STRATEGIES FOR CULTIVATING THE CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS

OF CHINESE PRIMARY SCHOOL EFL LEARNERS IN ENGLISH TEACHING

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Abstract

STRATEGIES FOR CULTIVATING THE CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS OF CHINESE PRIMARY SCHOOL EFL LEARNERS IN ENGLISH TEACHING

Fang Wu

Under the supervision of Dr. Hao Chen

In today's globalized economy and with the advancement of modern technology, it has become increasingly important for individuals to understand the significance of cross-cultural communication. Cultural differences between Chinese and Western societies can often result in misunderstandings when expressions are directly translated, leading to communication barriers. The purpose of this paper is to address the current challenges of promoting cross-cultural awareness in Chinese primary schools and to emphasize the importance of cultivating cross-cultural competence during English language instruction. The paper will also present effective strategies for educators to utilize in developing students' intercultural communication skills, thus facilitating the practical application of English learning. By promoting cross-cultural awareness, students will gain a greater understanding and appreciation of different cultures, which will enable them to communicate more effectively and engage with others in a respectful and inclusive manner.

Key words: cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural awareness, English language instruction, intercultural communication skills

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The increasing integration of the global economy and growing interconnections between countries have made effective communication between nations more important than ever before. English, as a lingua franca, has been widely adopted in the education system by many countries including China. At present, English is a significant subject in China as it facilitates people's engagement with the outside world. However, effective cross-cultural communication between countries demands more than just language proficiency; it necessitates a deep understanding of cultural norms and values. Failure to comprehend the cultural context during communication often leads to comical misunderstandings and ineffective communication. Therefore, it is crucial to develop students' cross-cultural awareness and competence. Without this skill, even if individuals possess strong English language proficiency, they may struggle to understand people from diverse cultural backgrounds and engage in effective communication.

Most studies on cross-cultural awareness have focused on university students, with little attention paid to primary school students as cross-cultural awareness is generally considered an advanced topic for them.

In Chinese primary schools, many educators fail to recognize the importance of integrating cross-cultural awareness into their English language curriculum. As a result, language instruction often prioritizes rote memorization of vocabulary and sentence structures over the development of intercultural communication skills. Neglecting to cultivate cross-cultural awareness in students during their early stages of language learning can impede their overall proficiency in English. It is essential for educators to understand that promoting cultural understanding and appreciation is a critical component of language acquisition and can contribute to the

development of well-rounded, global citizens. Therefore, it is necessary to implement effective strategies in primary school English teaching that foster intercultural communication competence and cross-cultural awareness among students. It is crucial for teachers to pay attention to this aspect of language education and it is necessary to cultivate the students' cross-cultural awareness in their primary school English learning.

Nowadays, Chinese EFL teachers and researchers in primary schools have begun to realize the importance of teaching cultures. As a result, the Chinese government now regards the cross-cultural awareness as one of the key competences in the educational program. The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) has pointed out four key competences specifically for Chinese students; the third key competence is "cross-cultural awareness". Developing students' cross-cultural awareness can help them appreciate the remarkable achievements of different civilizations, compare Chinese and foreign cultures, develop intercultural communication skills, adopt a more open attitude towards diversity, avoid cultural shock, and actively engage in international communication. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate cross-cultural awareness and broaden students' knowledge of different cultures during the primary school teaching process.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of integrating cross-cultural awareness into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction for primary school students in China. It provides an overview of the current status of cross-cultural awareness cultivation in the classroom, and offers effective strategies for teachers to incorporate cultural understanding into language learning. By emphasizing the value of cross-cultural competence, this paper seeks to enhance students' overall proficiency in English and promote a more inclusive and respectful learning environment. Additionally, the paper highlights the need for educators to recognize the

importance of cross-cultural awareness in language learning, and to integrate cultural content and communication skills into their teaching practices and culture in the teaching content, moderately developing course-teaching materials, enhancing student's intercultural communication experience, etc.

Statement of the Problem

English plays a crucial role in China's education system, aiming to equip students with practical communication skills. Despite this, primary school English education in China faces various challenges in terms of content and teaching methodologies. Teachers pay more attention to the mechanics of the English language from the textbooks and ignore excavating the cultural connotation of the teaching content. As a result, they emphasize excessively on the instrumental nature of English, and they render the text content into fragments, practice words, and isolated sentences in a mechanical way. Although students may appear to have a good grasp of individual words and sentences, they often struggle to comprehend the text in its entirety and lack the ability to fully grasp the cultural nuances embedded within it. Therefore, students always find it difficult to listen to and speak English during the learning process. They are always afraid of using the language to communicate in their real life.

Teaching a foreign language goes beyond imparting knowledge of vocabulary, grammar rules, and pronunciation. It also requires the cultivation of students' intercultural communication skills and awareness. Merely mastering language mechanics does not guarantee the ability to communicate effectively in the target language. As such, English teachers in China should prioritize cross-cultural awareness and integrate it into their teaching methods, allowing students

to gain a deeper understanding of English culture. The question then arises as to how primary school teachers in China can effectively instill cross-cultural awareness in their students during English lessons.

Definition of Terms

Intercultural communicative competence: Intercultural communication is commonly defined as a process in which individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds interact and negotiate shared meanings. It involves the exchange of ideas, values, and beliefs between individuals from different cultural communities. The process of intercultural communication can be complex, requiring careful attention to cultural norms and customs, as well as an openness to learning and understanding different perspectives. Effective intercultural communication can lead to increased understanding and cooperation between individuals and communities. (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 39).

Cross-cultural Awareness: It refers to the understanding and mastering of English-speaking countries' cultures as well as local cultures. On this basis, cultural knowledge is used to improve the ability to understand English and thus improve the ability to use English (Fan, 2020, p. 172).

Purpose of the Study

With the rapid development of China, there has been a significant increase in exchange and collaboration between China and other countries worldwide. To thrive in this changing global landscape, it is crucial for students to be equipped with the necessary skills. Learning English in primary school is a vital first step in their English education. However, if students only focus on the mechanics of the language and treat English as just another subject, it may negatively impact their long-term English learning. Thus, it is important for students to understand the practical applications of English and develop a comprehensive understanding of the language to succeed in the increasingly globalized world. Thus, it is essential to initiate and cultivate the students' understanding of English-speaking countries' cultures during their primary school years, as this is a crucial foundation for their cross-cultural awareness. This early exposure can greatly benefit their future studies and interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. If the students really appreciate the values and cultures of the countries, they will be more interested in learning English. Consequently, English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers should prioritize not only imparting language knowledge but also fostering students' cross-cultural awareness and enhancing their intercultural communication abilities. Unfortunately, the reality is that primary school students in China usually only have three English classes per week and may not have many opportunities to use the language in their daily lives. Moreover, English teachers in China care more about the students’ scores of the test, and they have attached much more importance to the teaching of vocabulary, grammar, and writing, and have ignored the creation of the real and natural situation for the students to use the language. This leads to that most students cannot communicate in English with others effectively in their real life. In this paper, the significance and rationales behind fostering primary school students' cross-cultural awareness in English

language education will be examined. Furthermore, effective teaching strategies aimed at enhancing the intercultural awareness of EFL learners in their English language studies will be proposed.

Significance of the Study

With the development of global economy, cross-cultural communication has become an indispensable skill of people from every country. However, the main challenge of cross-cultural communication is cultural difference. At present, English has become a common language. In English communication, cross-cultural awareness is a very important ability, which is to recognize the influence of cultural factors on behavior. Learners are required to have a deep understanding and cognition of the historical geography, customs, cultural background, language expression, and ideological values of different countries and nations to communicate effectively with others.

When teaching English in China, it is crucial to help students comprehend the distinctions between Chinese and Western cultures. Only by truly understanding these differences can they effectively communicate with people from other countries and nations.

Currently, English teaching in China is mainly exam-oriented, cultivating students' English ability to master words, grammar, writing, and reading, but ignores listening and speaking, so that many students of Chinese-style education cannot speak fluent English. Cultivating cross-cultural awareness helps to expand students' vision and knowledge level to let students understand the exotic customs different from the local culture, so as to really improve the comprehensive English skills.

Given that primary school students are in a period of English language exploration, they possess an innate curiosity towards the unfamiliar realm. By emphasizing the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, students' inquisitiveness towards learning English can be stimulated, thereby enabling them to relish the joy of learning. Thus, it is imperative to nurture the primary school students' cross-cultural awareness through English language instruction during the initial stages of their English language acquisition journey.

Delimitation of the Study

This paper centers on the English language education of primary school students in China, with a particular emphasis on teaching English as a foreign language. It explores the importance of developing cross-cultural awareness among these students and provides effective strategies for achieving this objective. By integrating cross-cultural awareness into English language education, students will be better equipped to navigate the global landscape and communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This study is to help primary school teachers to develop an effective curriculum for the English teaching in the classroom. The findings of this thesis could prove beneficial for teachers and students alike. Nonetheless, given the varying backgrounds of teachers and students across different regions, the applicability of this study may be limited in certain English language teaching contexts.

Methodology

In this seminar paper, a thorough examination was undertaken of recent literature pertaining to the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness among EFL learners. The sources reviewed included professional journals, articles, and seminar papers, with the majority of resources being accessed through the UW-Platteville online library.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Brief Introduction of Chinese Education System

As defined by the Educational Law of the People's Republic of China, the education system in China consists of four stages: preschool education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education. The first stage, preschool education, is designed for children between the ages of 3 and 6. It serves as a critical foundation for future learning and development. The institutions mainly include nurseries, kindergartens and preschool classes attached to primary schools which implement preschool education before entering primary school to carry out planned education.

Primary education refers to the first stage in a national school system, also known as elementary education. It is a general school for children between the ages of 6 and 12 and the grade goes from 1st to 6th.

Secondary education refers to the education that continues on the basis of primary education. Secondary education acts as an essential part in the whole national school system, which is divided into two stages: primary secondary education and senior secondary education. That is what we called middle school education from 7th to 9th grade and high school education from 10th to 12th grade.

Higher education encompasses a range of specialized academic programs, typically consisting of junior college, undergraduate, and graduate education levels. These levels of education build on each other, allowing students to acquire more advanced knowledge and skills as they progress through their academic journey. Higher education undertakes the multiple tasks of training specialized personnel, carrying out scientific research, and engaging in social service.

Institutions of higher education mainly include junior colleges, independent colleges, universities, and so on. Junior college education, undergraduate education, and graduate education typically last for a period of 2-3 years, 4-5 years, and 2-3 years, respectively, depending on the specific program and institution.

The nine-year compulsory education from Primary School to Middle School is compulsory for the students in China. If parents do not send their children to school, parents may face legal consequences, including fines and other penalties; In the event that a school refuses to admit school-aged children for education, the school will be subjected to legal consequences and penalties. Likewise, if the government fails to provide the necessary conditions, it will be held accountable by law. After the completion of the 9-year compulsory education, students can choose to enter either high school, or vocational secondary school, or the workforce directly. Students in China are often required to take the same classes until high school. Later, if the students want to enter high school to study further, they need to pass the Senior High School Entrance Examination proposed by each province. The main testing subjects are Chinese, mathematics, and English. The students will be ranked and filed to the high school by their scores in the Senior High School Entrance Examination. Some students might not be able to further their studies if they cannot meet the minimum score requirement of the high schools. Therefore, many middle school students in China choose to attend night classes in the school so that they can have extra time to self-study or receive tutoring in preparing for the Senior High School Entrance Examination. They face tremendous pressure to enter a high school from such an exam.

The same is for pursuing the college education in China. If the students want to enter their ideal university, they have to pass the university's score requirement of the National Higher

Educational Entrance Examination which is always hosted nationwide on June 7th every year. Although some students in different province may be assessed differently, the main subjects always include: Chinese, mathematics, and a foreign language (typically English). The students can express their interest in some universities beforehand, then the universities will assess if they will offer the admittance to those who express their interest by their testing scores in the National Higher Educational Entrance Examination.

Therefore, China's education system lays too much emphasis on the exams and scores. Students cultivated by this system may be more like a "learning robot" than a "active learner". This might be the reason why teachers and students emphasize so much about the exam-oriented teaching approach in China.

English Teaching in China

In China, most students will learn English for 13 or 14 years from grade 3 of their primary school to their senior year of college. Surely for some extremely poverty-stricken rural countries, the students may not receive an English course in primary school. With that said, the minimum time of learning English for Chinese students is at least 10 years. Therefore, students should be expected to learn English well and to communicate fluently in this language. However, the real situation is that many students can't use the English language in real life and even are afraid to communicate in English, let alone to communicate with foreigners. They are only proficient in English exams and getting a high score in these English tests and exams doesn't correlate to a high level of their English skills. Ma (2020) noted that some students who learn English well still have communication misunderstanding and barriers now and then, which affects their communication precision in real life (p.112). The fundamental reason for this problem lies in China's exam-oriented education system in which teachers focus more on improving the test

score and teaching vocabulary and grammar knowledge instead of the learning of cultural knowledge of different countries.

Ma (2020) also posited that “the lack of formal culture learning is a very important reason”. This will ultimately result in communication failures and barriers in the real situation. It is widely recognized among English language learners that language serves as a crucial means of conveying culture, and culture constitutes an integral part of language, reflecting not only a nation's distinctive features but also embodying its way of life and patterns of thought. Integrating cultural learning with language instruction is essential for developing students' cross-cultural awareness. This enables learners to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures, facilitating effective communication and interaction with people from diverse backgrounds. Ma (2020) claimed that “According to the author (p.112), systematic cultivation of cross-cultural awareness is rarely discussed or prioritized in Chinese English language classrooms.” This may be attributed to the fact that students are required to perform well on grammar-focused exams in order to gain admission to prestigious schools. As a result, other important aspects of language learning, such as cultural understanding, are often overlooked. This emphasis on grammar testing highlights the importance of mastering the rules and structures of language, which is seen as a key indicator of one's academic ability and potential for success. Students who perform well on these exams are considered to be more qualified for admission to top-tier institutions, providing them with greater opportunities for future advancement and achievement. Additionally, strong grammar skills are essential for effective communication, both in academic and professional settings. Penner (1995) concluded that the EFL teachers spent much of their effort on imparting the grammar and vocabulary knowledge to their students to help them pass their exams successfully. Consequently, the

cultivation of cross-cultural awareness through English education in China is fragmented and inadequate. This deficiency is attributed to several factors, such as a lack of emphasis on cultural content in language instruction, limited exposure to authentic materials from diverse cultural backgrounds, and a shortage of qualified teachers capable of integrating cultural elements into their lessons. The consequences of this deficiency are far-reaching, leading to a lack of understanding and appreciation of other cultures, as well as hindering effective communication and collaboration in multicultural settings. To address these challenges, there is a need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to language and cultural education that integrates language skills with cultural knowledge and cross-cultural competence.

Cross-cultural Awareness

Sapir (1921) stated that language is a part of culture, language reflects culture, and culture influences culture. It means the structure, meaning and use of language is different under the influence of different cultures. Hence, language and culture can't be told apart. Bonvillain (2008) also argued that both language and culture are the integral parts of everyone's intellectual system, which means they are twins and they can't exist in isolation. According to Hanvey (1979), the cross-cultural awareness refers to the comprehension of both our own culture and other cultures that will affect the people's behaviors and perception. Rather than a kind of external knowledge, language is an internal capacity and attainment. As an English learner, the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness is a prerequisite for students to use the language flexibly. Damen (1987) also claimed that one who possesses cross-cultural awareness will have a better grasp of cross-cultural communication. We not only have the ability to observe other cultures from the perspective of our own culture, but also can reflect on our own culture from the perspective of other cultures. Through such observation and reflection, we can achieve a deep understanding of

the language in different cultures. Shaban (2019) proposed that the cultural and linguistic background of students can significantly impact their foreign language learning experience. Their native language and cultural background often shape their approach to and understanding of the target language, affecting their ability to comprehend and produce language. This influence can result in challenges such as difficulty in understanding cultural nuances and idiomatic expressions, as well as in the pronunciation and use of certain language structures. On the other hand, students' cultural and linguistic diversity can also bring unique perspectives and insights into language learning, enriching the classroom experience for all learners. Therefore, it is essential for language teachers to recognize and leverage the cultural and linguistic diversity of their students to facilitate effective language learning. The different culture background will lead to the different modes of thinking. Naturally it will change language usage. Also, when we learn a foreign language, we will find that it is easy for us to apply the language rules and expressions of our first language to our second language. This demonstrates that learning a foreign language necessitates an exploration of both the linguistic and cultural similarities and differences between two nations. Gaining an understanding of these similarities and differences can foster cross-cultural awareness, enabling individuals to adapt their communication styles and bridge cultural gaps. In essence, language learning provides a unique opportunity to develop a more nuanced appreciation and understanding of different cultures and ways of life, promoting greater empathy and cross-cultural competence. In addition, Huang (2016) noted that it will turn one’s self into a fool if he or she learns another language and does not learn its culture. To learn a language effectively, it is crucial to acquire knowledge of the culture associated with the target language country. This is because language and culture are intertwined, and understanding the cultural context of a language can enhance one's ability to communicate effectively and

accurately in that language. The nuances of language use and the cultural references embedded in language can be difficult to grasp without a solid understanding of the cultural context. Furthermore, having knowledge of the target culture can help to avoid misunderstandings and cultural faux pas when interacting with native speakers, and can facilitate more meaningful and authentic communication. Thus, incorporating cultural knowledge into language instruction is essential for achieving proficiency in a foreign language. Seen from above, communication that lacks relative culture knowledge will result in an odd or humorous situation leading to misunderstanding and communication breakdown, just as Fan (2016) explained that cross-cultural awareness is an important ability to recognize the influence of cultural factors on behavior. Students are required to have a deep understanding of the history, geography, customs and habits, cultural background, language expression, and ideological values of different countries and nationalities in the communication with others. Without cross-cultural awareness, it is impossible to communicate effectively and smoothly.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Xiao (2021) said that "The ability to effectively communicate across cultures, known as intercultural communicative competence, encompasses a wide range of skills and factors." These include language proficiency in the native language of the interlocutors, knowledge of the social and cultural background of the speakers, familiarity with literature, strong cognitive ability, and emotional intelligence. Developing intercultural communicative competence involves not only linguistic skills but also cultural sensitivity and an ability to navigate cross-cultural differences in communication styles, values, and norms. In the present globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively across cultures is crucial for achieving success in various aspects of life, including personal, academic, and professional endeavors. Developing intercultural

communicative competence is, therefore, vital for learners who aspire to become proficient in the target language. This requires them to understand the cultural nuances inherent in the language, so as to avoid misunderstandings and culture shocks during communication. Ting-Toomey & Chung (2005) have defined intercultural communicative competence as a skill of people with different culture backgrounds who negotiate the shared meanings in an interaction. According to Davitishvili (2017), The term intercultural competence refers to the capacity to communicate proficiently in diverse cultural contexts and to interact appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. It entails the ability to navigate cultural differences in communication styles, values, and norms, and to adapt one's communication style accordingly to achieve effective and meaningful communication. Developing intercultural competence requires not only language proficiency but also a deep understanding of cultural similarities and differences and an ability to view the world from multiple perspectives. It is a crucial skill in today's globalized world, where individuals frequently encounter people from diverse cultural backgrounds in personal, academic, and professional settings (p. 551). Barnet & Lee (2022) explained that intercultural competence is a kind of inherent ability of the person to deal with the cultural difference, cultural strangeness and other key issues so as to make the efficiency and effectiveness. Effective communication across cultures is a critical skill that involves not only the ability to communicate effectively but also the ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences. Developing intercultural communicative competence involves incorporating intercultural aspects into English language teaching to raise learners' awareness of intercultural sensitivity and communication competence. By fostering this awareness, learners can improve their ability to interact with people from different cultures in a way that is respectful and effective, facilitating meaningful and authentic communication. Therefore, it is essential to

integrate intercultural elements into English language instruction to equip learners with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in a globalized world.

Cross-cultural Awareness Cultivation in Chinese High school and University

Cross-cultural Awareness Cultivation in Chinese University

According to Ma (2020), Chinese universities students are not very proficient in English reading and writing, let alone in talking directly with foreign people even if they have learned English for at least 10 years. Some people even criticize that English teaching in China is “deaf and dumb” (Ma, 2020). Even for some students who have studied English very well, communication failure and misunderstanding still occur from time to time. I am a typical example for this. When I was in university, I had got a very high scores in many vocabulary- or grammar-oriented English exams, but I couldn’t communicate in English with people successfully, let alone to communicate with foreigners. The College English Curriculum emphasizes that learning objectives should include not only English language knowledge and applied skills, but also learning strategies and cross-cultural communication. To achieve these objectives, college English teaching requirements are classified into three levels: general, higher, and much higher. Each level emphasizes the importance of developing English language proficiency, application skills, learning strategies, and intercultural communication competence in order to prepare students for success in the global community (College English curricular Requirement formulated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2007). Hence, it is of great importance to combine the culture with English learning together.

Wang (2011) pointed that although most teachers in universities have realized the new concept that English language learning is inseparable from the cultural knowledge learning of the target language, they still teach with the old teaching method. The English classroom teaching

mode still trends to the exam-oriented teaching. With the rapid development of global economy and the enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength, cultivating cross-cultural consciousness in college English teaching can not only change the present situation of Chinese college English teaching, but also meet the needs of compound talents in the world. English teachers should adapt to the new situation as soon as possible, actively adjust their pedagogy, change the traditional classroom teaching mode, integrate cultural knowledge into the English classroom, and strive to improve their own cultural accomplishment and cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness.

Zhou (2018) noted that College English, as a language course, is inseparable from the culture. Teachers have changed their traditional vocabulary- and grammar-focused teaching methods to integrate the cultural background knowledge learning with English learning, improved their culture knowledge, and applied modern technology to enhance the understanding of foreign cultures. Only on the premise of fully understanding the local culture can we effectively use the language to communicate. Therefore, in college English teaching classroom, consciously cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness can improve not only the efficiency of students' English learning, reduce the burden of English learning, improve their interpersonal skills, and cultivate students' bilingual thinking, but also their flexibility in the workplace. There is no doubt that in college English education, the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness needs to be placed in a prominent position. Only with a good understanding of other cultures can we stand out in international communication and promote the smooth communication.

Cross-cultural Awareness Cultivation in Chinese high school

Zhu (2014) conducted a study and found that it was urgent for the students in high school to improve the understanding of the cultural knowledge, improve the ability of intercultural

communicative competency and strengthen the cultivation of the cross-cultural awareness. In addition, Liang (2019) conducted a study to assess the level of cultural awareness among high school English teachers, which revealed that the teachers have a low level of cultural awareness. In other words, the study found that the teachers lack the necessary knowledge and understanding of different cultures, which can hinder effective cross-cultural communication and understanding in the classroom. It is important for language teachers to be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences in order to create a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for all students. Zhu (2021) proposed that incorporating cultural knowledge into English language teaching is of utmost importance for teachers. This is because language and culture are closely intertwined, and understanding the cultural context of a language is crucial for effective communication. By integrating cultural knowledge into their teaching, teachers can help students develop intercultural communicative competence, which is essential for success in today's globalized world. Moreover, by integrating cultural knowledge into English language instruction, students can develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the cultural contexts in which the language is used. This not only makes the learning experience more engaging and meaningful but also enhances their overall language proficiency. Ultimately, the goal of learning English is to effectively communicate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and cultivating cross-cultural awareness is essential for achieving this goal. Teachers must recognize the importance of incorporating intercultural communication competence in their English teaching practice. Zhu (2021) also noted that the teachers in high school still didn’t pay attention to the cultivation of the students’ cross-cultural awareness due to their weak cultural background knowledge of other countries. What’s more, the students themselves didn’t really enjoy learning English using the traditional method. They learn it just for getting a high score in the National

College Entrance Examination so that they can attend their ideal college. Therefore, Zhu (2021) advocated that teachers firstly should emphasize the importance of cultivation of the cross-cultural awareness in English teaching then they should permeate the culture teaching in each part such as listening, vocabulary, and reading.

In fact, more than a thousand articles can be found on the China National Knowledge Net when searching for literature related to cultivating cross-cultural awareness in college and high school English teaching. Also, the integration of culture knowledge teaching with English language teaching has been paid much more attention already by the teachers. Students in high school and college can understand the subject better when the teachers teach the students' cultural knowledge behind the language directly. What's more, in most colleges and universities, British and American literature, cross-cultural communication, and other relevant courses are set up, so that students can have a comprehensive and systematic way to learn domestic and foreign cultural knowledge, and to understand the world's cultural traditions and customs. Upon conducting a literature search on the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness in primary school English teaching, I found that there are only around 300 articles available on the topic. This indicates that cross-cultural awareness has not been given sufficient attention in primary English education, and there is a need to address this gap in research and practice. Therefore, it is time to cultivate the cross-cultural awareness in primary school.

The importance of cultivating the cross-cultural awareness in primary school

As we all known, culture and language are closely connected. Without cultural awareness, a learner's language learning progress will inevitably be impacted. Insufficient understanding of cultural nuances and differences can result in miscommunication, which can lead to frustration and confusion for language learners. Additionally, lacking cultural awareness can limit learners'

ability to fully engage with and understand the culture and context in which the language is spoken. Therefore, it is essential for language learners to develop their intercultural communicative competence alongside their language skills in order to achieve proficiency and success in language learning. The earlier we study language, the better our language proficiency will be. Therefore, it is better to cultivate the cross-cultural awareness as early as possible. Although English teaching in the outset-stage of primary school starts from basic words and sentence patterns, it cannot be assured that students can only express simple and native ideas which are far behind their cognitive levels. Pan (2015) stressed that English teaching in primary school needs to be changed from laying excessive emphasis on grammar explanation and spelling words and sentences to paying attention to cultivate the students' cross-cultural awareness. The new curriculum standard clearly puts forward that it is necessary to cultivate and improve students' intercultural communication awareness and ability (English Curriculum Standards formulated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Awareness is a necessary condition for the formation of ability and deserves more attention. At the same time, Hu (1999) clearly pointed out that there seems to be a tendency to simplify the cultivation of intercultural communicative competency in foreign language education in China. According to the analysis of teaching syllabi in primary and high schools, it is a requirement too high to form cross-cultural awareness in primary and high schools, so the cultivation in primary schools is particularly important. Last but not least, the importance of cross-cultural awareness has been recognized in both the 2017 general high school English curriculum standard and the new English curriculum standard for compulsory education in 2022 (English Curriculum Standards formulated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017 and 2022). The former defines it as culture in foreign language education, while the latter defines it

as cross-cultural awareness in the vision of core literacy, emphasizing cultural confidence, integrating emotional attitude into cultural awareness, and expanding the connotation of cultural awareness. The extensive connotation of cultural awareness has a very clear position: cultural awareness embodies the value of the core quality. It contains values, cultural confidence and other good characters, which make English curriculum have more connotation of character education. We know that the critical period of character education lies in primary school, because primary school students have relatively significant plasticity and teacher-orientation, so primary school English education can develop students' character, and then cultivate cross-cultural awareness. As the starting point of the foundation of English education, English education in primary school is of self-evident importance to the cultivation of learners' thoughts, culture and ideology. Only by attaching importance to the cultivation of pupils' cross-cultural awareness from primary school can we lay a solid foundation for future language learning.

English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education

The Education Ministry of PRC released the new English curriculum for compulsory education in 2022, which sets out the goal of English learning as “acquiring an understanding and appreciation of both Chinese and foreign cultures, developing a sense of Chinese identity, enhancing cultural confidence, broadening global perspectives, improving cross-cultural communication skills, critical thinking skills, learning skills, and innovative abilities, and forming a sound worldview, values, and outlook on life” (English Curricular Standards for Compulsory Education formulated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). It has made a clear request in the English curriculum that the students not only need to learn the language, but also have to learn the cultural knowledge, understand and absorb the essence of culture in different countries so that they can gradually form cross-cultural

communication and exchange awareness and ability to lay a solid foundation for the lifelong learning and adaptation to social development.

Furthermore, the new English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education in 2022 have outlined four major goals for the English subjects, namely: enhancing language proficiency, fostering cultural awareness, refining critical thinking, and strengthening learning aptitude. The secondary objective of cultivating cultural awareness in primary school include: “To cultivate students’ intercultural communication skills, it is important for them to be motivated and curious about other cultures, learn from teachers about the appropriate behavior and customs in different cultural contexts, and develop the ability to recognize and respect cultural differences during cross-cultural interactions” (English Curricular Standards for Compulsory Education formulated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China , 2022). Obviously, cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness is of paramount importance. In today's globalized world, developing an understanding and appreciation of different cultures is essential for effective communication and cooperation. Students who possess cross-cultural awareness are better equipped to navigate multicultural environments, understand the perspectives of others, and respect diversity. Therefore, it is essential for educators to incorporate cross-cultural education into their teaching strategies to enhance students' cultural competence and equip them with the necessary skills to succeed in diverse settings. and communicative competence at the beginning stage of primary school English learning. It is also beneficial for students' cross-cultural awareness formation at the early and key primary school education stage.

Cross-cultural Awareness Cultivation in Chinese Primary School

Zhu (2008) conducted a study by investigating the cross-cultural knowledge of school teachers and students and concluded the current situation of teachers and students in primary

school with weak cross-cultural awareness and lack of cross-cultural communication ability. Jing (2017) analyzed students' barriers in intercultural communication and the application of situational teaching method in English cultural teaching. Furthermore, it mainly focused on the relevant theories of situational teaching and the intercultural communication activities carried out by teachers in situational teaching. Pan (2015) mentioned that the reason why cross-cultural awareness cultivation in primary schools is not paid attention to is that teachers seldom carry out cultural teaching in class, and teachers lack of cultural knowledge and English literacy. All in all, although the English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education in 2011 and in 2022 have a clear requirement for the cultivation for the primary school students, they have not received enough attention in primary school English teaching. The reasons are as below:

1. Overemphasizing the acquisition of target language knowledge in the textbook while neglecting the exploration of cultural connotations embedded in the content. For example, in an English open class competition, teachers were teaching Unit 1 with the subject of “welcome back to school” in the primary school English textbook of grade 3 published by the People's Education Press. The key words are “China, Canada, USA, UK” and the key sentences are “Where are you from? I am from....”. The teachers spent much time on practicing the new words and the key sentences. The students also can speak with each other in new words and key sentences. However, the teachers ignored the excavating the cultural connotation of the content. For this part, the teachers should guide the students to learn the national flag, national landmarks, and national treasure animals of different countries shown by the pictures of each new word to broaden the students’ vision and cultivate the cross-cultural awareness.

2. In our ordinary English teaching, many teachers tend to prioritize the acquisition of target language knowledge from textbooks over the exploration and comparison of cultural

connotations. This overemphasis on the instrumental aspect of English learning often leads to a neglect of its humanistic aspect. They paid more attention to the teaching of the key words and sentences in the text so that they spent most of the time to practice the keys words and sentences mechanically in the classroom instead of understanding of the connotation of the text.

For example, when teachers taught students the key sentence “How old are you?” in the primary school English textbook of grade 3 published by the People's Education Press. The teachers paid more attention to ask the students to practice the key sentence by different activities like driving train, role play, finding friends etc., in an open class. On the surface, the students mastered this key sentence well and they could read, write, and speak with it correctly, but they could not use it appropriately. It is because the teachers had ignored teaching the cultural connotation of this sentence. The teachers should relate the language with the culture and let the students know that the language habits and environment in other countries. Maybe it is OK to ask for someone’s age in China, but in western countries, it is a taboo to ask someone directly about their age and other privacy questions. From this example, we can clearly see that there are big differences between cultures such as China and western countries. By fixing this, the teachers could guide the students to learn other cultures and understand their own cultural characteristics through comparison.

3. Another crucial reason is the absence of formal cultural education. In China, students are required to pass grammar- and vocabulary-based tests to gain admission to better schools, but cultural education is often overlooked. This was without doubt the most important factor that leads to the teachers’ spending most of their efforts in teaching vocabulary and grammar in English. It will unavoidably result in the ignorance of the cultural learning of the language. As an English teacher in a rural primary school in my hometown for the past ten years, I have not come

across any mention of developing the students' cross-cultural awareness in English education, including in my own experience. Most teachers have the same experience as I. It is only until the release of the new English Curriculum Standards in 2022 that our teachers started thinking deeply about how to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness and how to transform our classroom teaching methods to meet the higher requirement. Meanwhile, the cultural knowledge of teachers themselves in the primary schools is insufficient so that they find it quite difficult to implement the cultural teaching methods into their English teaching, not to mention to carry out the formal cultural learning for the students.

Difficulties concerning cultural teaching

The definition of culture is quite broad and it is quite difficult to define. The word "culture", everyone will say and use. It seems very simple, but it is not. Zhongshu Qian, a great scholar in China, once said "it is still clear what culture really is, but once asked, one would be confused" (Qian, n. d.). According to a renowned cultural critic from Britain, Raymond Williams (n. d.), the term "culture" is among the most intricate words in the English language, ranking within the top two or three. Additionally, he argued that understanding its full meaning requires a comprehensive study of its various dimensions. The scholars from different fields try to define what culture is exactly. Halverson (1985) pointed out that, on the one hand, civilization is often regarded as the peak of human achievement, encompassing historical, social, artistic, architectural, musical, and literary achievements. In contrast, on the other hand culture refers to the customs, traditions, and daily practices of people. Lusig & Koester (1999) claimed that culture can also be regarded as the intercultural communication competence. It means an ability that you can better understand culture of others so as to have a smooth and effective communication. Culture is inseparable from human life. Different countries have different

cultures. Different scholars have different definitions. Nowadays, with the inevitable development trend of economic globalization, it will also be the trend of integration of various cultures in the world. Undeniably, the complexity and difficulty of defining the culture will increase with time. In the similar way, the difficulty to determine the culture-related teaching content for English teaching will also grow.

The lack of cultural content in the standardized and required textbook. In China, we must teach students according to the standard required textbook (People's Education Edition English textbook for primary schools) published by People's Education Press which lacks systematic and rich cultural subjects and focuses more on the language knowledge. Undoubtedly, it will be more complicated and difficult for teachers to train students' cross-culture awareness. It will demand that the teachers who have a certain rich cultural background knowledge, all-scale understanding of the language, and also a strong cross-cultural awareness and communicative competence to deeply study the textbook and analyze the text so as to excavate the cultural connotation of the language and impart the culture knowledge teaching into the English teaching. However, there are quite short of this kind of skillful teaching staff (Ma, 2020). This also leads to the difficulty of cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness.

The lack of evaluation criterion. As we know it now, China's education system emphasizes more on the exam-oriented education. The scores in the Senior High School Examination and the National College Entrance Examination will determine if a student can enter a better school. However, neither Senior High School Examination nor the National College Entrance Examination examines the cultural knowledge and intercultural communicative competence. Although the cultivation of the cross-cultural awareness has been included in the curriculum standards, there is still no tangible assessment in the exams. Under the enormous pressure of

students’ getting high scores for entering better schools, teachers will attach more importance to the vocabulary- or grammar-oriented English teaching. This also leads to the ignorance of the cultivation of the cross-cultural awareness.

Chapter III

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

After conducting an extensive literature review on strategies for cultivating cross-cultural awareness of Chinese primary school EFL learners in English teaching, several key insights have been identified. These insights can help to better understand the importance of incorporating cross-cultural awareness in English language teaching and to develop effective strategies for enhancing students' intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 2008).

First, it is evident that cross-cultural awareness plays a vital role in language learning, particularly for EFL learners (Gu, 2016). By understanding different cultures, their customs, values, and norms, students can communicate more effectively and build stronger connections with people from diverse backgrounds (Bennett, 2009). Furthermore, developing intercultural competence is essential for students in an increasingly globalized world, as it enables them to adapt, collaborate, and thrive across various cultural contexts (Deardorff, 2006). This skill not only promotes effective communication but also fosters respect, empathy, and appreciation for other cultures, paving the way for a more harmonious and interconnected world (Byram, 2008). As a result, emphasizing cross-cultural awareness in language education equips students with the tools necessary to succeed in a multicultural and global society (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Second, the integration of cultural content in the English curriculum is essential for fostering cross-cultural awareness. Incorporating elements of both target and source cultures in the teaching materials can provide a comprehensive understanding of cultural differences and similarities, which can enhance students' overall language learning experience (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Teaching strategies that involve real-life cultural experiences, such as interviews,

storytelling, or cultural field trips, can further facilitate students' engagement with diverse cultures and help them develop a deeper appreciation of cultural nuances (Deardorff, 2006). Moreover, by including authentic materials, such as news articles, videos, and literature from various cultural backgrounds, teachers can encourage students to analyze cultural contexts, identify stereotypes, and develop critical thinking skills. This comprehensive approach to cultural content in language education ensures that students not only acquire linguistic competence but also gain a better understanding of the cultural intricacies associated with the language they are learning.

Third, the use of technology, such as multimedia and online resources, can significantly contribute to promoting cross-cultural awareness among primary school EFL learners (Lin, 2019; Wang, 2019). These tools can offer a wider range of cultural content and provide learners with engaging and interactive learning experiences. For example, videos, podcasts, and interactive websites can expose students to authentic cultural materials, helping them develop a deeper understanding of diverse customs and traditions. Online platforms can connect students with native speakers or peers from different cultural backgrounds, enhancing their intercultural understanding through collaborative projects, discussions, and language exchange programs (O'Dowd, 2018). These virtual interactions offer students the opportunity to practice their language skills while gaining valuable insights into the perspectives and experiences of others, fostering empathy and promoting open-mindedness. Additionally, digital games and simulations can be used to create immersive environments where students can explore cultural scenarios, problem-solving tasks, and decision-making processes in a safe and controlled setting (Chik, 2012). This innovative approach not only increases student engagement but also encourages learners to develop intercultural communicative competence by actively participating in

authentic cultural experiences.

Fourth, promoting collaborative learning and fostering a culturally inclusive classroom environment can greatly contribute to the development of cross-cultural awareness among primary school EFL learners (Gorski, 2012). By encouraging students to work together on group projects and discussions, teachers can create opportunities for learners to share their cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives with their peers. Incorporating activities that highlight the value of diverse cultural practices and traditions can help students develop a sense of respect, curiosity, and appreciation for other cultures (Byram, 2008). For instance, teachers can organize cultural celebrations, encourage students to share their family traditions, or introduce various cultural artifacts, such as art, music, or literature, in the classroom. Moreover, establishing a safe and supportive learning environment, where students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions, is crucial for facilitating open and meaningful discussions on cultural topics (Gorski, 2012). Teachers can create classroom guidelines that promote inclusivity, empathy, and active listening, helping students to develop the skills needed for effective cross-cultural communication. Ultimately, by implementing collaborative learning strategies and fostering a culturally inclusive classroom, educators can create a rich and dynamic learning environment where students are encouraged to explore and embrace cultural diversity, enhancing their intercultural understanding and communicative competence.

Recommendations

Based on the above information, we can conclude new teaching strategies for primary school students:

1. Simplify cultural content: Cultural content should be age-appropriate for primary school students, ensuring that it is easy to understand and relate to their daily experiences. This can be

achieved by presenting simplified cultural topics or scenarios, using visual aids such as pictures, maps, or videos to engage students in discussions and activities.

2. Encourage peer learning: Since young learners are often more receptive to learning from their peers, implementing peer-to-peer learning activities can be an effective way to develop cross-cultural awareness. Activities such as pair work, group projects, and presentations can allow students to share their cultural experiences, learn from one another, and gain a better understanding of different cultures.

3. Incorporate storytelling: Storytelling is a powerful teaching tool for primary school students, as it allows them to relate to cultural concepts through engaging narratives. Teachers can share stories, folktales, or myths from various cultures to introduce cultural concepts, customs, and values, fostering students' curiosity and interest in other cultures.

4. Use age-appropriate language: When discussing cultural topics, teachers should use simple and clear language that is suitable for primary school students. This can help ensure that students can comprehend the cultural concepts being discussed and actively participate in the conversation.

5.Cultural Jigsaw Activities: Divide students into small groups, with each group assigned a specific aspect of a culture. Students can then research their assigned topic and create a presentation or poster to share with the class. This collaborative learning activity encourages students to explore and appreciate different cultural practices and traditions.

6.Cultural Show and Tell: Organize a "Cultural Show and Tell" session, where students are invited to bring a cultural artifact from their home or community to share with the class. This activity allows students to express their cultural identity and fosters appreciation for the diversity within the classroom.

7.Interactive Cultural Games: Design interactive games that introduce primary school students to different cultural practices and traditions. For example, create a "Cultural Bingo" game where students must match pictures of cultural artifacts, customs, or celebrations to their corresponding descriptions. This can be a fun and engaging way for young learners to explore different cultures.

By adapting existing teaching strategies for university students and introducing new strategies tailored to primary school students, educators can effectively promote cross-cultural awareness in the classroom, fostering intercultural understanding and communicative competence from a young age.

Based on the insights gained from the literature review, the following recommendations can be made to improve the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness in the Chinese primary school EFL teaching environment:

1. Curriculum Design: Educators and curriculum designers should prioritize incorporating cultural content from both target and source cultures in the English language curriculum. This includes integrating cultural topics into reading materials, listening exercises, and speaking activities to ensure that students are exposed to a variety of cultural contexts.

2. Teacher Training: Teachers should receive adequate training on cross-cultural communication and intercultural competence. This can help them effectively incorporate cultural content in their teaching and guide students in developing a deeper understanding of different cultures.

3. Classroom Activities: Teachers can design interactive and engaging classroom activities that promote cross-cultural awareness, such as role-plays, simulations, and group projects. These activities can encourage students to explore cultural differences and similarities, fostering

empathy and understanding.

4. Utilizing Technology: Teachers should take advantage of multimedia and online resources to enhance students' cross-cultural learning experiences. This can include using videos, images, and podcasts to expose students to authentic cultural content and providing opportunities for virtual exchanges with native speakers.

5. Extracurricular Activities: Schools can organize cultural events and activities, such as international festivals or language clubs, to encourage students to engage with different cultures outside the classroom. These activities can provide additional opportunities for students to develop cross-cultural awareness and intercultural competence.

By implementing these recommendations, educators can help Chinese primary school EFL learners develop a strong foundation in cross-cultural awareness, improving their overall language learning experience and preparing them for successful communication in an increasingly globalized world.

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