

Cultivating Intercultural Competence in High School English Teaching

Yuenan Wang^{1*}

¹ Huanggang Normal University, Huanggang, China

Email Address

2403607724@qq.com (Yuenan Wang)

*Correspondence: 2403607724@qq.com

Received: 8 January 2024; **Accepted:** 23 March 2024; **Published:** 29 April 2024

Abstract:

In learning foreign language knowledge beyond textbooks, high school students should not only perceive their own culture, but also strengthen their intercultural communication awareness. This is also one of the advocated disciplinary core literacy elements in the new English curriculum standard for high school students. This article outlines the intrinsic relationship between high school English language and culture teaching, discusses the importance of cultivating cross-cultural teaching abilities in English teaching, analyzes issues in intercultural English teaching in high schools, and proposes measures to cultivate students' cross-cultural abilities in English teaching.

Keywords:

English Teaching, Intercultural Communicative Competency, Intercultural Education

1. Introduction

In the high school stage, various subjects have undergone several years of revision, and new curriculum standards have been promulgated, among which the most important is the concept of “key competence”. The core competence of the English subject is “language ability, learning ability, cultural awareness, and thinking quality”. Only when high school students have a multicultural perspective can they adapt to the new society of economic globalization. Therefore, emphasizing cross-cultural communication education in high school English classroom teaching is in line with the trend of the times.

2. Materials and Methods

In the era of globalization, China is actively integrating into the world. English, as a globally common language, holds a unique position. In the Chinese education system, English teaching runs through the basic education and higher education stages, aiming to cultivate English talents with stronger international language communication skills. In the process of educational reform, our country has strengthened the cultivation of students' core literacy and extracted core literacy in subjects. It is very necessary to carry out English cultural awareness education for students. High school students need to realize that as a language tool for communication, the greatest value of English is to provide students with the key to open the door to the English-speaking

world culture. By mastering this key, they can truly access and understand the English-speaking world.. Therefore, this study utilizes classroom observation to explore the cultivation of high school students' intercultural communication skills.

2.1. The concept of intercultural competence

Cultural learning is the base of language learning, so intercultural education should be an important part of English teaching in colleges and universities. Traditional college English teaching always focuses on the cultivation of knowledge and skills rather than cultural thinking, which is not conducive to improving students' practical use of language. Therefore, it is necessary to infiltrate intercultural education into English courses to promote students' grasp of English language. Chen and Starosta [1] defined intercultural communication competence as "the effective and appropriate communication that enables one to achieve the desired behavioral outcomes in a specific context." Byram [4] proposes that intercultural communicative competence consists of four dimensions: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and intercultural competence. This study argues that Byra's definition of intercultural communicative competence best aligns with the topic of this research.

2.2. The significance of cultivating intercultural competence in high school English teaching

The English and Chinese languages differ significantly in pronunciation, grammar, and cultural load. Therefore, it is important for English education in higher institutions to integrate intercultural content, help students develop intercultural awareness, and improve their intercultural communication skills. Currently, there is a noticeable gap between students' mastery of linguistic form and their communicative competence in the teaching of English majors in higher education, mainly manifested in students' lack of understanding of the cultural implications of linguistic forms, leading to pragmatic failure. Pragmatic failure in intercultural communication is unacceptable. Cultural mistakes are more serious than language errors in intercultural communication. How to cultivate students' cultural awareness of the language they are learning has become an important topic in foreign language teaching research. Whether to incorporate English culture into foreign language teaching has become a key indicator distinguishing traditional from modern foreign language teaching. The high school English curriculum focuses more on language, grammar, and semantics, and the responsibility for cultivating intercultural competence has not been fully implemented, resulting in students' inability to proficiently read and understand English original texts. The lack of clear cross-cultural teaching content and improper implementation strategies in high school English courses are important reasons affecting students' foreign language learning effectiveness. Therefore, integrating cross-cultural content in English teaching not only helps students intuitively understand and deepen their memory of language knowledge, but also enhances their learning interest and optimizes their language application skills.

2.3. High school English teaching and intercultural competency development

Only by deepening students' understanding, discrimination, and thinking about excellent culture in teaching can we help students master multiculturalism proficiently, thereby achieving the goal of improving the effectiveness of high school English teaching and enhancing students' core literacy in the subject [2]. This study adopts

the classroom observation method, taking the high school English class on Cultural Heritage as an example to demonstrate the intercultural communication ability of H School in Huangzhou District. The consideration of the issues in intercultural communication education in middle school English classrooms is rooted in the author's study of a listening and speaking teaching class titled "Cultural Heritage-Listening and Speaking." The theme of this section is "Take part in a youth project." Students learn about cultural heritage protection through listening and speaking, and combine their own participation in cultural heritage protection actions. In this class, the teacher mainly introduced some cultural heritage in the introduction and pre-listening parts, and this article mainly analyzes these two parts. The teacher showed cultural heritage videos and displayed pictures of world-famous cultural relics to discuss these cultural relics with students. Then, the teacher showed the definition of cultural heritage to students, and introduced tangible cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage for discussion. In this part, the students' initiative is not very high, mainly the teacher's explanation and the display of relevant videos and pictures through multimedia courseware.

Here is an excerpt from the pre-listening segment:

T: Let's move on to the listening task. Before we begin, let's appreciate a picture (Teacher shows a picture of the "Five Mountains are Supreme" rock carvings on Mount Tai). Have you seen this before? Have you seen this rock or this picture before?

Ss: No. (Most students respond with "no")

T: The rock is located on Mount Tai. Are you familiar with Mount Tai?

Ss: No (Most students still respond with "no")

T: There is an old famous Chinese saying about Mount Tai. (The teacher explains about Mount Tai and the students suddenly realize)

This part of the teacher's approach also involves using cultural commentary and discussion, combined with multimedia teaching materials. The teacher shows pictures, asking students to guess where it is, but most students don't know. This indicates that these students are not very familiar with China's natural cultural heritage, or their memories are fuzzy. This highlights the importance of infiltrating our country's culture in the classroom. By appreciating the magnificent rivers and mountains of our motherland, students' interest in learning can be fully stimulated, enhancing their national confidence and raising awareness of cultural preservation. At the same time, this teacher, when displaying pictures of world-famous cultural heritage, teaches students the English expressions for these cultural heritages, cultivating students' intercultural communication abilities.

3. Results and Discussion

From the perspective of cultivating core literacy in English, the key to high school English education lies in "culture." When high school students truly understand English culture, their English proficiency will be greatly enhanced. Currently, although some teachers have been actively exploring new teaching strategies in the process of high school English teaching, and have put a lot of effort into teaching design, and are committed to the comprehensive development of students' core English literacy, they have not recognized the significant importance of cultivating intercultural awareness. This is mainly manifested in the fact that most teachers emphasize the imparting of basic language knowledge such as grammar, sentences,

and discourse, as well as the training of skills, while neglecting the introduction of knowledge related to the era background, cultural concepts, emotional attitudes, social etiquette, etc. in classroom teaching. There is a lack of methods and valuable theoretical guidance in the integration of cross-cultural awareness into teaching, a lack of scientific teaching evaluation methods, resulting in generally low intercultural communication abilities and the understanding and application of multicultural knowledge among students, seriously affecting the overall teaching effectiveness. So here are the classroom permeation strategies of intercultural communication education:

3.1. English teachers strive to enhance their overall cultural literacy

The traditional teaching method, which is teacher-centered, is deeply rooted. This method emphasizes language skills and language forms in English classes, neglecting the students' position. Therefore, teachers may consider dividing the class into groups at the beginning of the semester. Based on the actual teaching situation, allocate 5 minutes of each class to the students, allowing each group to prepare materials on cultural differences between the East and the West in turn and then make a simple daily report. Teachers should innovate the teaching methods of English. Intercultural communication is not only about language exchange, but also involves crossing of consciousness, attitudes, and behaviors. Therefore, teachers can engage students in activities such as role-playing, situational simulation, and case analysis to enable students to learn and apply English in a real communication environment, understand cultural differences, master communication skills, and develop intercultural communication competence [3]. Firstly, situational teaching focuses on creating real situational simulations of cross-cultural communication, enabling students to apply their language knowledge and communication strategies in practice. Teachers can guide students to learn and use English in practice through role-playing, situational simulation, case analysis, and help students understand and adapt to the communication needs in different cultural backgrounds, and enhance cross-cultural communication skills. Secondly, flipped classroom emphasizes that students learn theoretical knowledge outside the classroom and practice and interact in the classroom. In intercultural communication teaching, teachers can provide students with online learning resources such as teaching videos, online articles, and online discussions, so that students can independently learn and understand relevant knowledge before class, laying a foundation for classroom interaction and practice. In the classroom, teachers can organize students to participate in group discussions, interactive tasks, situational simulations, and other activities, allowing students to use English in cooperation and communication, and improve intercultural communication skills. Thirdly, information technology can provide students with rich learning resources, such as language learning software, cross-cultural communication case databases, virtual practice platforms, and promote students' independent learning and practice, broaden students' intercultural communication perspectives, and improve students' intercultural communication competence and level.

3.2. Introducing abundant cultural elements

English, as an international language, encompasses rich cultural connotations. If regular English class time is limited, teachers can also make full use of school resources by carrying out school-based training and other methods to organize a variety of communicative activities for students and create specific situations. For example, allowing students to role-play, simulate real-life situations, or invite foreign

teachers to hold activities that can liven up the classroom atmosphere, especially during some Western traditional festivals [5]. These activities can serve as supplementary teaching materials. An active classroom atmosphere can stimulate their interest, enabling students to deepen their understanding and appreciation of cultural differences in communicative activities, thereby enhancing their cross-cultural communication abilities. Teachers can incorporate cultural background information, real-life examples, and multimedia resources in English teaching to help students understand and experience the languages, customs, values, and societal characteristics of different countries and regions, broaden students' horizons, and enhance their cross-cultural communication awareness. Due to varying cultural backgrounds and upbringing, people from different countries and ethnicities may encounter differences in language, customs, habits, and thinking during interactions. This calls for the implementation of cross-cultural communication activities to improve individuals' English proficiency and cultural literacy, and to better promote communication and integration between different cultures.

3.3. Establishing an effective English teaching evaluation system

The scientific, humanized, and fair evaluation method has important significance for building students' confidence and improving their learning enthusiasm. Therefore, intercultural evaluation should be included in the high school English teaching evaluation system. For the cultivation of intercultural awareness, teachers need to abandon the traditional evaluation method based solely on academic performance and establish a new evaluation system from an intercultural perspective, strengthening the assessment of students' English communication skills and intercultural proficiency. This can lay a solid foundation for the cultivation of foreign language applied talents with intercultural awareness. Teachers should encourage students to timely reflect on and summarize the problems and shortcomings in intercultural communication, and require them to develop personal learning plans based on their own experiences and reflections to enhance their intercultural communication abilities. Schools can also introduce student self-assessment, learning logs, student feedback and other methods to enable students to participate and master the learning process more consciously, thereby improving their cross-cultural communication abilities. Intercultural communication emphasizes collaboration and cooperation, and the evaluation of high school English teaching based on intercultural communication should value students' performance in teamwork.

4. Conclusions

English language teaching has been popular in China for many years, and English classrooms play a crucial role in students' mastery of the English language. In the context of the new curriculum standards advocating for "core literacy", teachers in the classroom should not be limited to simply imparting language knowledge, but should also have a long-term focus on shaping students' cultural and thinking qualities. This study also provides some reference for the cultivation of high school students' intercultural communication ability in English.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Yuenan Wang.; Methodology: Yuenan Wang.; Software: Yuenan Wang.; Validation: Yuenan Wang.; Formal analysis: Yuenan Wang.; Investigation: Yuenan Wang.; Resources: Yuenan Wang.; Data Curation: Yuenan Wang.; Writing – original draft preparation: Yuenan Wang.; Writing – review and editing: Yuenan Wang.; Visualization: Yuenan Wang.; Supervision: Yuenan Wang.; Project administration: Yuenan Wang.; Funding acquisition: Yuenan Wang.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge express gratitude to peers for providing emotional support, as well as to the supervisor for patient guidance and correction, and finally to acknowledge their own persistent efforts.

References

- [1] Chen, G.M.; Starosta, W.J. Intercultural communication competence: A synthesis. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 1996, 19(1), 353-383.
- [2] Chen, M. Cultivating Intercultural Awareness in High School English Teaching—A Review of “Optimization Strategies for High School English Teaching Design”. *Theory and Practice of Education*, 2022, 42(24), 2.
- [3] Chowdhury, R.M. International TESOL Training and EFL Contexts: The Cultural Disillusionment Factor. *Australian Journal of Education*, 2003, 47(3), 283-302.
- [4] Michael, B. Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence: Revisited. *Multilingual Matters*: 2021-02-09, DOI: 10.21832/9781800410251.
- [5] Tylor, E.B. Primitive culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art and custom. J. Murray, 1871, 33.



© 2024 by the author(s); licensee International Technology and Science Publications (ITS), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)