Exploration of Project-based Teaching Model in College English under the Perspective of Core Literacy

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Abstract: This paper, based on the BAK Education Institute's PBL Gold Standard and China's Three-Six standard model, analyzes traditional teaching challenges through pedagogical practice and constructs a three-in-one PBL teaching model of "goal anchoring—process implementation—diversified evaluation." The effectiveness is validated through the "Overseas Dissemination of Traditional Culture" case study. Empirical results show that this model significantly enhances students' English application skills and cross-cultural critical thinking abilities, providing a practical paradigm for educational reform.

Keywords: Core Literacy; College English; Project-Based Teaching; Intercultural Competence

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background
The framework of "Core Competencies for Chinese Students' Development"defines the core competencies in foreign language disciplines as linguistic competence, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability, marking the transformation of college English teaching from "instrumental" to "competency-oriented". However, current teaching still suffers from disconnection: content focuses on grammar and vocabulary while neglecting cultural and thinking training; methods are primarily based on "teacher instruction + exercise practice" without authentic language scenarios; evaluations center on final written tests, making it difficult to measure comprehensive competencies.
Project-based teaching, driven by real projects, can promote the integration of deep learning and literacy. However, there are some problems in the application of PBL in college English in China, such as "insufficient pattern" and "loose connection with literacy objectives", so it is necessary to build a systematic framework to achieve the precise implementation of core literacy.

1.2 Research Significance
Theoretical significance: clarify the inherent compatibility between core literacy and PBL, improve the theoretical construction of PBL localization under EFL, respond to the question of "how to implement four-dimensional literacy through project design", and enrich foreign language teaching theory.
Practical significance: refine the operable PBL teaching process and strategies, solve the difficulties of teachers in "driving problem design" and "building inquiry scaffolds", provide teaching guidance for teachers, and cultivate multi-disciplinary talents.

1.3 Research Ideas
The study employs literature review and action research methodologies through three phases: The first phase examines core competencies and the theoretical framework of Problem-Based Learning (PBL), analyzing their compatibility. The second phase identifies challenges in traditional teaching approaches to competency development. The third phase establishes a competency-oriented PBL model, validating its effectiveness through case studies and data analysis to formulate optimization recommendations.

2. Analysis of the compatibility between core literacy and project-based teaching in College English

2.1 The Connotation and Definition of Core Literacy
The core competence of college English covers four dimensions, which are interrelated and organically unified:
Language ability: the ability to use English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills

in real context to communicate is the basis of foreign language learning;

Cultural awareness: the quality of understanding Chinese and foreign cultures, respecting differences and having cross-cultural tolerance is the core literacy of globalization;

Thinking quality: The development of critical, logical and innovative thinking through English is the deep goal of language learning;

Learning ability: the ability to plan learning independently, integrate resources and reflect on adjustment is the guarantee of lifelong learning.

2.2 The Core Characteristics of Project-Based Teaching

According to the Buck Institute for Education's PBL Gold Standard, high-quality PBL requires seven essential elements: challenging driving questions, continuous inquiry, authentic contexts and tasks, student autonomy, process reflection, diversified evaluation, and public demonstration of outcomes. China's Three-Six standard model divides PBL into three phases—design, implementation, and assessment—with each containing six key components, emphasizing a closed-loop connection between "goals → process → outcomes".

2.3 The Internal Compatibility of The Two

Contextualized Language Competence Development: PBL designs authentic tasks such as cross-cultural communication and English project creation, breaking the constraints of virtual environments. This approach enables students to apply language skills in real-world scenarios, facilitating the transition from "knowledge memorization" to "practical application." Research indicates that such contextualized learning can enhance language proficiency by over 60%.

The inquiry process cultivates critical thinking: PBL's continuous exploration requires students to identify questions, analyze information, and devise solutions (such as "Optimizing Qingdao's Overseas Dissemination Strategy for Marine Culture"), thereby developing critical and logical reasoning skills. In cultural-themed projects, students compare maritime communication pathways between China and other countries while evaluating the feasibility of proposed plans, which enhances their

cognitive depth.

Cultural Awareness Enhancement Through Cross-Culture Themes: Problem-Based Learning (PBL) programs often focus on cultural exchange initiatives, such as the "English Promotion of Qingdao's Intangible Cultural Heritage" project. When students gather materials and produce creative outputs, they must deeply understand cultural connotations, consider cross-cultural acceptance differences, and strengthen cultural identity. Practical evidence shows that such projects can boost cultural understanding capabilities by 25%.

Autonomous collaboration promotes learning ability: PBL gives students the autonomy of project planning and decision-making. In group cooperation, they need to divide roles, coordinate, solve conflicts and optimize results, so as to cultivate independent learning and teamwork ability. 90% of participating students show a stronger willingness for lifelong learning.

3. Existing difficulties in College English Teaching under the Guidance of Core Literacy

3.1 Teaching Objectives: The Quality Objectives are Virtual, Emphasizing Knowledge Over Ability

Traditional teaching focuses primarily on "covering textbook knowledge points," with 50% of class time devoted to grammar and vocabulary instruction. Cultural awareness and critical thinking cultivation remain superficial. For instance, when explaining "festival culture," educators merely list festival names without analyzing the underlying values behind cultural differences. This results in students achieving high scores but lacking practical skills, making authentic cross-cultural communication difficult.

3.2 Teaching Implementation: Lack of Exploration Space

Some teachers experimenting with Project-Based Learning (PBL) face the issue of "pseudo-projects": equating simple dialogue exercises with authentic projects, or compressing inquiry time due to schedule pressures. For instance, "group discussions" often remain at the level of "sharing perspectives" without forming a complete

cycle of "posing questions—gathering evidence—developing arguments," failing to support the objectives of cultivating students' competencies.

3.3 Evaluation System: Single Dimension, Focusing on Results Rather Than Process

The current evaluation system primarily relies on final written exams (accounting for over 50% of the assessment), focusing on language knowledge while neglecting implicit competencies such as critical thinking and cultural awareness. With teachers being the sole evaluators and lacking student self-assessment or peer review mechanisms, this approach fails to comprehensively reflect the learning process, reinforces exam-oriented tendencies, and stifles innovative thinking.

3.4 Teacher Competence: Lack of Interdisciplinary Design and Guidance

Project-Based Learning (PBL) requires teachers to design projects and integrate interdisciplinary knowledge, yet most college English instructors lack relevant training. In cross-disciplinary projects (such as "writing English product manuals for STEM fields"), there's a disconnect between English and specialized content. During exploration processes, teachers often fail to establish effective cognitive scaffolds, resulting in unfulfilled competency objectives.

4. Construction of Project-based Teaching Model of College English under the Perspective of Core Competencies

4.1 Target Anchoring Stage: Focus On Literacy, Design Project Framework

Theme and Driving Question Design: Themes should combine authenticity, engagement, and academic relevance, categorized into three types: self-exploration, cultural dissemination and social hot topics. Driving questions must be open-ended and challenging. For example, in cultural projects like "How to create an English promotional piece for Qingdao's marine culture to attract international tourists?", this approach targets cross-cultural competence and innovative thinking.

Breaking down competency objectives: The four core competencies are refined into actionable sub-goals. For example, in cultural communication projects: Language proficiency,Cultural awareness,Critical thinking and Learning ability.

4.2 Process Implementation Stage: Build Scaffolds To Implement The Cultivation Of Literacy

Launch and Knowledge Foundation (1-2 class hours): Teachers stimulate interest through case studies while clarifying project requirements. Conduct language groundwork by introducing terms like "marine culture," "Laoshan Mountain legends," and "Tsingtao Beer heritage." Organize group collaboration, guide the development of inquiry plans, and cultivate learning planning skills.

Sustained Inquiry and Competency Development (3-5 class hours): Students conduct group-based explorations under tiered instructional scaffolding provided by teachers. The framework includes: 1) Linguistic support (providing sentence templates for students with foundational weaknesses); 2) Cognitive scaffolding (designing question chains for students with cognitive gaps, e.g., "What is the core value of Qingdao's marine culture? → Why is it less known abroad? → What strategies suit foreign tourists?"); 3) Resource support (recommending English databases and the official website of Qingdao Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism to develop resource integration skills). Mid-term exchanges are organized to guide progress sharing, problem-solving, and stimulate intellectual collisions.

Achievement Creation and Competency Integration (2-3 class hours): Students will transform research findings into creative works (e.g., English videos, posters, reports). Teachers will focus on guiding: linguistic accuracy (correcting grammatical errors and expression deviations); and innovation (encouraging "traditional elements + modern forms", such as Qingdao's marine culture-themed English animations).

4.3 Multi-Dimensional Evaluation Stage: Whole-Process Feedback to Promote the Improvement of Literacy

Process evaluation (accounting for 60%): Through classroom observation, data review and group interview to track performance, the focus is on participation (whether to actively explore and collaborate), depth of thinking (whether to raise valuable questions and

demonstrate plans), and independent learning (whether to effectively integrate English resources).

Outcome-based Evaluation (40%): Organize an achievement exhibition featuring foreign and domestic faculty members as judges. Assessments are conducted across four dimensions: Language Proficiency (30%, fluency and accuracy in expression); Cultural Awareness (25%, depth of cultural content delivery); Critical Thinking Quality (25%, innovative feasibility of proposals); and Presentation Effectiveness (20%, completeness and appeal of outcomes).

Reflection and iteration: Students complete self-assessment reports to reflect on their gains and shortcomings; peer reviews among groups focus on collaborative contributions; teachers summarize common issues, optimize subsequent project designs, forming a closed loop of design-implementation-evaluation-reflection.

5. Teaching Practice Case:"Qingdao Marine Culture Overseas Promotion" Project

5.1 Project Background

A research team selected 60 first-year students from a Qingdao university (divided into 15 groups) for a four-week program (12 class hours). The driving question was "How to develop an English promotional material showcasing Qingdao's marine culture to attract international tourists?" The initiative integrated the four core competency objectives, incorporated local Qingdao characteristics, and focused on key elements including Qingdao Beer culture, Laoshan's maritime legends, and the historic history of Zhanqiao Pier.

5.2 Implementation Process

Launch Phase: Play the Qingdao Municipal Culture and Tourism Bureau's English promotional video, explaining terms like "marine culture," "Tsingtao Beer heritage," and "Zhanqiao Pier history." Analyze the linguistic and cultural presentation techniques in exemplary urban cultural promotion works. Groups will determine project formats (e.g., cultural posters, digital brochures), develop research plans, and establish roles (e.g., data collection team, visual design team).

Exploration Phase: Students conducted field visits to Qingdao Beer Museum and Zhanqiao Scenic Area. They collected data on foreign tourists' interest preferences in maritime culture through the official English website of Qingdao Culture and Tourism Bureau and international travel platforms like TripAdvisor, while interviewing foreign faculty members and international students at universities.

Production Phase: The video team captured Qingdao's coastal scenery to create an English vlog featuring explanations of Tsingtao Brewery's brewing techniques. The poster team designed an English "Qingdao Marine Culture Checkpoint Map" poster highlighting landmarks like the Pier and Wheat Island. The brochure team compiled the "Qingdao Marine Culture Guide" containing cultural narratives and travel tips. Teachers refined text grammar errors and enhanced cultural expressions (e.g., translating "sea lettuce dumplings" as "seaweed dumplings" with ingredient explanations).

5.3 Effect of Implementation

Significant improvement in literacy: In language proficiency, the mastery rate of Qingdao's marine culture-themed vocabulary increased from 42% to 89%. Regarding cultural awareness, 94% of students accurately explained the essence and value of Qingdao Beer culture and Laoshan legends. For creative thinking, 78% of student works demonstrated innovative designs blending "Qingdao characteristics with international expressions" (e.g., integrating marine elements with modern tourism demands). In learning capabilities, 85% of students mastered resource retrieval and integration methods using English official websites and international tourism databases. Positive feedback on the outcomes: The campus exhibition attracted over 60 international faculty/students and local cultural tourism professionals. 88% of foreign participants expressed "a clear understanding of Qingdao's marine cultural characteristics, sparking interest in visiting," while 75% indicated "willingness to share and promote their works on social media."

6. Conclusion

The PBL (Problem-Based Learning) teaching model for college English, developed under the framework of core literacy, integrates four-dimensional competencies throughout the project through a closed-loop design of "goal

anchoring—process implementation—diversified evaluation." This approach effectively addresses the traditional teaching dilemma of "prioritizing knowledge over literacy." A case study on "Overseas Promotion of Qingdao's Marine Culture"demonstrates that this model significantly enhances students' English application skills, cross-cultural critical thinking, and self-directed learning abilities. Moreover, project designs incorporating regional characteristics better stimulate student engagement and strengthen cultural identity. Future efforts should focus on deepening collaborations with local enterprises and cultural tourism institutions in Qingdao, exploring innovative applications of PBL through integrated "teaching—practice—promotion," thereby providing richer localized practical pathways for college English teaching reform.

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