

Construction and Application Research of a Cross-Cultural Concept Acquisition System

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Abstract:

Conventional intercultural pedagogy tends to prioritize the transmission and rote memorization of cultural facts and concepts, largely overlooking the fundamental nature of intercultural competence as a dynamic process of meaning construction and narrative interpretation. As a result, learners often struggle to transfer and apply decontextualized cultural knowledge effectively in authentic intercultural encounters. To address this pedagogical gap, the present study proposes a narrative-based framework for intercultural concept acquisition. The framework integrates Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model, Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), Bruner's theory of narrative cognition, and Dale's Learning Pyramid. Building upon these theoretical foundations, the framework innovatively introduces a four-stage, closed-loop instructional cycle comprising (1) Narrative Deconstruction, (2) Conceptual Analysis, (3) Narrative Reconstruction, and (4) Feedback Internalization. This design facilitates a fundamental pedagogical shift from a "concept-first" to an "experience-led" instructional paradigm. Through a systematic procedure, learners are guided to analyze authentic cultural narratives, extract and connect underlying theoretical concepts, construct personal narratives based on their own intercultural experiences, and engage in collaborative peer feedback and reflective internalization. The core theoretical contribution of this research lies in establishing "narrative" as the central cognitive mechanism for intercultural learning, thereby offering a novel perspective on the deep acquisition of cultural concepts. Practically, the framework effectively transforms abstract cultural knowledge into tangible personal narrative competence, bridging the gap between knowledge acquisition and behavioral output in real-world intercultural contexts. Characterized by theoretical coherence and instructional feasibility, the framework provides a systematic structure for both intercultural teaching and assessment, with clear implications for enhancing the cultivation of profound intercultural competence within foreign language education.

Keywords:

Narrative Cognition, Intercultural Concept Acquisition, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Narrative Pedagogy

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Problem Statement

Examining current intercultural teaching practices, a prominent “gap between knowledge and practice” is prevalent. The mainstream teaching model often follows the path of “concept indoctrination - case illustration - memory testing.” For example, students are taught concepts such as “high-context culture,” “collectivism,” and “face,” which are then verified through textbook cases. While this “concept-first” approach helps students build a knowledge base, it fails to effectively guide them in transforming these abstract concepts into usable interpretive frameworks and action strategies in real, dynamic cultural interactions. As a result, students often “know” the theories but cannot “apply” them—they can recite definitions yet struggle to flexibly draw on relevant knowledge for reasonable explanations and appropriate responses when facing authentic intercultural situations.

The core of this dilemma lies in the fact that existing teaching methods simplify the essence of intercultural competence to a certain extent. Intercultural competence is not a static collection of knowledge but a dynamic, context-based process of “meaning construction.” It requires learners to start from specific cultural phenomena (e.g., “declining gifts repeatedly”), identify cultural confusions within them, connect them to universal cultural concepts (e.g., “guanxi” and “face”) through analysis and reflection, and ultimately generate personalized interpretations that can guide future actions. Current teaching precisely lacks systematic guidance for this complete cognitive process.

Therefore, this study aims to address the following core research question: How to construct a systematic teaching framework that effectively guides learners through the complete meaning-making journey, from perceiving specific cultural confusions, to understanding abstract cultural concepts, and finally to generating independent cultural interpretations? Exploring this question is not only crucial for improving teaching effectiveness but also represents a rethinking of the nature of intercultural learning.

1.2. Research Objectives and Significance

The primary objective of this study is to construct a “Narrative Cognition-based Framework for Intercultural Concept Acquisition,” aiming to bridge the aforementioned gap between knowledge and practice.

Its theoretical significance is reflected in two main aspects: Firstly, this study attempts to go beyond the traditional practice of treating narratives (e.g., stories, cases) merely as auxiliary teaching materials, and instead deepens their theoretical value from a cognitive perspective. By integrating Jerome Bruner’s theory of narrative cognition, this study regards narrative as the fundamental thinking mode through which humans organize experiences and construct meanings, thereby providing a new perspective for understanding the internal psychological mechanisms of intercultural learning. Secondly, this exploration contributes to promoting dialogue and integration between intercultural communication theories and related fields such as cognitive linguistics and educational psychology. By combining classic theories like Byram’s Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model and Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) with cognitive science principles, this study seeks to advance intercultural teaching theory toward a direction that emphasizes learners’ cognitive processes and meaning generation.

In terms of practical significance, this study endeavors to provide frontline foreign language teachers with a clear, operable, and assessable teaching framework. Through

a specific four-stage cycle of “narrative deconstruction - concept anchoring - narrative generation - collaborative reflection,” the framework offers detailed guidance for teaching design. This not only helps teachers systematically cultivate students’ cultural analysis and interpretive abilities but also directly contributes to the contemporary proposition of “telling Chinese stories well.” Through this framework, students will learn how to articulate the rich connotations of Chinese culture to the international community clearly, vividly, and persuasively based on in-depth understanding and by means of narrative, thereby achieving a role transformation from passive recipients of cultural information to active disseminators of cultural meanings.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Research Background

In recent years, with China’s strategic advocacy of “telling Chinese stories well” on the international stage, the value of narrative in foreign language teaching and cultural communication has been elevated to an unprecedented height. This strategic shift provides new opportunities and requirements for intercultural teaching research: foreign language education must not only cultivate students’ ability to understand other cultures but also forge their discourse competence to actively and effectively interpret and disseminate local culture. Therefore, exploring how to systematically transform narrative, the fundamental way humans perceive the world, into a teaching path for fostering intercultural concept acquisition and interpretive competence has become a cutting-edge topic in academic circles.

The current research status presents the following characteristics: on the one hand, classic theoretical models of intercultural communicative competence (such as Byram’s ICC model and Bennett’s DMIS model) provide a macro framework and target dimensions for competence development. On the other hand, research on narrative cognition theory (Bruner) and narrative teaching methods has revealed the unique value of stories in organizing experiences, constructing meanings, and cultivating empathy. However, most existing studies proceed along two relatively independent tracks: intercultural research focuses on the discussion of theoretical systems and the setting of macro teaching goals, while narrative research mostly centers on stories as teaching materials or the design of specific classroom activities. There is a lack of research that deeply integrates narrative cognition as a core mechanism into the entire process of intercultural concept acquisition and constructs a systematic teaching framework. This study aims to address this theoretical gap and practical demand.

2.2. Domestic and Foreign Research Progress

In response to the theoretical gap of “relative independence between intercultural research and narrative research, and lack of systematic integration,” as well as the practical need to cultivate intercultural interpretation and communication competence under the background of “telling Chinese stories well,” academic circles at home and abroad have carried out targeted explorations. Although both types of research focus on the in-depth integration of “narrative” and “intercultural communication,” they exhibit differentiated characteristics in theoretical anchors, research focuses, and practical scenarios: domestic research is more closely aligned with the local educational context and national cultural communication strategies, forming a

research vein of theoretical localization and practical contextualization; foreign research tends to extend classic theories, conduct micro-analysis of cognitive mechanisms, and pursue methodological diversification and innovation, providing an international reference for intercultural narrative teaching. The following will sort out the research progress at home and abroad respectively, systematically present the research achievements and core controversies in the field, and lay a solid literature foundation for the subsequent construction of the acquisition framework.

2.2.1. Domestic Research Progress

Domestic research in the past five to ten years has yielded remarkable achievements at the intersection of “narrative” and “intercultural communication,” mainly deepening along three directions: “theoretical introduction and interpretation,” “teaching application and practice,” and “national narrative and discourse construction.”

Firstly, in terms of theoretical introduction and localized interpretation, scholars have actively linked cutting-edge international narrative theories with intercultural theories. For example, Professor Lan Liangping (2023) systematically introduced the paradigmatic shift of conversational narrative research from structural analysis to social practice, emphasizing that narrative is not only a reflection of linguistic competence but also a field for interactional competence and identity construction[12], providing methodological enlightenment for studying intercultural learning in dynamic communication. Guo Yuanhui and Guo Yuanxiang (2025) demonstrated from a linguistic philosophical perspective that the narrativity of language is the key to realizing intercultural expression, pointing out that foreign language narrative is essentially a dialogue and reconstruction between two worldviews[10]. This lays a theoretical foundation for this study to examine intercultural concept acquisition from a cognitive perspective.

Secondly, in the aspect of teaching application and practice, a large number of studies have explored the effectiveness of narrative teaching methods in specific scenarios. A teaching practice targeting medical students shows that narrative teaching can simultaneously improve students’ linguistic competence, cultural knowledge, and intercultural empathy, providing an effective way to resolve cultural constraints in practical communication[13]. Taking Chongqing narratives as an example, Tao Siyi (2025) constructed a teaching chain of “corpus - task - competence - output,” systematically demonstrating the value of local narrative resources in cultivating students’ intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness[9]. These studies reflect the trend from macro narrative to specific and operable teaching design.

Finally, centering on the national strategy of “telling Chinese stories well,” relevant research focuses on the construction of learners’ narrative competence and identity. Zhao Dongqian (2023) adopted narrative inquiry to track the changes in intercultural identity of a Japanese major student during her study abroad [14], revealing the core role of personal experiences and emotional experiences in identity formation, which provides an empirical reference for this study to focus on learners’ subjective meaning construction. He Yuanyuan’s (2023) research found that college students’ theme selection when telling Chinese stories in English is deeply influenced by the dual drivers of the “ideal construction” of their cultural identity and the “negative imagination” of Western audiences [11], highlighting the importance of guiding

critical cultural awareness and complex audience awareness in teaching. Professor Tian Dexin (2025) further proposed that “narrative paradigm theory” can be used to analyze the meta-narratives of Chinese myths, thereby enhancing the rational persuasiveness and cultural affinity of Chinese stories in international communication.

2.2.2. Foreign Research Progress

International academic research also presents the characteristics of theoretical deepening and practical innovation, especially in the conceptual reconstruction of intercultural competence, the cognitive value of literary narrative, and the integration of methodologies.

In the development of intercultural competence theory, scholars have continuously reflected on and expanded classic models. Byram’s ICC model remains the cornerstone, but subsequent studies have attempted to inject richer cognitive and emotional dimensions into it. For example, a study (2016) proposed the conceptual evolution from “intercultural speaker” to “intercultural reader,” emphasizing that literary reading, as a special form of intercultural communication, can cultivate learners’ ability to handle textual conflicts, ambiguity, and engage in imaginative participation[8]. This actually extends the field of intercultural competence from real-time oral interaction to in-depth textual interpretation and reflection [8]. This study reveals that the interpretation of narrative texts itself is a cognitive process of meaning construction.

In terms of narrative as a teaching tool, research not only focuses on its function in language learning but also delves into its cultural cognitive value. Kumada (2023) explored how to use fairy tales to cultivate the “attitudes,” “knowledge,” and “skills” defined by Byram’s ICC model in basic education [6]. Applying literary reception theory, this study demonstrates how to guide students to understand cultural differences through retelling classic stories, providing specific examples for the design and use of narrative materials.

In terms of research methodology, cutting-edge studies advocate the dialectical integration of paradigms. When sorting out the methodological system of intercultural research, Tian Dexin (2025) pointed out that social scientific methods emphasizing quantification and prediction, interpretive methods focusing on understanding and construction, and critical methods centered on power and criticism should be dynamically integrated. This idea of “dialectical integration” is highly consistent with the characteristics of narrative inquiry that values context, meaning, and subjectivity, providing a methodological basis for this study to adopt a mixed-methods or multi-perspective analytical approach.

In addition, research on metacognition and intercultural writing has provided new perspectives. A study (2022) proposed a “correlative system between metadiscourse and metacognition” through cross-linguistic and intercultural metadiscourse comparison, arguing that metadiscourse is the linguistic reflection of metacognition [5]. Although it does not directly discuss narrative, the principle it reveals, “how cognitive monitoring is reflected in discourse”, is of great significance for analyzing how learners regulate their thinking and monitor the application of cultural concepts when constructing intercultural narratives.

2.3. Theoretical Gaps and Integrated Framework

Overall, despite the abundant existing literature, there is an obvious theoretical gap: target theories of intercultural competence (such as Byram's ICC model) and psychological development theories (such as Bennett's DMIS model) clarify "what to cultivate" and "where to develop," but there is a lack of systematic discussion on "how to achieve this development through specific cognitive mechanisms." A large number of teaching practice studies provide cases of "how to do it," but they often lack an in-depth theoretical explanatory framework that connects "goals - processes - cognition."

This study aims to fill this gap. We believe that Bruner's narrative cognition theory is the "core cognitive bridge" connecting static competence components and dynamic psychological development. Based on this, we propose an integrated theoretical perspective (as shown in Figure 1) as the foundation for constructing the teaching framework:

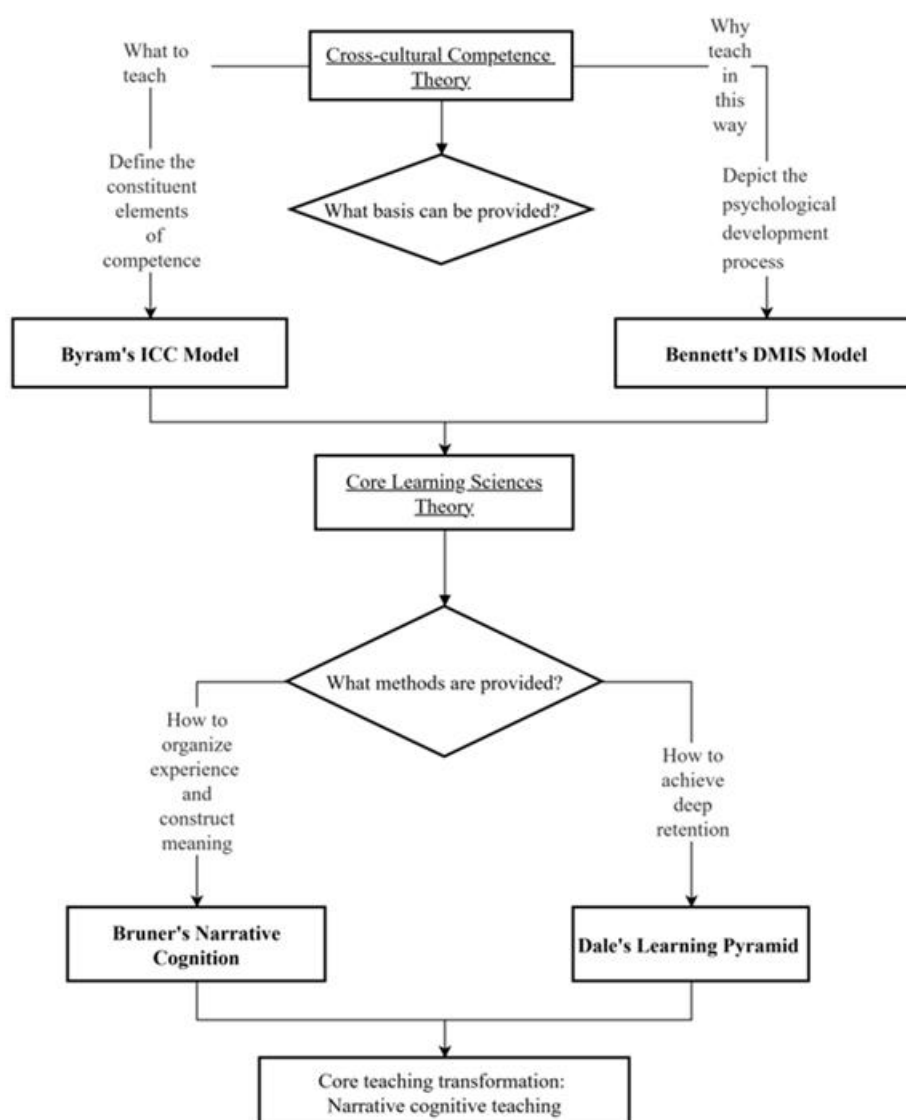


Figure 1. *A intercultural concept acquisition system based on narrative cognition.*

Byram's ICC model defines the static components of intercultural competence, i.e., the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness that successful learners should possess. It provides a clear teaching goal system and evaluation dimensions for this study.

Bennett's DMIS model depicts the dynamic psychological development path of learners from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. It explains why learners experience psychological stages from "confusion" and "defense" to "understanding" and "adaptation," providing a psychological basis for this study to design progressive teaching interventions.

Bruner's narrative cognition theory provides the core cognitive tool driving this development. Humans are inherently inclined to organize experiences, understand the world (paradigmatic cognition), and construct the self (narrative cognition) through stories. In the teaching context, guiding learners to "deconstruct" cultural stories means guiding them to enter the meaning world of others (developing Byram's "interpretive skills"); "reconstructing" personal narratives means guiding them to integrate new and old cognitions and complete personalized meaning construction (promoting Bennett's "adaptation" stage). Narrative here becomes a consistent mechanism for meaning generation and psychological regulation.

Therefore, the "Narrative Cognition-based Framework for Intercultural Concept Acquisition" constructed in this study is not a simple superposition of theories, but an organic integration of target theories and development theories centered on "narrative as the core cognitive mechanism of meaning construction." It aims to transform the acquisition of intercultural concepts from a passive knowledge reception process to an active cognitive development journey of meaning exploration, negotiation, and reconstruction through narrative, via a systematic four-stage teaching cycle. This constitutes the core theoretical innovation of this study.

In summary, the literature review in this chapter shows that deeply integrating narrative cognition into the construction of intercultural concept acquisition framework is not only a response to the current frontier trends of domestic and foreign research but also a theoretical and path innovation to solve the teaching dilemma of "the gap between knowledge and practice" and deeply align with national cultural communication strategies. Based on this solid literature foundation, this study will carry out subsequent framework construction and application exploration.

3. Framework Construction: A Four-Stage Acquisition Cycle Based on Narrative Cognition

This study aims to construct an intercultural concept acquisition framework that effectively bridges the gap between knowledge and practice. This goal dictates that the framework cannot rely solely on a single theoretical perspective but must conduct targeted theoretical integration to simultaneously address core issues in intercultural learning, such as goal setting, developmental processes, cognitive mechanisms, and learning effectiveness. Therefore, at the outset of its construction, the framework established the following clear logic for theoretical selection:

First, Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model [4] and Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) [1] jointly form the "goal-development" framework of the system. With its comprehensiveness and authority, Byram's ICC model provides a clear, decomposable blueprint for competence components, defining static dimensions such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness that teaching should cultivate, and addressing the question of "what to cultivate." However, intercultural competence is not a static accumulation of knowledge but a dynamic psychological development process. Bennett's DMIS model precisely depicts the psychological development ladder of learners from

ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, explaining why and how learners undergo phased changes from denial and defense to adaptation and integration. It provides a crucial “process-oriented” basis for the framework to design progressive teaching interventions that align with cognitive and psychological laws. The combination of the two ensures that the framework not only targets the endpoint but also maps out the steps to reach it.

Second, Bruner’s narrative cognition theory [3] serves as the core cognitive engine connecting “goals” and “processes.” While the aforementioned models clarify directions and stages, the internal cognitive transformation mechanisms of learners still need to be elaborated. Bruner’s theory identifies two fundamental modes of human cognition: the paradigmatic (logical-scientific) mode and the narrative mode. The latter is the fundamental way people organize experiences, construct meanings, and understand themselves and others. In intercultural learning, cultural concepts are not abstract symbols but meaning nodes rooted in countless specific narratives (stories, cases, experiences). Therefore, this framework introduces Bruner’s theory to elevate “narrative” from a teaching material to a core cognitive tool. We hypothesize that guiding learners to systematically engage in “narrative deconstruction” and “narrative reconstruction” is the underlying cognitive mechanism that drives their upward development along Bennett’s ladder and gradual internalization of the various competences defined by Byram. It addresses the key question of “how to achieve development.”

Third, Dale’s Cone of Experience theory strengthens the framework’s “output-driven” design principle to ensure learning effectiveness. The integrity of the theoretical framework must be matched by efficient learning design. Bruner’s theory explains how meaning construction occurs, while Dale’s Cone of Experience reveals empirical differences in the effectiveness of different learning methods, clearly indicating that active application and teaching others yield the highest learning retention rates. This provides solid pedagogical support for placing “narrative reconstruction” (creation and storytelling) at the core of the cycle. It compels the framework to abandon the traditional passive input-centered model and instead use learners’ creative output and collaborative reflection as key levers to catalyze in-depth internalization and realize the leap from “knowing” to “doing.”

3.1. Core Concepts and Principles of Framework Construction

The teaching framework constructed in this study aims to fundamentally address the dilemma of “easy to know but hard to practice” in traditional intercultural teaching. Its design is not a simple patchwork of existing teaching methods but a reunderstanding of the nature of intercultural learning—it is not a passive knowledge reception process, but an active journey of meaning construction and identity negotiation using narrative as a cognitive tool. This fundamental stance gives rise to three core principles guiding the framework’s construction:

First, experience precedes concepts. The framework resolutely abandons the traditional “concept-first” path and advocates taking the real cultural confusions directly or indirectly experienced by learners as the logical starting point of all teaching activities. Whether facing the initial misunderstandings of foreign experts in Telling Chinese Stories in English or the awkward moments learners encounter in intercultural interactions, such “confusions” are not distractions to be avoided but the most precious source of cognitive motivation. They effectively activate learners’ prior

knowledge, placing them in the “defense” or “minimization” psychological states described by Bennett, thereby creating internal psychological needs and emotional tension for subsequent conceptual intervention and meaning reconstruction.

Second, meaning construction orientation. The framework clarifies that the goal of learning is not to repeat standard definitions from textbooks but to generate personalized interpretations that can guide future actions. This means the focus of teaching shifts from “imparting correct answers” to “building cognitive scaffolding.” The teacher’s role is to guide learners to explore “why such cultural behaviors occur” and “what they mean to me,” encouraging them, as Bruner described, to organize diverse cultural phenomena through narrative and construct coherent, personal meaning networks. The criteria for evaluating learning effectiveness also shift from memory accuracy to the rationality, depth, and creativity of interpretations.

Third, output-driven internalization. The framework fully recognizes and integrates the cognitive laws revealed by Dale’s Cone of Experience, placing “output” at the core of driving deep learning. Passive input such as mere listening and reading can only achieve superficial understanding, while active output through creation, storytelling, and teaching others compels learners to sort out, integrate, and externalize their implicit understanding. In this framework, the “narrative retelling” stage (i.e., creating personal cultural stories) is the concentrated embodiment of this principle. It is not only a display of learning outcomes but also the most effective learning process itself, enabling abstract concepts to be “anchored” in personal experience and thus completing the key leap from “knowing” to “being able to apply.”

These three principles are interdependent and progressive: “experience” provides the raw materials and motivation for learning, “construction” clarifies the direction of cognitive processing, and “output” ensures the depth and effectiveness of the processing. Together, they form the philosophical foundation that distinguishes this framework from traditional teaching.

3.2. The “Narrative Cognition-Based” Intercultural Concept Acquisition Framework

Based on the above concepts, this study proposes a four-stage teaching cycle framework consisting of “Narrative Deconstruction—Conceptual Analysis—Narrative Retelling—Reflective Internalization.” This cycle is not a linear, fixed sequence but an iterative, recursive spiral upward process, aiming to systematically guide learners through a complete cognitive journey from cultural confusion to independent interpretation.

Stage 1: Narrative Deconstruction—From Confusion to Inquiry

This stage begins with a detailed analysis of others’ cultural narratives. Teachers need to carefully select authentic narrative materials rich in cultural conflicts and cognitive tension, such as Matthew Clark’s initial confusion about “red envelopes” or “dumplings” mentioned earlier in *Telling Chinese Stories in English*. Learners’ core task is to act as “cultural detectives,” identifying the narrator’s confusion points, misunderstandings, and emotional reactions in the text.

The key is that teachers should guide learners to suspend immediate judgments and instead describe the confusion itself: “Why was he surprised?” “What underlying cultural expectation differences exist here?” This process urges learners to step out of their own cultural frameworks and begin to attempt “adopting the perspective of the

other,” marking the initial activation of the “interpretive and relating skills” emphasized by Byram. Psychologically, this corresponds to the sensitive period in Bennett’s model where learners begin to recognize differences and may produce defensive reactions. The goal of this stage is not to obtain answers but to raise a “genuine question,” laying the foundation for subsequent conceptual exploration.

Stage 2: Conceptual Analysis—From Phenomenon to Rationale

Driven by the specific questions raised in narrative deconstruction, teaching naturally transitions to the conceptual analysis stage. At this point, teachers introduce relevant intercultural theoretical concepts (such as “face,” “high-context communication,” “gift economy,” and “collectivism”), but not through direct definition indoctrination—instead, these concepts are provided as analytical tools for learners to explain the “confusions” identified in the previous stage.

For example, learners can use the concept of “face” to analyze the “euphemistic refusal in public” described by Matthew Clark. Teachers guide them to distinguish: Whose face is involved in this specific context? What “face-saving” strategies are adopted? How does this differ from or resemble face maintenance in the learners’ own cultures? Through this process of systematically linking and differentiating specific narrative elements with abstract concepts, learners achieve a leap from perceptual phenomena to rational cognition. The core development in this stage is the “knowledge” dimension in Byram’s model, but this is not isolated, static knowledge—it is contextualized, problem-oriented explanatory knowledge with clear practical relevance.

Stage 3: Narrative Retelling—From Understanding to Expression

This is a critical link for the framework to realize competence transfer and internalization, and the core embodiment of the “output-driven” principle. Learners need to transfer the understanding gained in the previous two stages to their own experiences and complete a creative “narrative retelling” task. They can rewrite an original story by changing the cultural positions of its characters, or create an entirely new “my intercultural story” based on their own experiences.

For example, students can create a story describing how they explained the cultural connotation of “wedding money” to a foreign friend, demonstrating the application of cultural concepts in the story. This process compels learners not only to understand concepts but also to master them, thinking about how to present them logically and appropriately within a new narrative framework. This fully aligns with the most effective levels of “teaching others” or “immediate application” in the Cone of Experience. Psychologically, when learners can actively use new conceptual frameworks to organize and explain experiences, they have transcended mere acceptance and begun to move toward the “adaptation” stage defined by Bennett, showing initial ability to flexibly switch between different cultural frameworks.

Stage 4: Reflective Internalization—From Output to Awareness

The final stage aims to elevate specific narrative practices into stable intercultural cognitive literacy, solidifying learning outcomes through structured reflection. Specific forms include peer evaluation based on clear rubrics, targeted teacher feedback, and reflective journals required of learners. The core reflection questions should guide learners to transcend the story itself and conduct metacognitive examination: “In the story I created, did I apply the concept of ‘guanxi’ (interpersonal

relationships) accurately? Was it oversimplified?” “What new insights have I gained about my original cultural assumptions through this creation?”

Peer evaluation provides diverse perspectives, while teacher feedback ensures professional guidance. Personal reflective journals, meanwhile, serve as a space for learners to dialogue with themselves, helping to sort out the process of cognitive change. This stage integrates the most profound dimension of Byram’s model, “critical cultural awareness,” i.e., the ability to critically evaluate the norms, values, and practices of one’s own and others’ cultures, while also echoing the characteristics of the “integration” stage in Bennett’s model, where new cultural perspectives begin to become part of one’s self-identity. At this point, a complete learning cycle starting from specific confusion, undergoing analysis, creation, and reflection, and ultimately leading to critical awareness and self-reconstruction is realized.

3.3. Characteristics and Innovations of the Framework

In summary, the “four-stage acquisition cycle based on narrative cognition” constructed in this study exhibits distinct characteristics and innovations in three aspects:

First, the systematicity of theoretical integration. The framework does not mechanically piece together classic theories but identifies “narrative cognition” as the key hub, organically and dynamically integrating Byram’s definition of static competence components, Bennett’s description of dynamic psychological development, and Bruner’s and Dale’s insights into cognitive and learning mechanisms into a coherent teaching framework. Each teaching stage can find its corresponding coordinates and basis in the theoretical matrix, forming a self-consistent logic of “goal-process-mechanism” trinity.

Second, the cyclical nature of the learning path. The framework breaks away from linear “input-output” thinking and designs a spiral upward cognitive cycle. The four stages are interconnected: new insights generated in the “reflective internalization” stage may trigger new “confusions,” thereby initiating a new round of “deconstruction.” This cyclical design acknowledges the complexity and long-term nature of intercultural learning, allowing learners to repeatedly refine the same cultural concept at different depths, continuously deepening their understanding and iteratively developing their competence.

Third, the operability of teaching practice. The greatest value of the framework lies in its transformation of high-dimensional theories into a clear, actionable teaching “manual.” Each stage corresponds to clear teaching objectives, core tasks, and evaluation focuses (e.g., “problem identification” in the deconstruction stage, “story creation” in the retelling stage), and provides specific tools such as “cultural detective” activities, “conceptual analysis tools,” “narrative creation tasks,” and “reflection rubrics.” This greatly lowers the threshold for teachers to apply theories, enabling the framework to truly enter classrooms and undergo testing and optimization through teaching practice.

Therefore, the framework not only provides a new solution to “how to teach intercultural concepts” but also attempts to offer an explanatory theoretical framework and practical example for understanding “how intercultural competence is generated” from a cognitive perspective.

Table 1. *Comparison Between Traditional Intercultural Teaching & Narrative Cognitive Acquisition System.*

Comparison Dimension	Traditional Intercultural Concept Teaching Method	Narrative Cognitive Acquisition System
Teaching Objectives	Memorize/retell cultural concepts; end with concepts	Contextual interpretation/transfer; orient to “understand & apply”
Cognitive Mechanism	Logical-scientific cognition; abstract concepts; prioritize universality/accuracy	Narrative & logical cognition; deconstruct/reconstruct concepts; prioritize individuality/contextuality
Teacher’s Role	Knowledge transmitter; authoritative judge	Narrative guide; thinking coach; feedback collaborator
Assessment Method	Standardized tests (MCQs/definitions); focus on knowledge reproduction accuracy	Diversified performance assessments (narrative creation/peer review); focus on application appropriateness/reflection criticality

4. Teaching Application: Implementation Paths of the Framework in Intercultural Teaching

4.1. Selection of Teaching Materials and Construction of Narrative Corpus

The effective operation of the model first relies on a carefully selected and organized narrative corpus. The straightforward cases commonly found in traditional textbooks, which aim to “verify” cultural concepts, often lack cognitive tension and fail to effectively stimulate learners’ desire for exploration. Therefore, the selection of teaching materials in this framework follows three core principles:

Authenticity: Materials should be derived from real intercultural communication events or personal experiences, such as foreigners’ self-narratives, intercultural interview records, biography excerpts, or real film and television scenes. For example, the personal experiences of foreign experts in Telling Chinese Stories in English, with their authentic emotional and cognitive trajectories, are far more likely to resonate and provoke thinking than fictional, conclusion-first dialogues [10][15]. Authenticity ensures the “original flavor” of cultural confusions, laying a solid foundation for meaning construction.

Conflictuality: Materials should contain obvious cultural misunderstandings, value conflicts, or behavioral surprises. An American employee’s confusion about a Chinese leader’s implicit criticism to “save face,” or a Chinese student’s discomfort when invited to a Dutch friend’s “AA” (go Dutch) dinner, are ideal materials. This conflictuality is the starting point for perceiving “differences” in Bennett’s model—it creates cognitive dissonance, forcing learners to pause, examine, and seek explanations, thereby naturally driving the initiation of the “narrative deconstruction” stage.

Conceptual Relevance: Materials should naturally (rather than forcedly) link to key intercultural theoretical concepts, such as “high-context/low-context communication,” “individualism/collectivism,” “power distance,” and “uncertainty avoidance.” A narrative about the use of silence in Japanese business negotiations is inherently related to the concepts of “high-context” and “uncertainty avoidance.” This relevance ensures a smooth and academically in-depth analytical path from emotional narratives to rational concepts.

Based on these principles, teachers can construct a diverse and dynamic corpus. Its sources may include: expert and ordinary people's narratives (e.g., the aforementioned foreign experts' stories, international students' blogs), literary and film excerpts (selecting classic scenes depicting cultural collisions), news documentaries and interviews (recording real intercultural events), and even learner-generated narratives (serving as valuable materials for subsequent teaching cycles). A classified and continuously updated narrative corpus is an important resource guarantee for the regular implementation of this model.

4.2. Design of Classroom Teaching Activities for the Four-Stage Cycle

The following takes the culturally distinctive Chinese concept of "red envelopes" as an example to specifically demonstrate how to fully implement the four-stage cycle in a teaching unit. This design uses Matthew Clark's confusing narrative in *Telling Chinese Stories in English* as the core introductory material.

Stage 1: Deconstruction—Revealing Confusion and Suspending Judgment

Core Activity: Students read an excerpt of Matthew Clark's narrative about his initial confusion and slight discomfort when encountering "red envelopes," which he equated with "public cash gifts."

Teaching Guidance: Instead of hastily explaining what "red envelopes" are, the teacher guides students to engage in group discussions, focusing on two questions: "What was Matthew's initial misunderstanding (what did he observe)?" and "What might be the reasons for his feelings (what was his original cultural framework)?"

Design Purpose: The goal of this stage is to guide learners to become "observers of cultural phenomena" and practice the descriptive part of Byram's "interpretive and relating skills." By analyzing others' confusions, students begin to recognize the existence of cultural filters and enter the "difference identification" state in Bennett's model. Teachers need to create a safe atmosphere, encourage any observations, and avoid value judgments on misunderstandings.

Stage 2: Analysis—Linking Concepts and Constructing Rationale

Core Activity: Building on deconstruction, the teacher introduces academic concepts such as "gift economy," "symbolic lubricant for social relations," "principle of reciprocity," and "ritual exchange" as analytical tools.

Teaching Guidance: Working in groups, students use these concepts as lenses to re-examine the "red envelope" narrative and expand their analysis of its functional differences in various contexts such as weddings, Spring Festival, and birthdays. For example, discussing the changing weight of the "mutual assistance" component in wedding red envelopes and the "blessing" component in birthday red envelopes.

Design Purpose: This stage aims to complete the "conceptual anchoring" from specific phenomena to abstract concepts. Students not only learn the definitions of concepts but also practice their explanatory power in real contexts, thereby constructing the "knowledge" system emphasized by Byram's model. This is no longer isolated vocabulary memorization but a networked schema of understanding.

Stage 3: Reconstruction—Transfer Creation and Personalized Expression

Core Activity: Students receive a creative output task: working in groups, they write and perform a 5-8 minute short play. The plot should revolve around a foreign friend

who causes a minor social awkwardness at a Chinese family gathering due to improper handling of red envelopes (e.g., opening them in front of others, asking about the amount), and then understands their cultural connotation through communication.

Teaching Guidance: The teacher provides suggestions on plot structure and emphasizes that the script must clearly and naturally reflect at least two core concepts analyzed in Stage 2 (e.g., “symbolic exchange,” “relationship maintenance”).

Design Purpose: This is a key link in “output-driven internalization.” To create the script, students must transfer, combine, and apply internalized concepts to guide the words, deeds, and psychological changes of characters in specific contexts. This perfectly aligns with the “teaching others” or “practice” levels at the top of the Cone of Experience and promotes learners toward the “adaptation” stage (Bennett) where they can flexibly use new frameworks.

Stage 4: Reflective Internalization—Evaluation, Feedback, and Consciousness Solidification

Core Activity: First, each group performs their short play, and other groups conduct peer evaluation using an assessment rubric jointly developed by teachers and students, focusing on “the accuracy of cultural concept application” and “the appropriateness of intercultural solutions.” Second, each student submits a personal reflective journal.

Teaching Guidance: The reflective journal should address questions such as: “What specific changes have occurred in your understanding of ‘red envelopes’ during the creation or viewing of the short play?” “If you were to explain red envelopes to a foreign friend who knows nothing about them, how would you tell the story to avoid Matthew’s initial misunderstanding?”

Design Purpose: This stage integrates performance assessment and metacognitive reflection. Peer evaluation provides diverse perspectives and real audience feedback; personal reflection compels students to internalize external activities into adjustments of cognitive structures. By examining their own and others’ narrative reconstruction processes, students begin to develop Byram’s “critical cultural awareness”—not only knowing “what it is” but also being able to judge “why it is so” and “how to apply it appropriately,” marking the development of learning toward a deeper state of “integration.”

4.3. Reconstruction of Teacher-Student Roles and Classroom Ecology

The successful implementation of this teaching framework ultimately depends on the fundamental transformation of teachers’ roles and the matching classroom ecology.

4.3.1. Threefold Transformation of Teachers’ Roles

A) From Knowledge Authority to Narrative Guide:

Teachers are no longer disseminators of standard answers but “curators” of high-quality narrative materials and “guides” for learners’ inquiry journeys. Their core task is to raise good questions, build thinking scaffolding, and timely introduce new conceptual tools or auxiliary narratives when students’ analysis reaches an impasse.

From Content Instructor to Thinking Coach:

Teachers shift their focus from “teaching content” to “coaching thinking.” During group discussions, conceptual analysis, and script creation, teachers circulate to

observe and stimulate the clarity, logic, and criticality of students' thinking through questioning ("Why do you interpret it this way?" "Is there another possibility?").

From Outcome Judge to Feedback Provider:

Teachers reduce summative, score-based evaluations and increase formative, descriptive feedback. In the reflection stage, teachers' feedback should specifically target the subtle or debatable aspects of students' application of concepts in narrative works, as well as the cognitive depth reflected in reflective journals, helping students clarify directions for subsequent improvement.

4.3.2. Threefold Transformation of Students' Roles

Any profound educational reform must be a two-way process of collaborative evolution of teacher and student roles. What this framework advocates is a transformation from passive knowledge receivers to active meaning explorers and constructors. Students' role transformation is also reflected in three corresponding dimensions, forming an interactive cycle of mutual improvement with teachers' roles.

From "Knowledge Receiver" to "Narrative Deconstructor"

Students are no longer passive knowledge receivers who wait for teachers to impart cultural facts and concept definitions while regarding textbooks as authoritative; instead, facing authentic materials provided by teachers as "narrative guides," they become active "cultural detectives." Their core task is to keenly identify doubts, recognize emotional conflicts, and describe behavioral differences from first-hand narratives (e.g., Matthew's confusion about red envelopes) rather than rushing to seek explanations, which requires them to suspend instinctive judgments, practice refined observation and description skills, and accumulate raw, unprocessed "phenomenal evidence" for subsequent analysis.

From "Standard Answer Reproducer" to "Narrative Creator"

Students are no longer standard answer reproducers who dedicate themselves to memorizing and reproducing standard explanations of cultural phenomena provided by teachers or textbooks; instead, building on the conceptual scaffolding erected by teachers as "thinking coaches," they transform into active "meaning constructors." They need to use theoretical tools such as "face" and "guanxi" to propose personalized, evidence-based interpretive hypotheses for the "cases" (cultural confusions) they discover, and more importantly, upgrade to "narrative creators" in the "narrative reconstruction" stage—transferring and weaving internalized concepts into new, personal stories (e.g., creating an intercultural short play). This process has nothing to do with memory but centers on creation, integration, and personalized expression, marking the transition of cognition from understanding to application.

From "Score Competitor" to "Growth-Oriented Reflector" and "Collaborative Evaluator"

Students are no longer score competitors who focus on external evaluations (scores and rankings), orient their learning behaviors toward exams, and view peers primarily as competitors; instead, in the safe and open ecology created by teachers as "feedback providers," they transform into "growth-oriented reflectors" who focus on internal cognitive growth—continuously tracking the trajectory of changes in their understanding and developing metacognitive abilities through writing reflective journals. Meanwhile, they also serve as "collaborative evaluators" who critically and

constructively examine others' narrative works in peer evaluation based on clear rubrics. This process not only cultivates critical thinking and empathy but also allows them to deepen their understanding of evaluation criteria (i.e., what constitutes good intercultural interpretation) when evaluating others, realizing the mutual nourishment of Byram's "critical cultural awareness."

4.3.3. Reconstruction of Classroom Ecology

This collaborative reconstruction of teacher and student roles jointly shapes a new classroom ecology. In this ecology, teaching is no longer a one-way transmission of information but a joint journey of meaning discovery where teachers and students, centered on "cultural confusions" as the common object of inquiry, use narrative as a cognitive tool to experience "deconstruction-analysis-reconstruction-reflection." The value of teachers lies in professionally designing and guiding this journey, while the true sovereignty of learning and profound cognitive experiences are returned to students as "cultural detectives," "storytellers," and "lifelong reflectors." This is not only a change in methods but also a profound shift in educational philosophy from "giving fish to others" to "teaching others to fish" and even "fishing together."

In summary, this chapter concretizes the theoretical model of Chapter 3 into a clear practical path covering resource development, activity design, and the reconstruction of teacher-student relationships. Taking "red envelopes" as an example, it fully demonstrates how to transform an abstract intercultural concept into students' interpretable, applicable, and reflectable living competence through the cycle of narrative cognition. This marks a key step in translating the research results from theoretical conception to teaching practice.

4.4. Suggestions for Teaching Implementation

In addition to relying on rigorous design, the successful implementation of this framework requires teachers to grasp several key principles in classroom practice to address potential challenges and ensure that learning takes place in a safe, supportive, and productive atmosphere.

First, creating a safe psychological atmosphere is crucial in the "deconstruction" stage. Discussing cultural confusions and misunderstandings may touch upon students' cultural identities and emotions. Teachers need to clearly convey that all descriptions of confusions based on real observations are valid starting points for learning, and there are no "stupid questions." Descriptive language should be encouraged rather than hasty value judgments. Teachers act as neutral hosts, protecting the space for each exploratory speech, so that students dare to expose their "ignorance" or "confusion"—a prerequisite for initiating real meaning construction.

Second, providing structured creative scaffolding in the "reconstruction" stage can effectively reduce anxiety and improve output quality. Faced with the open task of "creating an intercultural story," students may shrink back due to confusion. Teachers should provide necessary scaffolding, such as: narrative templates (frameworks for context, conflict, misunderstanding, exploration, resolution, and reflection), character cards (indicating potential values and blind spots of characters from different cultural backgrounds), or key concept lists (reminding of core concepts to be reflected in the story). These tools do not restrict creativity but rather provide fulcrums for thinking, helping students weave abstract concepts into vivid narratives in an orderly manner,

thereby more smoothly experiencing the effectiveness of “output-driven internalization.”

Finally, actively utilize and carefully present students’ real outputs as the best evidence and reflection materials for teaching. With students’ permission and anonymization, teachers can introduce excellent narrative reconstruction works by previous students (e.g., a wonderful script dialogue, an ingenious metaphor) or excerpts from profound reflective journals as examples in current teaching. For instance, showing a student’s reflection: “When creating a story about how to explain ‘face,’ I found that I first needed to explain it clearly to the ‘Western perspective’ within me, which made me truly understand where the most difficult part of this concept was for me.” Sharing such real generative texts resonates with learners far more than theoretical elaborations, helping them understand the essence of the learning process and providing vivid annotations for evaluation criteria. Teachers need to guide the focus from “judging the quality of works” to “appreciating the demonstration of thinking processes and the creative application of concepts.”

5. Assessment System: Competence Development-Oriented Evaluation Based on the Model

5.1. Philosophical Shift in Assessment: From Knowledge Testing to Competence Evaluation

The philosophical foundation of this assessment system stems from a redefinition of the nature of intercultural learning. If intercultural concept acquisition is recognized as a dynamic process of meaning construction, assessment must undergo a fundamental shift from “retrospective knowledge testing” to “developmental competence evaluation.”

This shift encompasses three core ideas:

From “Knowing” to “Applying”:

The focus of assessment moves from reciting definitions of concepts such as “face” and “high-context communication” to examining whether students can accurately identify, reasonably explain, and appropriately apply these concepts in specific narrative contexts. For example, whether students can have characters adopt specific communication strategies to “save the other party’s face” in a self-created story is far more valuable than dictating the definition of “face.”

From “Answers” to “Interpretations”:

Assessment no longer seeks a single correct standard answer but embraces diverse, evidence-based personalized interpretations. It focuses on how students organize evidence (narrative details) and invoke theories (cultural concepts) to construct a logically consistent meaning framework for explaining a particular cultural phenomenon.

From “Endpoint” to “Trajectory”:

Assessment is not merely a summative judgment at the end of learning but also formative feedback throughout the learning process aimed at promoting development. It values the changing trajectory of students’ thinking qualities, emotional attitudes, and interpretive abilities in the cycle from “narrative deconstruction” to “reflective internalization.”

In short, the assessment philosophy of this system is: Assessment as learning, feedback as navigation. It aims to guide and witness learners' continuous progress along the ladder described by Bennett's and Byram's theories[1][4], from "unconscious denial of differences" to "conscious intercultural integration" and "critical cultural awareness", through sustained, multi-dimensional feedback.

5.2. Design of Multi-Dimensional Assessment Tools

To realize the above philosophy, a single paper-and-pencil test must be abandoned in favor of a set of multi-dimensional, complementary assessment tools, each corresponding to different stages and outputs of the learning cycle.

Performance Assessment: Focusing on Narrative Reconstruction Outputs

As the core of the assessment system, this directly targets students' creative outputs in the "narrative reconstruction" stage (e.g., intercultural short play scripts, videos, personal cultural story texts). Its assessment object is complete, contextualized behavioral performance. For example, the assessment of a short play themed on "red envelopes" focuses on whether the words and deeds of the characters created by students naturally reflect concepts such as "relationship maintenance" and "symbolic exchange," and whether the plot development reasonably demonstrates the process from cultural misunderstanding to understanding.

Rubric Design: Achieving Professionalism and Transparency in Assessment

To overcome the subjectivity of performance assessment, detailed assessment rubrics must be developed. A rubric serving this model should include at least the following four core dimensions:

Conceptual Accuracy: Whether the application of cultural concepts aligns with their academic connotations and matches the narrative context.

Narrative Complexity: Whether the story goes beyond simple cultural comparison and demonstrates an understanding of cultural internal diversity, situational specificity, and individual agency.

Intercultural Situational Insight: Whether cultural norms, power relations, and communication purposes in specific contexts are accurately identified and responded to.

Depth of Reflection: Whether the cultural considerations behind creative choices are clearly elaborated in accompanying reflective journals, and whether cultural presuppositions in oneself or the narrative can be critically examined.

Each dimension is divided into descriptive levels such as "Exemplary," "Proficient," "Developing," and "Beginning," providing a clear, consistent benchmark for teacher evaluation, peer assessment, and student self-assessment, and making the assessment process itself an important learning link.

Formative Assessment: Tracking the Trajectory of Thinking Development

This type of assessment runs through the entire learning cycle, aiming to capture cognitive development that cannot be fully reflected in final works. Key tools include:

Discussion Records and Observation: During group discussions in the "deconstruction" and "analysis" stages, teachers assess the depth of students' questions, their willingness to switch perspectives, and their attempts to reason using concepts through observation and recording.

Reflective Journals: Serving as a key window connecting external behavior and internal cognition, regular journal writing allows students to track the evolution of their understanding of a particular cultural confusion, changes in emotional attitudes, and awareness of their own cultural frameworks. This provides teachers with valuable evidence to assess their metacognitive development and psychological position (Bennett’s model).

Self-Assessment and Peer Assessment: Cultivating Metacognition and Learning Communities

Guiding students to conduct self-assessment and peer assessment based on the above rubrics has dual significance: First, it forces students to internalize standards for high-quality performance and engage in self-monitoring and adjustment, serving as an advanced training for cultivating metacognitive abilities. Second, providing and receiving constructive feedback in peer assessment fosters a learning culture of collaborative inquiry rather than individual competition, promoting the development of “discovery and interaction skills” in Byram’s model.

5.3. How Assessment Aligns with Theoretical Models

This assessment system is by no means a simple collection of tools. Each dimension is deeply integrated with the teaching model and underlying theories constructed in Chapter 3, forming a rigorous alignment.

5.3.1. Aligning with the Static Competence Dimensions of Byram’s ICC Model

Each dimension in the assessment rubric can be directly mapped to the five core elements of Byram’s model:

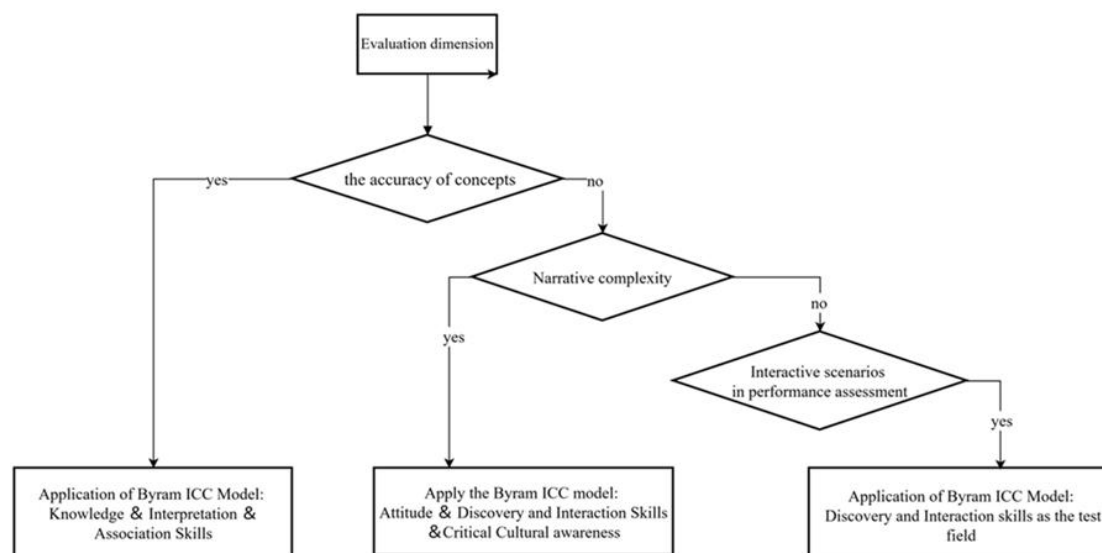


Figure 2. The correspondence between the evaluation dimension and the Byram ICC model.

Conceptual Accuracy and Intercultural Situational Insight directly assess “knowledge” (about others’ and one’s own culture) and “interpretive and relating skills.”

Narrative Complexity and Depth of Reflection comprehensively examine “attitudes” (openness, curiosity), “discovery and interaction skills” (the ability to acquire new knowledge through interaction), and the highest-level “critical cultural awareness” (the ability to evaluate and adopt critical perspectives). The interactive scenarios in

performance assessment serve as a natural venue for testing “discovery and interaction skills.”

5.3.2. Mapping the Dynamic Psychological Development of Bennett’s DMIS Model

Formative assessment, especially reflective journals and discussion observations, is a key tool for detecting learners’ psychological development positions:

Frequent use of judgmental language based on one’s own culture (e.g., “This is unreasonable”) in students’ discussions and reflections suggests they may be in the “Defense” stage.

The ability to describe differences rather than judge indicates a transition to the “Minimization” or “Acceptance” stage.

Proactive and appropriate application of new cultural frameworks to solve problems in narrative reconstruction, coupled with reflective examination of one’s own cultural perspective, strongly indicates entry into the “Adaptation” or even “Integration” stage.

The assessment system itself encourages diverse interpretations and perspective-taking, and its teaching process systematically creates psychological development conditions for moving from “ethnocentrism” to “ethnorelativism.”

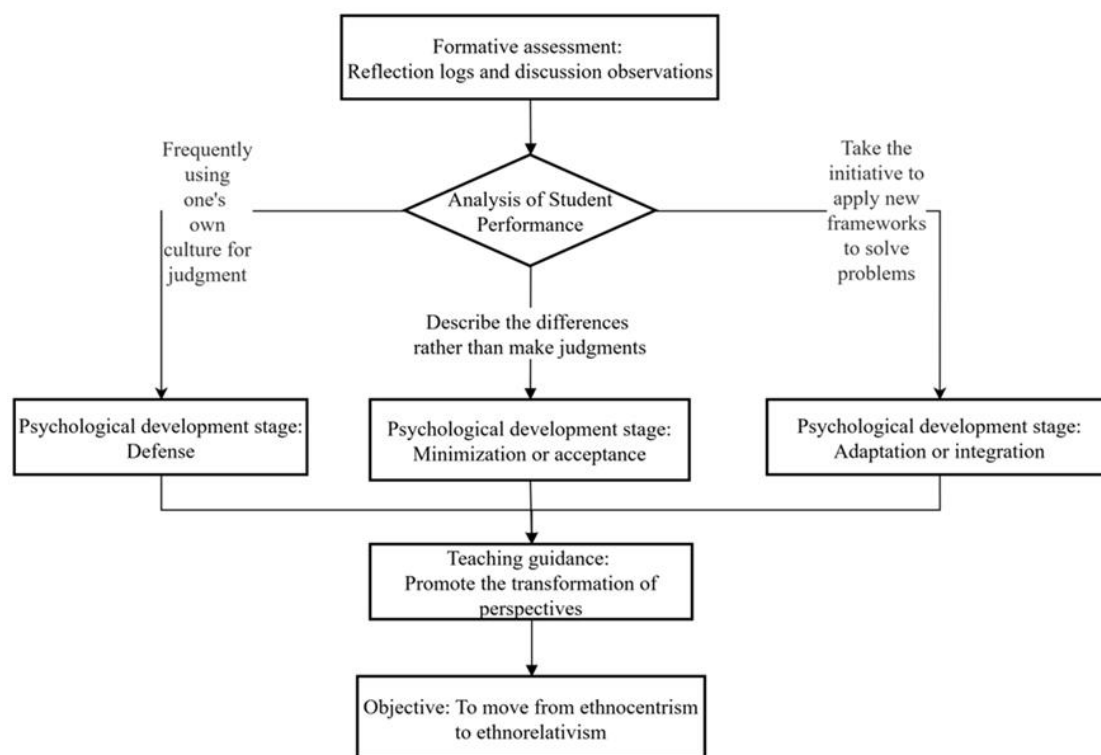


Figure 3. Mapping of formative assessment to the psychological development stages of the Bennett DMIS model.

In summary, the assessment system constructed in this chapter is a logical extension and operational manifestation of the teaching model in the evaluation dimension. Through multi-dimensional tools, it decomposes abstract “intercultural competence” into observable, describable, and developable specific behavioral and thinking indicators, while always anchoring in the directions guided by Byram’s and Bennett’s theories. This not only ensures the consistency between teaching and assessment but

also makes assessment itself an indispensable booster and navigator for promoting learners to complete the meaning-making journey from “cultural confusion” to “independent interpretation.”

6. Conclusions

6.1. Research Summary

The core achievement of this study is the construction of a “Narrative Cognition-Based System for Intercultural Concept Acquisition.” The innovation of this system does not lie in inventing entirely new teaching techniques, but in conducting in-depth theoretical reintegration and reshaping teaching logic.

First, at the theoretical level, this study has undertaken a key “bridge-building” effort. We thoroughly analyzed two pillars of intercultural research: Byram’s ICC model [4] provides a detailed static “competence map” for competence cultivation, while Bennett’s DMIS model [1] depicts a dynamic “developmental ladder” of learners’ psychological growth. However, there is a gap in the discussion of micro-cognitive mechanisms regarding “how to develop from point A to point B” between the two. This study introduces Bruner’s narrative cognition theory [3] precisely to fill this gap. We reposition “narrative” from a popular teaching material to the core cognitive tool driving intercultural learning. The fundamental cognitive mode through which humans understand the world, organize experiences, and construct self-identity—via stories—provides a solid psychological basis for explaining how learners can transcend superficial memory of cultural knowledge and move toward in-depth meaning interpretation and identity negotiation. Thus, the theories of Byram, Bennett, and Bruner form a self-consistent closed loop in this model: goals (what competences to cultivate), paths (what psychological development to undergo), and tools (what cognitive mechanisms to adopt) are organically unified.

Second, at the practical level, based on the aforementioned theoretical integration, this study has developed a highly operable four-stage teaching cycle—“Narrative Deconstruction, Conceptual Analysis, Narrative Reconstruction, Reflective Internalization.” This cycle design transforms grand theories into clear classroom action guidelines. It explicitly advocates “experience precedes concepts,” igniting learning motivation through real cultural confusions; it implements “meaning construction orientation,” shifting learning goals from repeating answers to generating personalized interpretations; it relies on “output-driven internalization,” making creation and storytelling the deepest learning processes. The supporting multi-dimensional assessment system further materializes the concept of “competence evaluation,” making the trajectory of learners’ thinking development visible, assessable, and promotable.

Therefore, the contributions of this study are twofold: theoretically, it provides a new perspective for intercultural acquisition research with the deep involvement of cognitive narratology; practically, it offers a complete set of teaching design and assessment schemes aimed at systematically bridging the “gap between knowledge and practice.”

6.2. Research Implications

The findings of this study bring several substantive implications for intercultural communication teaching and related fields.

First, the implication for intercultural teaching practice lies in its call for a paradigmatic shift from “content transmission” to “process understanding.” The focus of teaching should move from “teaching culture” to “teaching how to understand culture.” Instead of designing a series of lectures on cultural knowledge points, teachers need to create meaning-construction projects that guide learners to discover like “cultural detectives” and explain like “storytellers.” Classrooms should become safe risk-taking arenas where confusions are cherished, misunderstandings are analyzed, and diverse interpretations collide and grow within a rational framework.

Second, the implication for foreign language teachers’ professional development is urgent and specific. Implementing this model requires teachers to undergo a role transformation from “knowledge authorities” to “narrative guides,” “thinking coaches,” and “feedback providers.” This demands that teachers develop new competencies: the ability to select and design narrative corpora, the ability to ask questions that guide in-depth discussions and conceptual analysis, and the ability to design and apply performance assessment rubrics. Pre-service training and in-service professional development programs need to incorporate these competencies as core components, helping teachers acquire “practical knowledge” to transform theories into daily classroom behaviors.

Third, the implication for teaching materials and textbook compilation points to the reconstruction of a “resource ecology.” The ideal intercultural textbook of the future should no longer be a compilation of cultural facts and concepts, but a combination of a carefully curated “narrative corpus” and a “project toolbox.” It needs to provide a large number of authentic narrative cases (texts, videos, audios) rich in cognitive conflicts, and design learning tasks, discussion frameworks, and assessment tools that guide the four-stage cycle around these cases. The role of textbook compilers should shift from “authors of knowledge” to “architects of learning processes” and “curators of high-quality resources.”

6.3. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

It must be acknowledged that as an exploration focusing on theoretical model construction and preliminary teaching design, this study has inherent limitations.

The core limitation is that the effectiveness of the model has not yet undergone rigorous, large-scale, and long-term teaching empirical testing. Current research is mainly based on theoretical deduction, literature synthesis, and exemplary teaching design. What challenges will the model encounter in real, complex classroom contexts? To what extent can it promote the intercultural competence of learners from different backgrounds and levels (especially long-term behavioral changes and identity formation)? These key questions still need to be answered through rigorous empirical research.

Based on this, future research can be deepened and expanded in the following directions:

Empirical Validation of Model Efficacy: Conduct design-based research or quasi-experimental studies to implement the model in real courses. Integrate multiple methods such as quantitative questionnaires, qualitative interviews, text analysis, and reflective journals to longitudinally track learners’ development across various dimensions of Byram’s model and stages of Bennett’s model, so as to test and optimize the model’s effectiveness and applicable conditions.

Expansion and Adjustment of Model Applicability: The model in this study is mainly oriented toward higher education or adult foreign language learners. Future research can explore its applicability in different educational stages and scenarios such as basic education, vocational education, study-abroad preparation, or corporate intercultural training. Studies need to focus on how to adaptively adjust the complexity of narrative materials, the depth of theoretical concepts, and the form of output tasks according to learners' cognitive maturity, language proficiency, and learning goals.

Integrative Innovation with Digital Intelligent Technology: The digital age provides new imaginative space for the implementation of the model. For example, how to use AI narrative generation tools to enable students to co-create or deconstruct intercultural stories with AI, thereby providing unlimited personalized practice scenarios? How to use virtual reality (VR) technology to create immersive narrative environments where learners can "experience" cultural conflicts firsthand? And how to use learning analytics technology to automatically analyze learners' emotional attitudes and concept application reflected in discussion texts and reflective journals, providing teachers with more accurate formative assessment data? Exploring the deep integration of technology and humanities will be a highly promising direction.

In summary, this study opens a window based on narrative cognition for understanding and teaching intercultural concepts. It is not an endpoint but an invitation—inviting more researchers and teachers to engage in this field, and jointly refine the methods and wisdom to help learners cross cultural divides and become true intercultural interpreters through continuous dialogue between theory and practice. This path may be complex, but it is full of exploration necessity and value because it points to the essence of learning and the inherent human nature of meaning construction.

Conflicts of Interest

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