

On the Cultivation of Cross-cultural Awareness in College English Education

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Abstract. With the ultimate goal of enhancing students' cross-cultural awareness, this study mainly adopts the dominating theory of textbook evaluation and the theory of cultural theme classification by Byram to analyze and evaluate the cultural factors in the three currently used textbooks. Based on the actual needs of the research, feedback on the use of the textbooks is provided. Finally, multiple ways to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness in college English teaching are proposed, such as reflecting cross-cultural awareness in the teaching syllabus, strengthening cross-cultural awareness in textbooks, infiltrating cross-cultural awareness in classroom teaching and course practice activities and adding cross-cultural awareness indicators in the evaluation of college English teaching. This study provides practical basis and suggestions for improving the cultivation of cross-cultural competence in college English teaching. In addition, it also has some reference significance for the formulation of college English teaching syllabus, the compilation and adaptation of textbooks, and the development of educational and teaching activities.

Keywords: Cross-cultural Awareness; College English; Textbook Evaluation

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background. In the era of globalization, English is a bridge for world exchange and communication. With high comprehensive English proficiency and broad international perspective, better understanding and tolerance of foreign cultures, Chinese university graduates can not only enhance China's international competitiveness and influence, but also promote mutual understanding and exchange between China and the world, strengthen cultural soft power, and exert significant significance for building a peaceful and harmonious external environment in China. Therefore, the important value of college English courses in higher education in China is becoming increasingly prominent.

College English Syllabus [1] clearly points out that English is not only a tool for exchanging information, but also a tool for learners to broaden their horizons, expand their knowledge, deepen their understanding of the outside world, learn from and absorb the essence of foreign culture, and improve their cultural literacy. *College English Curriculum Requirements* [2] stipulates that college English teaching should not only focus on developing students' language skills, but also strives to cultivate students' comprehensive English proficiency, enhance their cross-cultural awareness, making them adapt to the needs of China's social development and international communication. This indicates that college English teaching is an important component of implementing quality education, and cultivating students' cultural literacy in college English teaching is also a requirement of the college English teaching syllabus.

Therefore, both teachers and students need a platform for learning English together, and textbooks undoubtedly play an important role. Textbooks not only provide language materials but also introduce students to the cultures of other countries or regions, which is beneficial for students to better understand world culture and is of great significance in cultivating cross-cultural awareness and communication skills. The undergraduate education in college English is essentially the cultivation of humanistic spirit and an indispensable component of quality education. Its core should be the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness. Without humanistic education, college English teaching cannot cultivate truly international composite talents.

1.2 Research Significance. This study draws inspiration from cultural teaching theory and textbook evaluation theory, selects college English teachers and college students as the subjects, and uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Through Byram's [3] cultural theme classification method, text analysis is conducted on three currently used college English textbooks, namely *New Horizon College English*, *New Standard College English*, and *New Fashion College Practical English*. The aim is to discover the classification and characteristics of cultural themes, the structure and layout of types, and the distribution of different genres. By conducting a questionnaire survey and key interviews with teachers and students to investigate the current situation and provide feedback on the use of different teaching materials, we can provide a reference basis for improving the effective cultural teaching of the current textbooks.

In addition, starting from the need to enhance students' cross-cultural awareness, this study provides feedback on the use of textbooks based on actual needs. Finally, various ways to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness in undergraduate English teaching are proposed. Therefore, this study has some reference significance for the development of college English teaching syllabus, the compilation and adaptation of textbooks, and the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness in college English teaching.

2. Current Research on Cultural Theme Classification

Byram (1997) regarded language and culture as a whole and proposed specific evaluation criterion for cultural content in textbooks, dividing them into 8 types. He believes that the evaluation of cultural factors in textbooks should adhere to the following standards: the cultural content is authentic and has the characteristics of the times, which can reflect the real social circumstances, question realistic concepts, reproduce cultural facts without detachment, and depict characters that reflect the influence of the times on their personalities. Byram's classification of textbook culture focuses on eight aspects: society, religion, morality, history, national geography, and all aspects about schools. This cultural classification of textbooks comprehensively presents the cultural content of the textbooks themselves, which is effective for the evaluation of textbook culture. Especially for textbook users, they can have a clearer understanding of the cultural content distribution of the textbook and effectively engage in learning about the cultural themes in the textbook. For current college English courses, it is more conducive to the development of cultural themed teaching by using Byram's classification of cultural elements in textbooks for analysis. Therefore, this study adopted Byram's cultural classification of textbooks.

Many domestic scholars have conducted textual analysis and research on the cultural content in current English textbooks. Gao Liping [4] (2010) conducted a text analysis of *New College English* based on Byram's evaluation system. She selected 126 non English major students to conduct an experimental teaching of integrating Chinese culture into foreign language teaching. Through the interpretation of specific teaching methods, she explained how to teach Chinese culture through textbooks. Wang Lixiu [5] (2010) used Byram's textbook evaluation criteria to quantitatively analyze the cultural content in the students' and teachers' books of *New Horizon College English*, in order to discover the advantages and disadvantages of the cultural content arrangement in this set of textbooks.

Lu Zhonglei [6] (2013) conducted a detailed summary and organization of the cultural content in *New College English* based on Byram's evaluation criteria for cultural content in textbooks, pointing out the importance and necessity of integrating Chinese culture into college English teaching. Shao Jing [7] (2014) conducted an internal evaluation of the cultural content in *New Horizon College English* from the perspective of cross-cultural teaching, referring to Byram's cultural classification criteria for textbooks. Huang Liping [8] (2018) studied on the cultural content of *Comprehensive Course of College Experiencing English*. The results showed that the input and output parts of the language materials in the textbook highlighted the target language and culture, with American culture accounting for the majority of the target language culture, while the native culture and other cultural contents being very few.

In summary, cultural teaching has gradually become one of the teaching hotspots in English

teaching, and compilers of various English textbooks are also committed to reflecting this hot topic in their textbooks. At the same time, some researchers have begun to analyze the proportion of cultural content involved in different English textbooks and how to cultivate students' cultural literacy and cross-cultural communication skills in English teaching. Although relatively rich theoretical achievements have been achieved, there are still certain limitations.

This study aims at promoting students' better understanding and absorption of multiculturalism in college English education, cultivating cross-cultural awareness, thereby improving their cross-cultural communication abilities, and cultivating composite talents that meet the needs of current internationalization. Additionally, it also has some reference significance for the formulation of college English teaching syllabus, the compilation and adaptation of textbooks, and the development of educational and teaching activities.

3. Research Methods

This study provides practical basis and suggestions for improving the cultivation of cross-cultural competence in college English teaching. The main research methods are as follows.

3.1 Literature Research Method. Try to clarify the definitions and theories of this study, and consolidate the theoretical foundation of this study.

3.2 Text Analysis Method. By using Byram's classification method of eight cultural themes, text analysis is conducted respectively on *New Horizon College English*, *New Standard College English*, and *New Fashion College Practical English*. The analysis is mainly conducted from three aspects: the classification and characteristics of cultural themes in textbooks, the type structure and layout of cultural themes, and the distribution of different genres of cultural themes.

3.3 Questionnaire Survey Method. It is used to analyze the cultural themes in the three selected textbooks based on their effectiveness. Questionnaire participants: 30 English teachers who have been teaching these three sets of textbooks and 300 randomly chosen students who have learned the textbooks for more than 1 year, all of whom selected from three comprehensive universities. In the questionnaire design, the main focus is on Byram's classification of 8 cultural themes, analyzing whether students like this distribution layout and what are the most popular themes, in order to analyze the contemporary atmosphere and educational significance of cultural themes.

4. Research Findings

English cross-cultural teaching is mainly based on theories of humanism and constructivism, as well as schema theory, cultural adaptation theory, and cultural input and output theory. Based on the research on these three sets of textbooks, we can see that in terms of the overall impression of the textbook culture, teachers and students are still relatively satisfied with the current three sets of textbooks according to the feedback on the classification of eight cultural themes in the textbook, feedback on the genre of textbook articles, and feedback on cultural teaching, however, there are also some problems that are not conducive to the development of cross-cultural teaching. Based on the above conclusions, this study proposes how to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness in undergraduate English teaching, focusing on the following five aspects.

4.1 Reflecting Cross-cultural Awareness in the Teaching Syllabus. If cross-cultural awareness is not reflected in the college English teaching syllabus, textbook writers and users often overlook the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness. Therefore, the definition and cultivation goals of cultural awareness should be clearly stated in the college English teaching syllabus. Specific requirements should also be put forward for language proficiency and cultural literacy, just like the requirements for listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation abilities, what communication strategies should be mastered by students, and what communication customs, etiquette, interpersonal relationships, values, etc. should be learned. Improving the college English teaching syllabus is also an effective guarantee for promoting cross-cultural teaching.

4.2 Strengthening Cross-cultural Awareness during Textbook Compilation. For textbook writers, in the process of writing textbooks, more consideration should be given to students' own

characteristics and preferences for cultural themes. Correspondingly, increase articles on the two themes of social interaction and national geography. Each book can appropriately cover each cultural theme, making the knowledge more comprehensive and rich to help students accept better. During the writing process, textbook editors should also adjust the genre of articles reasonably to meet the needs of students, making the genre of textbook articles more diverse and attractive. In addition, English articles on Chinese culture, Chinese social life, and the lives of Chinese college students should be appropriately added to college English textbooks, so that students can express their thoughts in English and promote their country's culture to the outside world.

4.3 Infiltrating Cross-cultural Awareness in Classroom Activities. For teachers, in classroom teaching practice, it is necessary to start from developing cultural understanding and language perception abilities, create a harmonious atmosphere that stimulates students' creative thinking with students as the main body, use various teaching methods, cultivate and improve students' thinking ability through scientific and open teaching syllabus design and teaching practice, and thus finally obtain a certain level of language communication ability in order to truly cultivate students into thoughtful individuals, cultural inheritors and transmitters with appreciating abilities.

In the teaching process, teachers should adhere to combining cultural content with the explanation of basic English language knowledge, and effectively carry out cross-cultural teaching activities. Special attention should be paid to the three themes that students love: beliefs and behavior, social interaction, and national geography. Teachers can play more documentaries or movies related to national geography and history to help students further understand the cultural knowledge. In addition, multicultural and cross-cultural education can be added in the classroom, with the aim of helping students understand the formation and development of heterogeneous cultures through the comparison of Chinese and western cultures, thereby cultivating cross-cultural perspectives and appreciating and accepting differences between different cultures from the perspective of cultural diversity.

4.4 Emphasizing Cultural Awareness in Teaching Practice. For students, the importance of cultural teaching should be increased. In daily learning, it is necessary to strengthen oral exercise, increase opportunities for contact and communication with foreigners, learn more about foreign cultural knowledge, reduce communication barriers, narrow cultural differences, and improve one's cross-cultural communication skills. With the help of teachers, students can share and learn different styles of expression on the same topic through classroom discussions or group activities. Through self-directed learning, expanding learning based on one's favorite cultural themes and article genres can stimulate students' interest in learning and enhance their cross-cultural understanding, thereby enabling students to learn different cultural themes with ease and improving their practical English proficiency. Only by strengthening the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness in college English teaching based on various factors such as textbooks, students, and the environment, can teachers promote students to better learn the target language, cultivate new 21st century talents with innovative concepts and comprehensive development abilities, and thus truly achieve the goals of college English teaching.

4.5 Adding Cultural Awareness Indicators in Teaching Evaluation. Examinations have played an important role in promoting the standardization of college English teaching and improving the quality of English teaching. However, some universities regard the CET-4 and CET-6 exams as the ultimate goal of college English teaching, so it is necessary to change our examination view. In the current exam oriented education, exams largely determine the direction and focus of students' learning. The format of English exams in China is also undergoing significant changes. The paragraph translation ratio in the CET-4 and CET-6 exams has increased to 15%, mainly testing students' English expression ability on traditional Chinese culture and social life topics. In order to promote the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness and exert the effect of exams effectively, it is recommended to continue adding test questions to test cultural knowledge and pragmatic ability in the College English Test Band 4 and 6, and to add corresponding evaluation items in the scoring standards and relevant English teaching evaluations to fully play its guiding role.

5. Conclusions

This study has proposed multiple ways to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness in college English teaching, thus exerting some reference significance for the development of college English teaching syllabus, the compilation and adaptation of textbooks, and the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness in college English teaching. However, research on cultural teaching has not been fully carried out due to a lack of resources. Therefore, there is still a long way to go to strengthen the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness in college English teaching. This is also an issue that we should keep paying attention to in the next step of research, so as to strengthen research on cross-cultural teaching, promote cross-cultural communication and dissemination in the international community, and cultivate more versatile talents that meet the current internationalization needs.

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