply moved and brimming with confidence. For teachers, inspiring students to genuinely yearn for knowledge, recognize their teachers, and feel proud of their country and nation represents a significant value of education.

3. How to enhance thinking quality in English learning

Thinking and language are closely intertwined. The "English Curriculum Standards (Revised in 2020)" outline four core competencies for English subject education: linguistic competence, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability. These elements interact and promote each other, with linguistic competence serving as the foundational element, cultural awareness as the value orientation, thinking quality as the mental characteristic, and learning ability as the developmental condition. Thus, the development of thinking quality aids in enhancing students' abilities to analyze and solve problems, observe and understand the world from a cross-cultural perspective, make correct value judgments about things, and promote deep learning among students.

The composition topic for the 2024 English examination was related to technology, and many students failed to perform at their expected level due to a lack of practice on similar topics. However, all compositions are closely linked to the textbook. In Unit 4, "A Glimpse of the Future", from the New Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press Senior High School English Elective Course 3, numerous vocabulary, sentence patterns, and ideas related to AI can be applied to the Gaokao (National College Entrance Examination) composition. This indicates that students still require continuous practice and improvement in terms of thinking

quality. Therefore, in everyday teaching, it is crucial to design teaching tasks that are tailored to students' proficiency levels and can stimulate their active participation in thinking.

3.1. Design tasks with intellectual engagement

Based on the four levels of Depth of Knowledge (DOK): DOK1 — Observation and Comparison; DOK2 — Analysis and Inference; DOK3 — Generalization and Construction; DOK4 — Critique and Innovation, tasks should be designed to captivate students' attention through questions, continuously enhance the intellectual content, and foster the development of their thinking abilities.

3.1.1. Typical case analysis observation: Predicting the main idea of the article based on the title and accompanying illustrations DOK 2

S1: I've watched the movie "I, Robot." I think the passage might be similar to that movie.

T: What did you realize from that movie?

S1: It's dangerous to rely too heavily on robots.

S2: If we can regulate AI properly, it will bring us many benefits. But if it gets out of control, it will be a disaster.

This dialogue revolves around the movie "I, Robot." Student S1 believes that the content of the article may be similar to the movie and points out the dangers of over-relying on robots. Student S2 suggests that if AI can be effectively regulated, it will bring numerous benefits, whereas if it goes out of control, it will lead to a disaster. The discussion primarily explores the pros and cons of AI and robot applications, as well as issues related to regulation.

Teaching Reflection: 1) Knowledge Level: The dialogue demonstrates that students have a certain understanding of AI and robotics, having acquired knowledge about the risks and benefits of technological applications from the movie. Further guidance can be provided to encourage students to think about how to formulate specific measures for regulating AI from multiple perspectives, including ethics, law, and technology, thereby broadening and deepening their knowledge.

2) At the level of teaching methods: Triggering student discussions through references to popular movies can stimulate their interest and participation, making it an effective introductory approach. Subsequent teaching can continue to employ methods that integrate real-world cases and audiovisual materials. Additionally, organizing group debates, project-based learning activities, and other events can enable students to deepen their understanding of issues related to artificial intelligence through practice, enhancing their critical thinking and language expression abilities.

3.1.2. Word collocations and usage: DOK1 inferring meaning through observation and comparison

Differentiate between "used to do" and "be used to doing" based on example sentences.

E.g., It used to feel like 50 percent of my time was spent researching new restaurants.

I used to drink tea, but now I am used to drinking coffee.

“Used to do” indicates that something was done frequently in the past (but is no longer done); “be used to doing” means being accustomed to doing something.

Teaching Reflection: 1) At the level of knowledge comprehension: This approach of comparing through examples helps students intuitively grasp the differences between the two phrases. If time permits, additional example sentences in different contexts can be provided to help students achieve a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding. Students can also be asked to create their own sentences to test their mastery of the phrase usage.

2) At the level of teaching methods: Using example sentences for comparative learning is an effective vocabulary teaching method. Further expansion can be made in subsequent lessons, such as introducing relevant reading comprehension passages to allow students to identify and apply these two phrases within a textual context. Alternatively, group competitions can be organized to see which group can create the most reasonable sentences using these two phrases within a specified time, thereby increasing the fun of learning and student participation.

3.1.3. Inferring word meanings from context DOK 2

We could be seen as a minor inconvenience standing in the way of solving a bigger problem. If we're lucky, AI might consider us valuable enough to keep around. If not, it might wipe us all out.

Students inferred the meaning of “wipe out” based on the context, with some associating it with “destroy.” This exercise trains students to understand the meanings of unfamiliar words using contextual clues, enhancing their reading comprehension and vocabulary inference skills.

Teaching Reflection: 1) Knowledge Mastery: The fact that students could quickly associate “wipe out” with “destroy” indicates that some of them possess a certain ability to infer word meanings. However, students can be further guided to analyze the context more deeply, such as considering the attitude of “AI” towards “us” and the consequences of its actions, to more accurately grasp the meaning of “wipe out” as “completely eliminate or eradicate” in the text, thereby deepening their understanding of the vocabulary in terms of both depth and breadth.

2) Teaching Methodology: Inferring word meanings from context is an effective vocabulary learning method. Subsequent exercises could include more passages on diverse topics and varying levels of difficulty to reinforce this skill. Group discussions can also be organized, allowing students to share their approaches to inferring word meanings and learn from each other. Meanwhile, teachers can provide timely feedback and summaries to enhance students’ overall vocabulary learning and reading skills.

3.1.4. Expression of sentence structure and meaning DOK1

By posing questions about each paragraph, educators can improve students’ speed-reading abilities and enable them to analyze sentence structures and infer word meanings from their answers.

For example, when the teacher asks, “*Why is the writer grateful to AI?*”

Answer: *Thanks to AI, I've got my own super-smart personal assistant built into my phone.*

Students were able to fully express their viewpoints and quickly identify the important grammar point of using non-finite verbs as postpositive attributives.

Teaching Reflection: 1) Knowledge Mastery: This method helps students consolidate their grammar knowledge, such as their understanding of non-finite verbs used as attributives. However, it can be further expanded by providing more complex sentence structures that include different types of non-finite verbs (present participles, past participles, and infinitives) used as attributives, adverbials, and object complements, thereby deepening students' comprehensive grasp of the grammatical system of non-finite verbs.

2) Teaching Methodology: Question-guided instruction effectively stimulates students' thinking and language use. Subsequently, the diversity of questions can be increased, such as incorporating reasoning and evaluative questions, to enhance students' higher-order thinking skills. Additionally, students can be encouraged to ask their own questions and respond to each other, increasing student participation and interaction, and creating a more lively classroom atmosphere.

3.2. Design tasks to enhance thinking quality

Provide tasks that offer intellectual challenges to stimulate students' thinking and use paragraph-based writing to improve their expressive abilities. For example, after reading an article, ask:

Teacher: *"Which part of the passage do you find the most impressive? Why?"*

Students: *"I find paragraph 4 the most impressive. The writer described the victims of AI so vividly that I could feel the terror and anxiety of the future."*

3.3. DOK4 appreciation, evaluation, and formation of new perspectives

Discussion

Work in pairs to share your impressions of the three individuals in the forum with your partner.

E.g. 1 In my opinion, Popkid is cautious and slightly pessimistic. Because...

E.g. 2 I think Millenniumbutterfly is an optimistic person. Because...

E.g. 3 As far as I'm concerned, Pink-hzae is a wise individual who can view AI issues objectively.

Debate Competition

Proponent: AI is a genuine achievement.

Opponent: AI is a genuine threat.

After reading the article, pose questions to guide students in appreciating, evaluating, and forming new perspectives; have students discuss their impressions of the forum participants in groups; conduct a debate competition on the topic "Is AI an Achievement or a Threat?" Students are required to analyze arguments from multiple perspectives and form critical viewpoints through verbal expression. By employing teaching methods such as debates, story continuation, and role-playing, students' thinking abilities can be exercised, and their critical thinking skills and language expression abilities can be cultivated.

Teaching Reflection: 1) Task Design: These tasks can stimulate students' thinking and expression, but they can be further optimized. For instance, when discussing impressions of forum participants, more relevant background information can be provided to enable students to conduct deeper and more comprehensive analyses. Prior to the debate competition, students can be given more training on debate techniques and

guidance on collecting materials to enhance the quality of the debates. Such tasks can effectively exercise students' logical thinking and cross-cultural perspectives, but it is important to note the balance between reliance on guidance and independent thinking.

2) Teaching Methods: The comprehensive application of various teaching methods is commendable, but attention should be paid to ensuring equitable student participation. Students who are introverted or have a weak foundation in English may exhibit lower participation levels in debates and role-plays. To address this, additional support can be provided in advance, such as offering guidance on group task allocation and providing language frameworks, to ensure that every student has the opportunity to enhance their thinking and expression skills.

4. How to cultivate students' language and learning abilities in English teaching

4.1. Student-centered approach with AI tools as supplements

The emergence of DeepSeek has brought about multifaceted impacts, including, of course, a disruption to the education sector. Modern teaching methods offer tremendous convenience to both teachers and students. Teachers can leverage the various English teaching materials provided by DeepSeek and the results of regular student tracking and assessments to save time on lesson preparation, optimize classroom design, and promptly adjust teaching plans. For instance, in English writing, teachers can input students' English essays into DeepSeek to identify grammar and vocabulary issues, and then receive suggestions for further optimization. Students can also enhance their learning efficiency and broaden their horizons through this process. Additionally, in vocabulary teaching, teachers can input commonly misspelled words and sentence patterns into DeepSeek to generate targeted exercises such as cloze tests or reading passages, enabling students to deepen their understanding of vocabulary and grammar meanings within contextual settings, thereby improving their language abilities.

AI tools like DeepSeek can optimize teaching designs, such as generating personalized exercises and providing writing feedback. However, it is crucial to guard against over-reliance. Teachers should maintain student-centeredness through classroom interactions. If students lazily rely on AI to handle their assignments, it will further hinder the cultivation of their thinking abilities. Therefore, teachers play an extremely important role in the process of using AI to assist teaching. Teachers should pay attention to students' feedback in the classroom to understand their learning quality. By adopting a student-centered approach and delivering precise instruction, teachers can encourage students to actively explain the relevant knowledge they have learned. Gradually improve language and learning abilities through student-student interaction and teacher-student interaction. Break down disciplinary barriers and construct an interdisciplinary curriculum system. For instance, taking "An Unforgettable Trip" as a theme, students can describe their most memorable journey. The task requires the use of the past tense, inclusion of some newly learned English vocabulary, and focuses on describing the destination, interesting encounters, and personal feelings. More interestingly, students can be encouraged to draw simple illustrations related to the topic and create an English picture book. Classmates can guess the storyline based on each other's picture books, experiencing the joy of learning amidst laughter. Such activities can stimulate students' interest in learning, combining illustration with English expression to cultivate interdisciplinary integration of art and language abilities. However, teachers need to clarify language objectives to avoid prioritizing form over content.

4.2. The interaction between learning attitude and learning ability

Cultivating students' English learning abilities first manifests in their having a positive learning attitude, developing good learning habits, being capable of autonomous learning, and valuing collaboration, as well as possessing an awareness of lifelong learning. Secondly, students should have a clear understanding of their own learning status and be able to select reasonable and effective learning strategies and methods based on different contexts and their actual situations.

The division of student ability levels (Level 1, Level 2, Level 3). At Level 3, students are required to have a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the significance of English learning, possess a strong interest and desire for English learning, have long-term plans and clear learning objectives, formulate, adjust, and optimize learning plans according to needs, and possess a strong learning motivation. These points are particularly crucial. After the first English exam, most students did not give up; they firmly believed they would perform better in the next exam. The confidence, expectations, and self-requirements of students towards the English subject are precisely manifestations of improved learning abilities.

A positive learning attitude can unleash students' potential, allowing them to absorb knowledge and tap into their potential in a relaxed and joyful state, continuously enhancing their learning abilities. A negative attitude, on the other hand, can stifle the development of students' thinking, causing them to give up easily when faced with difficulties, be reluctant to think, and be resistant to practice, resulting in a decline in abilities across various aspects. Teachers must be adept at observing and, once they notice that a student's emotions are off or their attitude is not positive, they should promptly understand the situation and provide targeted guidance. Meanwhile, improving learning abilities can help strengthen students' confidence, while a lack of ability can lead to a negative mindset and a sense of frustration in students. As the saying goes, "When you know how, it is not difficult; when you do not, it is hard." This further requires teachers to infect students with their enthusiasm, care about their dynamics, and help them achieve corresponding results, thereby increasing their self-confidence and allowing everything to develop positively.

Students are both willful and adorable. Sometimes, they decide their attitude towards a subject based on their liking for it and the strictness of the teachers in charge. The principle of "loving the person also means loving what is associated with them" is reflected in students' subject choices, highlighting the importance of emotional communication between teachers and students. Teachers can enhance mutual affection and strengthen learning motivation through personalized feedback (such as through cards, letters, or slideshows). When students like and respect a teacher, they will naturally value the subject.

For example, senior three students significantly improved their confidence and self-requirements in English learning through emotional encouragement from teachers, demonstrating a virtuous cycle of learning ability and attitude. In the last class of the previous senior three cohort, the teacher presented each student in the class with a greeting card, each adorned with a poem that cleverly incorporated the student's name. Some of the poems were well-known to the public, such as the one given to student Li Qingyun: "With favorable winds, I soar to the blue sky." For students for whom it was difficult to find a ready-made fitting poem, the teacher composed one themselves. For instance, the poem given to student Yang Yinan reads: "The laurel is plucked, first promised to me; Yang's arrow pierces three leaves, astonishing all." The poem for student Han Ruixuan was: "Wisdom shines like stars, illuminating the path ahead; with unrelenting penmanship, a splendid chapter is forged."

These poems were filled with beautiful blessings for the students and also marked a successful conclusion

to the teaching journey of the previous senior three cohort. This marks not only the end of a learning journey but also the starting point of a new expedition. I would like to express my gratitude for all the dedication and efforts invested in past teaching endeavors.

In summary, integrating the core competencies of the English subject into daily teaching is a task that is both complex and engaging. Against the backdrop of the big data era, while students benefit from technological advancements, they also face new challenges. Teachers need to ensure the effectiveness of core competency cultivation, striving to nurture young talents with innovative thinking that meet the demands of the times. By adopting teaching strategies that keep pace with the times, teachers can enhance students' comprehensive abilities, promote the practical implementation of core competency cultivation, and help students blossom into a more splendid future.

5. Summary and prospects

The cultivation of core competencies in the English subject is a systematic and long-term educational endeavor that requires teachers to continuously explore and innovate in their teaching practices. By analyzing the integration paths of the four core competencies—cultural awareness, thinking quality, language proficiency, and learning ability—and combining them with specific teaching cases, this paper proposes a teaching strategy centered on students, supported by technology, and connected through emotions. Research indicates that the practical implementation of core competencies relies not only on scientific curriculum design but also on teachers' ability to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation and creativity through diverse interactions and interdisciplinary integration.

With the rapid development of educational technology, English teaching will encounter more opportunities and challenges. Teachers need to further explore the following directions:

1. Balancing technological empowerment and humanistic care: While leveraging AI tools to enhance efficiency, teachers should be vigilant against the potential weakening of deep thinking caused by technology and emphasize the cultivation of students' humanistic qualities and critical thinking.
2. Tiered cultivation of core competencies: Tailor teaching methods to the characteristics of students at different levels, refine competency development goals, and establish a more precise evaluation system.
3. Deepening of interdisciplinary integration: Strengthen the linkage between English and other disciplines (such as science and art), design more comprehensive practical tasks in real-world contexts, and promote the all-round development of students.

The ultimate goal of education is to cultivate lifelong learners who are “emotionally engaged, capable of critical thinking, and adept at learning.” English teachers should always be guided by core competencies, driving educational transformation through innovation and reflection, laying a solid foundation for students' future development. On the one hand, they should continuously explore novel and efficient teaching methods to enhance students' language proficiency. On the other hand, they should regularly participate in teaching research activities and engage in teaching reflection to analyze the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching process, adjusting teaching strategies in a timely manner based on student feedback and learning outcomes. This ensures that English education goes beyond merely imparting language knowledge and places greater emphasis on enhancing students' overall competencies, thereby nurturing high-quality talents for our country who possess an international perspective, innovative thinking, and lifelong learning capabilities.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Qi XD, 2001, Content, Approaches, and Methods for Developing Creative Education. *Beijing Education*, 2001(8): 9.
- [2] Chen YE, 2025, A Review Strategy for High School Biology under the Background of the New College Entrance Examination. *College Entrance Examination*, 2025(2): 3–5.
- [3] Li DX, 2001, Theoretical Exploration and Practical Conception of Innovative Education. *Journal of Shanxi University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2001(5): 17–21.
- [4] Ministry of Education, 2006, English Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High Schools” (Experimental). People’s Education Press, Beijing.
- [5] Tan JH, 2018, Some Thoughts on Practical Teaching of English in Vocational High Schools. *Scientific Consulting (Science and Technology Management)*, 2018(1): 104.
- [6] Yao RJ, 2019, A Teaching Model for Building Cultural Awareness through Reading and Writing: An Exploration of High School English Language Teaching. *New Curriculum (Lower)*, 2019(12): 8–9.
- [7] Wang J, 2019, The Application of Multimodal Teaching Models in Cultivating Cultural Awareness. *Teaching Monthly (Middle School Edition, Teaching Reference)*, 2019(Z2): 27–30.
- [8] Liang F, 2019, A Case Study on High School English Reading Instruction Based on Subject Core Competencies. *English Pictorial (Advanced Edition)*, 2019(27): 25–26.
- [9] Ministry of Education, 2020, English Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High Schools (2017 Edition, Revised 2020). People’s Education Press, Beijing.
- [10] Wang ZK, 2020, How to Cultivate Students’ Cultural Awareness in High School English Reading Instruction. *Liaoning Education*, 2020(17): 41–45.
- [11] Chen L, 2021, Original Texts and Translations of All Lessons in the Elective Compulsory Book III of the New FLTRP High School English Textbook. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Beijing.

Publisher’s note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.