



## The current situation of Chinese and foreign culture teaching in senior high school English reading

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### Abstract

In the new round of curriculum reform, The Ministry of Education proposed the concept of core competencies in English subjects and listed cultural awareness as one of the core competencies in English subjects. The formation and development of cultural awareness is mainly achieved through culture teaching, so culture teaching is very important in English teaching. In addition, English reading teaching, as one of the main ways of language input, is also a crucial part in senior high school English teaching. In this regard, this paper analyzes the necessity and the current situation of culture teaching in senior high school English reading teaching.

**Keywords:** English reading, culture teaching, current situation, necessity

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### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 The necessity of culture teaching in senior high school English reading teaching

##### 1.1.1. Promoting students' learning of the English language

As we all know, language and culture are interdependent and influence each other. On the one hand, language is the main carrier of culture, and language itself is an important part of culture. On the other hand, culture has a restrictive effect on language. Therefore, if a person wants to learn a language, he needs to learn the culture of that language. At the high school level, English reading is an important way for students to acquire English language, and it accounts for a large proportion in the college entrance examination. Meanwhile, the improvement of students' reading ability is not only related to basic knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar, etc., but also affected by their own cultural knowledge. Therefore, culture teaching in English reading class can improve the efficiency of students' learning of English. According to cultural schema theory, if readers are familiar with the cultural background knowledge related to the reading material, they will be able to read more easily and get more satisfactory reading results. In order to improve students' reading comprehension, they must have cultural schema related to the reading materials in addition to language knowledge. Therefore, only by strengthening culture teaching can students' cultural schema be enriched, thereby improving the comprehensive use of English language.

##### 1.1.2. Improving students' intercultural communication skills

According to the intercultural communication theory, people in different regions have different living environments, so they have different language habits, customs and social culture. For this reason, people from different cultures may have communication barriers such as misunderstandings and conflicts when communicating. With the deepening of China's reform and opening up and the development of economic globalization, exchanges between China and other countries in the world have become more and more frequent. Communication between countries necessarily involves cultural exchange, so if we want to successfully communicate with people from other countries, we must be familiar with the culture of these countries. According to the research, reading materials contain rich cultural knowledge, which is an important way to learn culture and compare cultural differences.

### 1.1.3. Conducive to cultivating talents needed for social development

Schools are the cradle of nurturing the talents needed by society. With the trend of internationalization in China, language talents must not only have excellent basic language skills, but also have cultural confidence, cultural awareness and the ability to spread excellent Chinese culture. *The English Curriculum Standard for Senior High Schools* (2017 Edition) proposed the concept of core competencies in English subjects and listed cultural awareness as one of the core competencies in English subjects. The formation and development of cultural awareness is mainly achieved through culture teaching, so culture teaching is very important in English teaching. English reading is an important way for students to acquire language and cultural knowledge, and it accounts for a large proportion in the college entrance examination. At the same time, English reading teaching, as one of the main ways of language input, is also a crucial part in senior high school English teaching. In addition, the reading texts in English textbooks contain rich cultural factors. It can be seen that culture teaching in senior high school English reading teaching is feasible and necessary. According to the requirement of *The English Curriculum Standard for Senior High Schools* (2017 Edition), the purpose of culture teaching is to enable students to students to correctly understand foreign culture, absorb the essence of Chinese and foreign culture, strengthen cultural self-confidence, and consciously promote Chinese culture. Therefore, only by strengthening the culture teaching in English reading can we meet the requirements of the new curriculum standard and cultivate excellent foreign language talents for the society development.

In conclusion, conducting culture teaching in English reading can promote students' learning of the English language, improving students' intercultural communication skills, and cultivate talents needed for social development. Therefore, strengthening culture teaching at the high school level is an issue that every teacher engaged in English teaching should pay attention to.

## 2. The current status of culture teaching in senior high school English reading teaching

In order to investigate culture teaching in senior high school English reading classes, the author adopts classroom observation, questionnaire and interview. The combination of qualitative research and quantitative research can ensure that the data collected is more authentic and reliable. In terms of research subjects, the study is conducted in the author's internship school—a high school in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. In order to ensure the authenticity and comprehensiveness of this study, the author selects 220 high school students from Grade 1. The reason is that these students have learned English for at least seven years, and they have more time to learning culture but students from Grade 2 and Grade 3 are very busy because they face greater pressure from the college entrance examination. Then, the author selects 4 female teachers and 1 male teacher with different years of experience.

### 2.1 The introduction to research instruments

In terms of research instruments, in order to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of the research results, the author began to conduct classroom observation at a high school in Taiyuan. The contents of classroom observation involve the contents of culture teaching, the methods of culture teaching,

students' performance in culture teaching and culture teaching time. The selected observation course types are reading classes, and each reading class lasts for 40 minutes. Because the observed reading classes need to include cultural contents, the author observes 20 reading classes of 4 teachers. As we all know, the real teaching situation is provided by classroom teaching, which can directly show teachers' teaching methods and students' performance. In addition, it can also reflect the merits and demerits of students and teachers. Secondly, the author uses questionnaire to investigate the current situation of culture teaching. There are 30 items in the questionnaire, and the items are much concerned with the following dimensions: students' attitude towards Chinese and Foreign cultural knowledge; students' situation of learning cultural knowledge; teachers' practice of culture teaching; students' evaluation of teachers' culture teaching. Thirdly, considering that classroom observation can not explore teachers' true ideas about culture teaching, the author adopts interviews to get a deeper research conclusion. The semi-structured interviews are conducted with five teachers who are the front-line English teachers. Teachers are between 26-51 years old. One is male teacher and 4 others are female teachers. In addition, two of them are bachelors and three of them are masters. In order to have a effective interview, the interview outline is prepared, which has 6 dimensions and 6 questions. The main contents of the interview are teachers' understanding of cultural awareness, teachers' attitude towards culture teaching, the importance attached by the school to culture teaching, teachers' ways of culture teaching, factors that influence culture teaching and teachers' suggestions for promoting culture teaching. With the permission of the teachers, the author records the interview process by recording machine, and the results of the interview are transcribed into written form for content analysis.

### 2.2 Analysis of cultural content in English textbooks

As the basis of English teaching, high school English textbooks are the main source of language learning input for students, and an important carrier carrying English knowledge and culture. The cultural content in English textbooks has a huge impact on culture teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the cultural content of high school English textbooks before classroom observation.

The English textbooks used by the high school in Taiyuan are published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2019. These English textbooks are revised based on the curriculum standard formulated by the Ministry of Education. There are ten English books for senior high school students. Book1 to Book3 are compulsory course materials; Book4 to Book7 are optional compulsory courses material; Book8 to Book10 are the enhancement materials in optional courses. According to the requirements of the syllabus, the compulsory part is a basic task that all students must learn. Therefore, the author mainly analyzes the cultural content in compulsory textbooks 1-3.

Firstly, the author analyzes the cultural content in terms of cultural regions. The author divides the cultures covered in these text book into five categories: native culture, target culture, world culture, comparative culture and other culture. Native culture refers to the culture with Chinese characteristics, including traditional Chinese and modern art, architecture, clothing, literature, etc., which is the common culture of the Chinese nation. Target culture refers to the

culture based on the English cultural background, mainly the culture of Britain and American countries. World culture, also called international culture, refers to the culture of other countries in the world in addition to the mother tongue culture and the target language culture. Comparative culture includes

the cultures of two or more countries, and it focuses on cultural comparisons. As for other culture, it refers to broader cultures such as science and technology, geography, and humanities. Meanwhile, it does not have a very significant national identity.

**Table 1:** Cultural distribution in FLTRP based on cultural region

Classification	Examples	Times	Percentage
Native Culture	Compulsory 1 Unit6: <i>Longji Rice Terraces</i>	24	16%
Target Culture	Compulsory2 Unit5: <i>Blogging Australia</i>	33	21%
World Culture	Compulsory2 Unit3: <i>A Game for the World</i>	14	9%
Comparative Culture	Compulsory 2 Unit4: <i>When Mamlet meets Peking Opera</i>	25	16%
Other Culture	Compulsory 1 Unit4: <i>Click for a friend?</i>	59	38%

Other culture accounts for 38%, which ranks first in this table. The author found that the topics of other culture in these textbooks are related to students' daily life, such as school life, friendship, family, interpersonal relationships and so on. For instance, *Like Father, Like Son* in Book1 Unit3 tells the conflict between the father and the son due to the different positions. Through learning the passage, students can feel the fine traditions of Chinese families and deeply understand the importance of good family relationships. In Book 1 Unit 4, *Click for a Friend?* talks about the changes in the way making friends and online dating, which can guide students to establish a correct view of making friends.

The target culture in these textbooks accounts for the second proportion, covering literature, art, customs, virtues, geography, sports, and so on. For example, *After Twenty Years* in Book1 Unit4, which tells a short story written by a distinguished American writer O. Henry. *Franklin's Experiment: How much is true?* in Book3 Unit3 introduces Franklin's famous experiment. These kinds of topics are beneficial to cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness and enhancing their interest and enthusiasm in learning English.

The author finds that native culture accounts for 16%. The topics of native culture cover Chinese beautiful scenery, festivals, food, arts, celebrities and so on in these three books. For example, Unit 6 of Book 1 introduces the beautiful scenery of Longji Rice Terraces in different seasons and the reasons for the construction of the terraces, which can help students correctly understand the relationship between human life and the natural environment. Through learning this passage, students can also know the cultural customs of different ethnic groups in China and build cultural self-confidence. Unit 2 of Book 2 involves Chinese traditional festival: Lantern Festival, the Spring Festivals. Students are able to learn the meaning and connotation of traditional Chinese festivals, enhance national identity and awareness of cultural transmission. Unit 2 of Book 3 introduces Chinese historical figure --- Tu Youyou. Knowing about her outstanding deeds, students can form the right values and tell Chinese stories well.

World culture mentions some hot topics, like technology, games, sports environmental protection and so on. For example, *A Game for the World* in Book 2 Unit 3 analyzes the reasons why football is popular all over the world. *A Well that Changed the World* in Book 3 Unit 2 tells the process of a Canadian boy named Ryan who engaged in public welfare and volunteering.

*The New Curriculum Standard* points out the cultural content that students need to learn includes Chinese and foreign cultures. In the process of learning the cultural knowledge,

students should compare the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign culture and absorb the essence of excellent culture. Therefore, comparative culture plays an important role in students' culture learning. The topics of comparative culture involves food, school life, language, art, science, etc. *A Child of Two Cuisines* in Unit 1 of Book 2 tells us a story about food in a Chinese-British multinational family. In this article, the representative foods of China and the United Kingdom are introduced in the voice of children in multinational families, as well as some interesting stories of the collision and integration of eating habits of the family. What's more, the article named *When Hamlet meets Peking Opera* in Unit 4 of Book 2 recounts the experience of a native English high school student who watched the Peking Opera version of Hamlet for the first time. We can conclude that the combination of Chinese and Western cultural art performs wonderfully.

From this table, it is obvious that these textbooks have a large number of cultural content, including native culture, target culture, world culture, comparative culture and other culture, which can provide the foundation for implementation of culture teaching. This means that the regional cultural settings in senior high school English teaching materials are relatively rich, so that students can acquire a lot of cultural knowledge from different countries, absorb the essence of cultures around the world, and establish appropriate cultural values. What's more, it is conducive to broadening students' horizons, recognizing that each country and nation has its own unique culture, so that they can understand each other's language and behavior from the other party's cultural background in cross-cultural communication.

## 2.3 The current situation of culture teaching in senior high school English reading class

### 2.3.1 The attitudes and understanding of students and teachers towards culture teaching

From the perspective of students, most of the students are interested in Chinese and foreign culture. They believe that learning Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge is helpful to improve English reading performance and cultural awareness. Based on this, they hold the view that it is necessary to learn cultural knowledge in English reading class. However, students do not have a high initiative to learn cultural knowledge, and they mainly learn cultural knowledge through teachers' explanations in the classroom. From the teacher's point of view, firstly, most of the teachers recognize the importance and function of culture teaching in senior high school English reading. However, the vast majority of teachers do not have enough understanding of cultural awareness in *The English Curriculum Standard for Senior*

*High Schools* (2017 Edition).

### 2.3.2 The situation of contents input of culture teaching

In terms of the situation of contents input of culture teaching, the author found that the proportion of language knowledge teaching is more than that of culture teaching in senior high school English reading class. Most of the teachers cannot combine these two knowledge types well in English reading teaching. Before reading, most teachers introduce the English cultural background knowledge of the text to help students understand the text better. In while-reading, the majority of English teachers teach students cultural knowledge based solely on the content in the textbook. What's more, many English teachers do not often excavate the cultural connotation from the aspects of vocabulary, grammar and translation in English reading class. In post-reading, only a small percentage of teachers set up activities related to culture for students. In addition, some teachers mainly rely on English textbooks to teach cultural knowledge, and cannot expand relevant cultural knowledge for students.

### 2.3.3 The methods of culture teaching

The methods of culture teaching are relatively single, oral explanation is the main teaching method, and most teachers do not pay attention to the combination of multiple methods. What's more, due to the influence of classroom time and traditional teaching concepts, most teachers are unable to choose appropriate teaching methods according to students' interests and levels. Lastly, judging from students' evaluation of the implementation of cultural teaching in English reading classrooms, the author can summarize the following points. Although most teachers recognize the importance of cultural teaching, some teachers, due to the constraints and influences of various factors, do not pay sufficient attention to culture teaching in the actual classroom.

## 3. Conclusion

Based on the investigation, the author finds that English textbooks used by this school have a large number of cultural content, including native culture, target culture, world culture, comparative culture and other culture, which can provide the foundation for implementation of Chinese and foreign culture teaching. In addition, most of the teachers and students have positive attitude towards culture teaching. However, the current situation of Chinese and foreign culture teaching in senior high school English reading teaching is not ideal: the teaching methods adopted by most teachers in actual teaching lack diversity and innovation; most teachers only rely on textbooks to teach cultural knowledge, and cannot expand relevant cultural knowledge for students; teaching process is relatively mechanical, emphasizing the teaching of language knowledge; students' initiative to learn cultural knowledge is not high. Therefore, the English teachers need to take appropriate measures to enhance students' cultural awareness and reading comprehension skills according to the current situation of Chinese and foreign culture teaching.

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