

# *The Feasibility of Socratic Teaching in Theory and Practice*

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**Abstract:** There have been extensive research on Socratic teaching in various subject areas in China, most of which are about the application of Socratic method in teaching and its enlightenment to the teaching classroom. Many authors have studied Socratic teaching through experiments and achieved good results. This paper reviews the theoretical and practical feasibility of Socratic classroom teaching in different fields. This paper introduces several common teaching methods, such as the lecturing teaching method, inquiry teaching method, practice teaching method and example teaching method. There are some similarities and differences between Socratic teaching method and these common teaching methods. Compared with these common teaching methods, the Socratic teaching method is an innovation in teaching. Some theoretical and experimental arguments can be obtained from the literature to prove that Socratic teaching is feasible in both theory and practice. Socratic teaching is of great significance to the education of most scholars, who can get some experience from it. Through the experience of Socratic teaching mode in the classroom, this study hopes to inspire teachers to be student-centered and pay attention to the guidance of students in teaching rather than indoctrination.

**Keywords:** socratic teaching, feasibility, guide, compatibility

## **1. Introduction**

The mainstream of contemporary education is quality-oriented education and educational innovation. The teaching method of Socrates, the great philosopher of ancient Greece, conforms to contemporary quality-oriented education and educational innovation. The Socratic teaching model always revolves around “student-centered” development. It is not blindly teaching and instilling knowledge, but through constantly throwing questions to students, inducing students to realize the lack of their own answers or mistakes, and then constantly overturning their own answers to the previous question, and finally naturally through the students themselves to draw a correct conclusion. This kind of teaching mode applies the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers to contemporary society, which is a fusion innovation of Chinese and foreign culture, history and education. It has certain feasibility in today’s teaching classroom, and the Socratic teaching mode has an influence on teachers and students.

Socratic teaching has a great influence on both teachers and students. Based on the theory of Socratic teaching and previous experimental studies, this study aims to explore whether the Socratic teaching model is feasible in today’s classrooms and what its significance is for classrooms in various professional fields. The paper is divided into three parts: First, it explains what the Socratic teaching mode is and what its characteristics are compared with other commonly used teaching modes. Second,

it analyzes whether the Socratic teaching mode is feasible in theory and in practice, and analyzes the reasons why it is feasible or not. Finally, students and teachers can gain great significance from this teaching method. The significance of Socratic teaching from the perspective of students and the significance of Socratic teaching from the perspective of teachers are listed respectively.

## **2. Teaching Modes**

At present, there are some generally applicable teaching modes in classroom teaching, such as lecturing teaching mode, inquiry teaching mode, practice teaching mode and example teaching mode.

### **2.1. Lecturing Teaching Mode**

Among them, the most common teaching mode is lecturing, in which teachers convey information to students by explaining knowledge. In class, teachers use their own knowledge and accumulated teaching experience to explain to students the knowledge in textbooks and textbooks combined with examples from life. This teaching mode is in line with the learning habits of the public. However, this teaching mode lacks interaction, and teachers cannot get feedback from students, nor can they better understand the learning progress of each student.

### **2.2. Inquiry Teaching Mode**

The inquiry teaching mode is mainly for students to discuss a certain problem. According to the content taught in class, the teacher puts forward some problems worthy of students' consideration and asks students to divide into groups for discussion. During the discussion, each student will put forward his own views based on his own understanding of knowledge, and then send student representatives to integrate each student's views in the group, and finally carry out communication and discussion between groups. This teaching mode can stimulate students' internal motivation of thinking and a sense of teamwork.

### **2.3. Practical Teaching Mode**

The practical teaching mode is for teachers and students to practice a certain theoretical problem. This teaching mode is quite common in science subjects, such as some physics or chemistry theories. Teachers will do experiments on physical or chemical materials to show students the reasons for the formation of the theories and some phenomena in the experiments. Sometimes these experiments will be completed by the students themselves. This teaching mode can make the classroom interesting, attract students' attention, improve students' practical operation ability and problem-solving ability and it can strengthen students' understanding and application of theoretical knowledge.

### **2.4. Example Teaching Mode**

The example teaching mode requires teachers to have rich knowledge reserves and find precise examples for teaching to persuade students. One of the interesting aspects of the case teaching model is that the actual cases collected by teachers may come from historical stories, life, or plots of movies and television. Students can better understand the teaching materials by following the examples given by teachers through their own experiences in the process of growing up, the history knowledge acquired in extracurricular activities and the experience in recreational projects. The above four teaching modes are relatively traditional compared with the Socratic teaching mode, but the Socratic teaching mode is also mixed with some of the above teaching modes.

## 2.5. Socratic Teaching Mode

The Socratic teaching model has four steps, namely sarcasm, midwifery, induction and definition. Among them, the irony is that students are constantly asking questions based on their speeches in class, so they fall into the contradiction of self-answer. Then, under the method of midwifery, teachers are guided by students' questions and their answers, and students are allowed to overturn their old answers and come up with new answers to solve their own problems. Induction is to let students find the commonality of things from concrete things. The definition is to find the general concept from the individual things and then arrive at the general concept of the things. Socratic teaching mode can enhance students' ideas of unity of knowledge and action and mobilize students' initiative and activity of thinking. The operation of the Socratic teaching method is mentioned in the Application of Socratic Teaching Method in English Teaching in China. The Socratic method is not complicated. It requires only two or more students and can be used alone or in combination with other modes of teaching [1]. Socratic teaching attaches great importance to the study of "problems", and realizes the completion of Socratic teaching mode through the question-answer between teachers and students [2].

## 3. The Feasibility of Socratic Teaching in the Classroom

According to some literature, Socratic teaching has been widely used in teaching classrooms in various fields. This teaching mode helps students improve their critical thinking ability and change from passive learning to active learning. This chapter makes a feasibility analysis of the application of the Socratic teaching mode in various fields.

### 3.1. Theoretical Feasibility of Socratic Teaching

In the article "The Application of Socratic Teaching Method in Law Teaching", it is necessary to introduce Socratic teaching in law. In the process of memorizing legal provisions, principles and provisions, students introduce Socratic teaching into case teaching, which can realize teacher-student interaction and allow more students to participate in the class. Secondly, teachers apply Socratic teaching to classroom debate to achieve equal dialogue between teachers and students [3]. In the field of medicine, the Application of the Socratic Teaching Method in the Theoretical Teaching of Nurse-turned-midwives mentioned that the application of the Socratic teaching method in the group of nurse-turned-midwives is conducive to helping nurses establish a knowledge system, enlighten their thinking and deepen their understanding of knowledge, and finally change from passive learning to active learning [4]. In ideological and political theory teaching in colleges and universities, college students advocate freedom, oppose dogma and pursue independent personality. The socratic teaching method is in line with the personality development of contemporary college students. In the article "Enlightenment of Socratic Method on Ideological and Political Theory Teaching in Colleges and Universities", Socratic teaching breaks the one-way teaching mode through the question-answering method and realizes the effective two-way interaction between teachers and students. This way can improve classroom activity, attract students' attention and interest, and achieve efficient teaching. For teachers, the question-and-answer method triggers teachers to think about the textbook through the new questions raised by students, and then re-creates the content of the textbook, which helps the textbook to keep pace with The Times and bring forth the new [5]. In the article "Application of Socratic Method in Hospital Teaching", the traditional teaching mode and Socratic teaching mode are compared with each other in the form of examples. In the former, teachers teach knowledge and students listen to and record the lecture; in the latter, the Socratic method simulates a question-and-answer session between teachers and students. As mentioned later, the Socratic teaching method is of great help to hospital teaching and can improve students' logical thinking ability [6]. In the field of music, Socrates is also applied to vocal music teaching in colleges and universities. In the article

“On the Exploration and Practice of Spiritual Midwifery in vocal music teaching in colleges and Universities”, it is mentioned that this teaching mode has high requirements on teachers, who not only need to have professional theoretical literacy, but also have a deep understanding of each student’s character and thinking. Only in this way can students solve problems better and more accurately [7].

### 3.2. Feasibility of Socratic Teaching in Practice

In the field of legal practice, moot court is an important teaching link. In the article “The Application of Socratic Teaching Method in Law Teaching”, students impersonate lawyers, judges, plaintiffs and defendants respectively according to the real cases provided by teachers to simulate the real court. In practice, teachers use Socratic teaching to supervise and correct students’ mistakes in time, and make comments at the end, completing the trial process jointly created by teachers and students [3]. An experiment was mentioned in the literature “Application of the Socratic Teaching Method in the Theoretical teaching of nurses in Transition Midwives”. The experiment used the traditional oral teaching method and the Socratic teaching method respectively, and the spss software was used to analyze the comprehensive evaluation and comparison of the two teaching effects. Finally, the conclusion is drawn that the Socratic teaching method can enable nurses in transition to seek the final answer through self-logical reasoning and dialectical thinking, deepen their knowledge mastery, and thus improve the teaching quality. This process improves the comprehensive quality of teachers and students, and plays the purpose of teaching and learning, which is worth promoting [4]. In Chinese teaching in international classrooms, two experiments are mentioned in the article “Application of the Socratic Circle Discussion Method in Chinese Classroom Teaching in International Schools”. First, teachers select appropriate texts for teaching, and students prepare after getting the texts suitable for their own level, such as reading through the texts and marking the pronunciation of new words. Annotate comments and prepare questions for discussion. In order to make the questions raised by students in the process of discussion meaningful, teachers teach students to raise some good questions, for example, the questions raised can be asked by the method of illustration, further clarification, open questions, hypothetical question, and so on. These methods are conducive to students’ discussion. The results of the experiment are very impressive. In the practice of nearly one year, students have improved in all aspects, their critical thinking ability has been enhanced, their creativity has been improved, their oral expression ability has been improved, their writing ability has also been improved, and they have been more patient to listen to others, they have learned self-reflection, and their social ability has also been improved [8]. In the article “The Application of Socrates’ Midwife Technique in the Oral Teaching of Graduate Students”, the specific teaching steps were mentioned. The experimenters divided the teaching into two parts: the first part was for students to give a speech with multimedia teaching, the second part was for students to ask questions about it, and the last part was for teachers to make comments. This way can give the class to the students to operate, exercise the students’ unity and cooperation ability and the ability to control the overall situation [9]. A practical case was also mentioned in the teaching of junior middle school mathematics. The author tried to implement the teaching concept of Socrates’ teaching method in the chapter “Concept of Fractions” of junior middle school mathematics. For this chapter, the author designed a case, in which the questions raised by the teacher and the presets for students’ answers were listed in detail, and the teaching content was summarized with pictures according to the process. Although the study has some shortcomings in some aspects, it proves that the Socratic method can work in practice [10].

## 4. Conclusions

Through literature analysis, it is found that the experimental results in the literature are very impressive. The students' overall ability has been improved, their critical thinking ability has been enhanced, their creativity has been improved, their oral expression ability has been improved, their writing ability has been improved, they have been more patient in listening to others, they have learned self-reflection, and their social ability has also been improved. For teachers, it helps teachers to innovate teaching modes, enhance interaction with students, and understand students more comprehensively. The Socratic teaching method is very suitable for teaching in any field. With the improvement of the knowledge level of the whole people, the ability level of future teachers will be far higher than the ability level of current teachers, and Socratic teaching will be more perfect in the future. In classroom teaching, teachers can properly use the Socratic teaching method to bring innovation to the classroom and students. Socratic teaching can also be combined with other teaching methods, which will make the classroom richer and have a certain degree of innovation.

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