

Research on Transformation Strategies for English Underachievers in County High Schools Based on Core Competencies

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Abstract: This study addresses the challenge of transforming struggling high school English students in county areas. With the core literacy as the theoretical framework, the study reconstructs the transformation goals and paths. The research proposes that in terms of teaching objectives, it shifts from filling knowledge gaps to developing literacy skills; in teaching implementation, by creating real contexts, implementing differentiated instruction, and developing county-specific courses, language skills, thinking quality, and cultural awareness are simultaneously enhanced; in the support system, a psychological support based on positive psychology, collaboration between home, school, and society, and a professional teacher team are constructed. The three elements form an organic whole, aiming to transform the assistance for struggling students from scattered to systematic education, providing a practical path for improving the English teaching quality in county high schools.

Keywords: Core literacy, County-level high schools, English struggling learners, Transformation strategies, Support system.

1. Introduction

The group of struggling high school students in county-level schools is large in scale, and its causes are complex, involving multiple dimensions such as language ability gap, cultural perspective limitation, fixed thinking mode, and lack of learning strategies. The traditional remedial model focuses on mechanical training of knowledge points, which is difficult to reach the core obstacles of the development of struggling students. This study is based on the core literacy framework and explores systematic transformation strategies from three levels: goal orientation, teaching implementation, and support system, aiming to achieve fundamental transformation of struggling students through the reconfiguration of teaching paths and the improvement of support systems.

2. The Connotation and Path Reconstruction of Transforming Struggling Students Based on Core Literacy

2.1. The Value Guidance of Core Literacy for the Transformation of Struggling Students in County High Schools

The proposal of core literacy provides a new value coordinate for the transformation of struggling students in county-level high schools, prompting educators to shift from merely focusing on score improvement to paying attention to the all-round development of students. The traditional transformation of struggling students often focuses on mechanical supplementation of knowledge points and training of exam skills, which is difficult to fundamentally change the learning predicament of struggling students. The four elements of core literacy, namely language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability, provide a systematic direction for the transformation work.

For county high school students, the difficulties in English learning often go beyond the language knowledge gap and stem from cultural perspective limitation, fixed thinking mode, and lack of learning strategies [1]. The guidance of core literacy means that the transformation work must go beyond low-level remediation and focus on the cultivation of students' comprehensive humanistic literacy. For example, by enhancing students' cultural awareness, it can help them understand the cultural logic behind the language, thereby reducing comprehension barriers; by cultivating thinking quality, it can guide students to move from surface memory to deep understanding, changing the habit of rote memorization [2]. This value guidance requires teachers to re-examine the potential of struggling students and regard each transformation opportunity as a node for the growth of students' core literacy, making English learning truly a process that promotes their intellectual maturity and personality development.

2.2. The Main Manifestations and Causes of Core Literacy Deficiency in County High School Struggling Students

County high school struggling students show obvious deficiencies in all dimensions of core literacy. These deficiencies are intertwined and form complex learning obstacles. In the language ability dimension, students generally have inaccurate pronunciation, poor vocabulary, and chaotic grammar, making it difficult to understand and express meaning in real contexts, which is closely related to their limited input of language materials and mechanical learning methods. In terms of cultural awareness, due to the limited opportunities for county students to contact foreign cultures, they lack basic cognition of the social customs and values of English-speaking countries, resulting in frequent "cultural dislocation" in reading comprehension, further weakening their learning interest. The lack of thinking quality is particularly prominent. Struggling students often habitually

accept and memorize mechanically, lacking analytical, reasoning, and critical thinking abilities, and are helpless when facing slightly changed question types, which are related to their long-term shallow learning state [3]. The problems in the learning ability dimension are the most fundamental. Students generally lack metacognitive strategies, do not plan, monitor the process, and reflect on the effect of learning, and their learning is in a blind and random state. The causes of these problems involve multiple factors such as insufficient county resources, weak family cultural capital, and single classroom teaching models, and require systematic analysis and targeted intervention.

2.3. Design Principles of the Transformation Path for Struggling Students Based on Literacy Development

The design of the transformation path for struggling students based on core competencies should follow three principles: systematicness, contextualization, and gradualness. The systematicness principle requires that the transformation process should not be limited to the knowledge repair within the English subject, but should comprehensively consider the interaction of multiple factors such as students' cognitive development, emotional attitude, and learning environment. County schools should establish a complete closed loop of "screening - diagnosis - intervention - evaluation", and shift the identification of struggling students from being based on scores to a multi-dimensional assessment based on competency performance. The intervention measures should also cover multiple fields such as classroom teaching, extracurricular activities, and family support. The contextualization principle emphasizes that the transformation must occur in real and meaningful language usage contexts. County English classrooms should make full use of local life materials to create language practice opportunities, enabling struggling students to learn by doing and understand through application, avoiding falling into meaningless drills that are disconnected from the context [4]. For example, English interpretation tasks can be designed based on the development of local tourism resources to activate students' language abilities under the drive of real tasks. The progressive principle requires respecting the student's recent development zone and designing step-by-step learning goals and challenging tasks. Transformation is not achieved overnight; it is necessary to break down the grand quality goals into observable and measurable phased behavioral manifestations, enabling students to accumulate confidence through repeated small successes and gradually transform from "passive recipients" to "active constructors".

3. Focusing on Core Competencies in English Classroom Teaching Optimization Strategies

3.1. Creating Realistic Contexts to Stimulate Language Skills and Thinking Quality

The English classes in county-level high schools often fall into the rut of "teachers lecturing and students memorizing". Students with learning difficulties have difficulty in substantially improving their language skills in a classroom lacking a real context. Creating a real context means pulling language learning out of the virtual world of exercises and bringing it back to a lively communication scene, enabling

students with learning difficulties to naturally acquire language and develop thinking through the process of meaning negotiation. Teachers can make full use of the unique life scenes in the county, such as local markets, traditional festivals, and natural landscapes, to design language tasks that are close to students' experiences. For example, when teaching expressions related to shopping, a real scene of a local market can be simulated, and students can use English to inquire about prices, negotiate prices, and recommend products in role-playing. This process not only exercises language skills but also prompts students to think about how to solve practical problems in English [5]. For students with learning difficulties, familiar scenes reduce cognitive load, allowing them to focus their limited attention resources on language expression itself. The creation of a real context should also pay attention to the setting of information gaps and viewpoint differences to stimulate students' thinking activities. For example, around the real topic of "whether to develop rural tourism in the local area", guide students to read relevant materials, collect data, and debate in groups. During this process, students not only need to express their opinions in English but also need to conduct information screening, logical reasoning, and critical thinking. This teaching method that integrates language learning with thinking training can enable students with learning difficulties to break through their original level unconsciously [6].

3.2. Implementing Tiered Teaching and Multifaceted Evaluation to Enhance Learning Ability and Self-confidence

The transformation of struggling students requires fundamental changes in teaching and evaluation methods. Stratified teaching and diversified evaluation are effective paths to respond to individual differences and cultivate learning abilities. In county high schools, the group of struggling students in classes often exhibits heterogeneity. Some students may have acceptable listening and speaking skills but struggle with reading and writing, while others may have a very low vocabulary but good pronunciation. A uniform teaching pace and requirements can only cause some students to fall behind [7]. Stratified teaching requires teachers to set differentiated learning goals, contents, and tasks based on the current status of students' core competencies. For example, in reading teaching, struggling students can be provided with simplified texts and necessary vocabulary support, and required to master the main idea and key information, while students with a better foundation can be provided with original materials and required to conduct in-depth analysis. This flexible design ensures that each student can grow on their current basis, avoiding the frustration caused by "one-size-fits-all". Diversified evaluation is an important supplement to traditional paper-and-pencil tests. It emphasizes the diversity of evaluation subjects, the variety of evaluation methods, and the comprehensiveness of evaluation contents [8]. For struggling students, the combination of teacher evaluation, group evaluation, and self-evaluation can enable them to understand their progress from multiple perspectives; process evaluation focuses on learning attitudes, strategy application, and cooperative performance, which can discover the shining points that traditional exams cannot present. When struggling students receive peer recognition in classroom presentations and discover their unique value in project assignments, their learning confidence will be greatly enhanced. This positive

emotional experience is an important psychological foundation for the continuous development of learning abilities.

3.3. Developing and Integrating County-Specific Curriculum Resources to Expand Cultural Awareness

The rich local cultural resources in the county are a valuable asset for the development of English courses and an important carrier for cultivating the cultural awareness of students who are struggling academically. For a long time, county-level English teaching has overly relied on uniform textbooks, neglecting the educational value of local knowledge, resulting in a separation between teaching content and students' life experiences. Students who are struggling often feel alienated from abstract foreign cultural concepts. However, if the cultivation of cultural awareness starts from the familiar local culture, it will have a solid anchor point [9]. Teachers can systematically sort out the historical and cultural relics, folk traditions, and folk arts within the county, and develop local characteristic English school-based courses. For example, lead students to visit local ancient buildings and record the architectural features and historical stories in English; around local characteristic cuisine, compile English recipes and record introduction videos; collect local folk stories and attempt to adapt and tell them in English. During this process, students first need to deeply understand the connotation of local culture and then think about how to express cross-cultural concepts in English, which is itself a two-way expansion of cultural awareness [10]. For students who are struggling, this course design gives English learning a sense of intimacy and meaning, and they are no longer learning foreign knowledge that has nothing to do with them; instead, they become disseminators of hometown culture. More importantly, when students realize that English can be used to tell stories they are familiar with and express their true emotions, the intrinsic motivation for language learning will be truly ignited, and the cultivation of cultural awareness will be elevated from knowledge transmission to the construction of identity.

4. Establish a Support System for The Development of Struggling Students Through Collaborative Education

4.1. Establish an Academic and Psychological Support Mechanism Based on Positive Psychology

The transformation of struggling students is not only a teaching issue but also a psychological one. Long-term learning setbacks often lead students to develop negative self-perceptions and learned helplessness. The support mechanism based on positive psychology emphasizes focusing on students' strengths and potential rather than merely compensating for deficiencies. By cultivating positive emotions, engaging in experiences, and fostering a sense of meaning, it provides students with the internal motivation for continuous development. County schools should establish a regular psychological screening and intervention system to monitor not only students' academic performance but also their emotional states, learning motivation, and self-efficacy. In daily teaching, teachers should consciously use positive language, pay attention to the small progress of struggling

students, and promptly offer specific and sincere encouragement to help students reconstruct the belief that "I can learn English well". For example, they can guide students to establish a "growth portfolio" to record every breakthrough in their English learning, whether it is mastering a difficult word or completing an English conversation. The accumulation of these positive evidence can gradually dismantle the existing negative self-schema. The school should also design appropriate challenging tasks to enable struggling students to gain a sense of success after effort. This "flow" experience is the key to stimulating intrinsic learning motivation. The psychological support mechanism should also include the establishment of a peer assistance system, allowing struggling students to express their anxiety, share their confusion, and receive support in a safe and accepting group atmosphere, transforming isolated individuals into a group that grows together.

4.2. Strengthen Collaboration Between Home, School, And Community to Create a Favorable Language Learning Environment

The language learning difficulties of county-level struggling students are often closely related to their family and social environments. Relying solely on school efforts is unlikely to achieve fundamental transformation. Strengthening collaboration between home, school, and community means considering struggling students in a larger ecosystem and mobilizing resources to create a supportive language learning atmosphere. At the family level, many county students' parents have limited educational attainment and are unable to provide academic guidance, but this does not mean that parents cannot play a role. Schools should use parent schools, home visits, etc. to help parents understand the English learning perspective under the core literacy orientation, guide parents on how to create a supportive family environment, such as providing a fixed study space, paying attention to children's emotional changes, and affirming their efforts rather than merely focusing on grades. At the social level, county communities have unique language practice resources, such as service positions in foreign-related tourist attractions, local enterprises' foreign trade demands, and the tutoring power of returning college students volunteers. Schools should actively connect with the community to create real language practice opportunities for struggling students. For example, they can organize students to engage in English volunteer work at tourist attractions on weekends, which not only exercises language skills but also enhances social responsibility. More importantly, the collaboration between home, school, and community requires the establishment of a regular communication mechanism to form an educational synergy, convey consistent educational expectations, and avoid struggling students being confused by conflicting requirements. When the entire community becomes a supporter of language learning, the transformation of struggling students has fertile soil.

4.3. Enhance Teachers' Competence to Build a Professional Team for The Transformation of Struggling Students

Enhancing teachers' competence is the key to the transformation of struggling students. First, it is necessary to promote teachers' mindset transformation, shifting from

"selecting students suitable for education" to "creating education suitable for students", truly accepting and believing in the development potential of struggling students. In terms of professional ability, teachers should systematically master the skills of diagnosing and intervening in struggling students, accurately identify causes and design personalized plans, and also possess basic psychological counseling and learning strategy guidance capabilities to help students master methods and rebuild confidence. Schools should strive to build interdisciplinary collaborative professional teams, integrating the efforts of English teachers, head teachers, and psychological teachers. They should establish a regular mechanism for case discussions and experience sharing, accumulate school-based transformation resources, and elevate the assistance for struggling students from individual actions to a school-wide system capability, providing solid professional support for the transformation work.

5. Conclusion

The transformation of struggling students in county high schools based on core literacy lies in the shift from the "catch-up" mindset to a "education-oriented" approach. The "target - teaching - support" tripartite strategy constructed in the research indicates that: in terms of the target, core literacy provides a systematic value framework for the transformation; in terms of teaching, the integration of real contexts, differentiated instruction, and local curriculum resources can simultaneously stimulate students' language skills, thinking quality, and cultural awareness; in terms of support, positive psychological intervention, collaboration between home, school, and society, and the construction of professional teams provide sustainable guarantees for the transformation. This strategy transforms the assistance for struggling students from scattered academic support to a systematic intervention covering cognition, emotion, and environment. Its practical value lies in promoting county high schools to shift from focusing on the improvement of the academic performance of a few students to optimizing the educational ecology of all

students, making English learning truly become the carrier of students' core literacy development.

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