

Theories and Strategies for Cultivating Cultural Awareness in Senior High School English Reading Class

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Abstract: This study focuses on the cultivation of cultural awareness in senior high school English reading teaching. Guided by the requirements for core competencies in the *English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools*, it systematically sorts out the precise connotation, educational value and important theoretical foundations of cultural awareness. Adopting the method of literature analysis, this research comprehensively integrates relevant research achievements at home and abroad, scientifically constructs a systematic cultivation framework of “cultural cognition – cross-cultural comparison – practical application”, and further puts forward specific and operable teaching strategies including cultural infiltration, comparative analysis and situation creation. Meanwhile, it combines typical teaching examples to clearly elaborate the practical application paths of the relevant theories in classroom teaching. This study aims to provide theoretical support and practical strategic references for senior high school English teachers, so as to effectively promote the transformation of senior high school English reading teaching from passive language skill training to the active development and formation of students’ cultural awareness.

Keywords: Senior High School English; Reading Teaching; Cultural Awareness; Core Competencies; Cultivation Strategies

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Against the background of accelerating globalization and increasingly frequent cross-cultural communication, cultural awareness serves as a crucial bridge for the exchange between Chinese and foreign cultures, making its cultivation particularly important. As

a key dimension of the core competencies for English education specified in the curriculum standards, the development of students’ cultural awareness has become an important criterion for evaluating the quality of senior high school English teaching. The *English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools* (hereinafter referred to as the “New Curriculum Standards”) explicitly identifies “cultural awareness” as one of the core competencies of English, emphasizing its significant role in strengthening cultural confidence, cultivating a sense of national identity and patriotism, and broadening students’ international vision.

The English reading class is one of the primary channels through which students acquire English expressions and engage with authentic English texts, thus playing an irreplaceable role in foreign language learning. However, the current practice of English reading teaching in senior high schools still shows a tendency to “focus on linguistic forms while ignoring cultural connotations”. Many teachers lack a systematic understanding of how to cultivate cultural awareness, and students find it difficult to gain an in-depth insight into the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures through reading materials.

Consequently, such a teaching status quo often leads to comprehension bias in cross-cultural situations and hinders the organic integration of language learning and cultural understanding.

1.2 Research Significance

From a theoretical perspective, this study integrates multiple relevant theories, including acculturation theory and cross-cultural communication theory, to clarify the theoretical system for cultivating cultural awareness in English reading teaching. It aims to provide solid theoretical support for the construction of an integrated teaching model that combines language learning and cultural understanding. From a practical perspective, the research

findings on integrating cultural awareness into senior high school English reading instruction can offer concrete references for teachers to design culture-oriented reading activities and develop cultural teaching resources. This will help students achieve the multi-dimensional development of their core literacy abilities in the process of English reading.

This study aims to address the following questions:

- (1) How should we understand the connotation and value of cultural awareness in senior high school English reading teaching?
- (2) How can we construct a theoretical framework and specific implementation strategies for cultivating cultural awareness?
- (3) How can we provide teachers with operable teaching approaches to promote the cultivation of cultural awareness in reading instruction?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

To clarify how to cultivate cultural awareness, it is first necessary to define what cultural awareness is. According to the curriculum standards, cultural awareness is described as “the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and the identification with excellent cultures, reflecting students’ cross-cultural cognition, attitudes and behavioral orientations in the context of globalization”. Its cultivation includes not only students’ acquisition of cultural knowledge, but also their sensitivity to cultural differences, critical thinking on the values of different cultures, and their ability to use appropriate language in cross-cultural communication.

In addition, how to develop cultural awareness in reading teaching is also a question that educators should clarify. Cultivating cultural awareness in reading refers to a teaching process in which teachers guide students to understand cultural connotations, reflect on cultural differences and develop cross-cultural communicative competence during language input through text analysis, interpretation of cultural backgrounds, cross-cultural comparison and other activities based on reading materials. Its core lies in integrating cultural elements into all aspects of reading teaching, so as to promote the mutual development of language learning and cultural understanding.

2.2 Research Status at Home and Abroad

Foreign research on cultural awareness originated relatively early, with studies focusing on cultural awareness in reading teaching dating back to the 1950s. Lado proposed the “cultural contrast” theory, emphasizing that comparing the cultures of the mother tongue and the target language can help students mitigate comprehension barriers [1]. Byram further put forward the “intercultural communicative competence” model, in which cultural awareness is regarded as a core dimension, and advocated the cultivation of students’ critical cultural competence through the reading of authentic texts [2]. In recent years, Western research has shifted its focus to the cultivation of cultural awareness in digital reading environments. For instance, through an analysis of multi-modal teaching materials, Uzum pointed out that cultural materials situated in real contexts are more effective than traditional textbooks in enhancing students’ cultural sensitivity [3].

Relevant domestic research started in the 1980s. Hu Wenzhong first proposed the correlation between “cultural differences and foreign language teaching”, emphasizing the importance of cultural background knowledge in reading teaching [4]. Since the beginning of the 21st century, with the proposal of the core literacy concept, research has gradually shifted to the connotation deconstruction and strategy construction of cultural awareness. Bi Jiwan and Zhang Zhanyi pointed out that intercultural awareness should be cultivated through the path of “cultural knowledge transmission - cultural difference comparison - intercultural practice” [5]; From the perspective of core literacy in English subject, Chen Jie proposed that the cultivation of cultural awareness should focus on the three-dimensional goals of “cultural cognition, cultural emotion and cultural behavior” [6]. Although existing research has formed a preliminary theoretical framework, its systematic application in reading teaching still needs to be deepened. Current research has covered most fields and dimensions, but there are still two deficiencies: first, most theoretical constructions are based on macro educational concepts, lacking integration with specific links of reading teaching; Second, most empirical studies focus on the effect of strategies, with insufficient interpretation of the internal mechanism of cultural awareness formation. In view of this, this paper is more in line with the reality of

senior high school English reading teaching, aiming to clarify the existing theoretical framework and point out a new direction for the cultivation of cultural awareness in senior high school English reading teaching.

3. Theoretical Basis

3.1 From Germination to Formation

The development of foreign theories presents a gradual deepening trend, from the theoretical germination of the connection between language and culture to the formation of intercultural communication and reading theories. Sapir put forward the linguistic relativity in *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*, pointing out that language structure will affect the thinking mode of its users [7], which laid a cognitive foundation for the subsequent integration of culture and language teaching. Lado proposed the cultural contrast theory in *Linguistics Across Cultures*, emphasizing that comparing the cultures of the mother tongue and the target language can reveal the difficulties in language learning [1], providing methodological support for the cultivation of cultural awareness in reading teaching. Hall first proposed the concept of intercultural communication in *The Silent Language* [8], pointing out the key role of non-verbal factors such as time and space in cultural communication, which promoted the transformation of cultural awareness from linguistic knowledge to communicative competence. Goodman [9] proposed the top-down reading model, regarding reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game, and emphasizing the active constructive role of readers' background knowledge (including cultural knowledge) in text comprehension, which provided a theoretical framework for integrating cultural awareness cultivation into reading teaching. Hanvey divided cultural awareness into four levels, from cultural symbol recognition to critical cultural understanding [10], systematically explaining the gradual cultivation path of cultural awareness. Byram proposed the theory of critical cultural awareness [2], emphasizing that language learning needs to cultivate students' ability to reflect on cultural differences and ethical awareness in intercultural communication, which directly responds to the requirements of the new curriculum standard for the cultural awareness dimension. By comparing the cultural

representations of multilingual textbooks, Uzum [3] pointed out the importance of authentic contextual materials for the cultivation of cultural awareness, providing empirical support for the selection of reading teaching materials.

3.2 Localization Exploration of Intercultural Communication Theory

The necessity of British and American cultural knowledge for English learning was systematically elaborated for the first time in *Cultural Differences and Foreign Language Teaching*, which advocated improving students' intercultural communicative competence by comparing Chinese and Western cultural differences [4], thus initiating domestic research on cultural awareness teaching. Bi Jiwan and Zhang Zhanyi proposed the concept of intercultural awareness, emphasizing the ability to actively identify cultural conflicts in communication [5], which provided a theoretical basis for cultural contrast activities in reading teaching.

The Ministry of Education of China first put forward the core literacy framework in *Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Curriculum Reform and Implementing the Fundamental Task of Moral Education and Cultivating People*, incorporating cultural awareness into the core literacy of English subject. Cheng Xiaotang and Zhao Siqi [11] clearly pointed out that cultural awareness includes not only cultural knowledge, but also intercultural cognition and behavioral choices, and this definition provided a theoretical anchor for the cultivation goals of cultural awareness in reading teaching. From a psychological perspective, Lin Chongde explained the essence of core literacy, emphasizing the importance of cultural awareness for students' lifelong development and social adaptation [12], which further strengthened its position in reading teaching.

3.3 Integration of Cultural Awareness and Reading Teaching

The three-dimensional cultural cultivation model for reading teaching proposed by Li Mingyuan and Peng Huaqing [13] still has important practical significance at present. From the perspective of cultural height, teachers can guide students to examine the status and value of the cultural phenomena reflected in the text in their respective cultural systems from a macro perspective, and understand the in-depth

concepts and social significance behind the culture. When explaining reading texts about Western festivals, teachers can let students explore the spiritual connotation, inheritance and evolution of the festival in Western culture, as well as its impact on Western society, enabling students to understand the values and social roots behind cultural phenomena.

In terms of cultural breadth, teachers should broaden students' cultural horizons and guide them to pay attention to diverse information from different cultural backgrounds. In reading teaching, cultural contents from different countries and ethnic groups should be introduced to compare their characteristics. For example, when reading articles involving traditional costumes from different countries, let students compare the differences in styles, colors, patterns and other aspects of costumes from various countries, analyze the differences in cultural traditions, aesthetic concepts and social backgrounds reflected by these differences, and help students fully understand the diversity of world culture.

Regarding cultural depth, teachers need to lead students to deeply analyze the cultural details in the text and understand the values, ways of thinking and so on behind cultural phenomena. When reading literary works, guide students to analyze the cultural values reflected by the behaviors and words of the characters in the works, as well as the impact of these values on the characters' fates and the development of the story, so as to cultivate students' in-depth understanding of cultural connotation and critical thinking ability.

The English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education points out that cultural awareness is reflected in the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures, the recognition of excellent cultures, as well as the attitudes, cognition and behavioral choices displayed in intercultural communication. This definition closely links cultural awareness with students' value shaping and global vision cultivation, emphasizing that in English learning, students should not only master linguistic knowledge, but also deeply understand the connotation of different cultures and establish correct cultural concepts. In terms of reading teaching, the new curriculum standard advocates that teachers guide students to excavate cultural information through text analysis and cultivate intercultural awareness and communicative competence.

Teachers can select reading materials rich in multicultural elements, such as articles involving the history, customs and values of different countries, organize students to analyze the differences and commonalities of cultural phenomena in the text, and let students learn to respect and tolerate different cultures in reading, so as to improve their sensitivity and adaptability in intercultural communication.

4. Strategies and Teaching Practice Paths for Cultivating Cultural Awareness in Senior High School English Reading Teaching

4.1 Cultural Infiltration Strategy

First of all, in reading teaching, promote students to explore cultural semantics in English contexts. In reading teaching, teachers should guide students to pay attention to the cultural connotation of linguistic aspects such as vocabulary and syntax. For example, when explaining the word “spring”, in addition to its basic meaning, teachers can expand its cultural symbols in Western poetry, such as the metaphor that spring symbolizes the recovery of life and longing for love, and compare the cultural image of “spring” in the Chinese context to help students establish the connection between language and culture. This strategy needs to run through basic teaching links such as vocabulary analysis and sentence analysis, so as to integrate the cultivation of cultural awareness into daily teaching.

Secondly, attention can also be paid to the interpretation of the thematic cultural value of English reading materials. For the theme of reading materials, teachers can guide students to explore the cultural values behind them. For example, when reading English texts about “individualism”, teachers can organize students to compare the differences in family concepts between China and the West, and analyze the roots of the formation of values in different cultural backgrounds. Such interpretation should avoid simple evaluation of advantages and disadvantages, but focus on the understanding and respect of cultural diversity.

4.2 Comparative Analysis Strategy

First of all, in English reading classes, teachers can assist students in completing horizontal comparison of cultural elements. Teachers can select reading materials with cultural representativeness and design comparison tasks.

For example, after reading excerpts from *Pride and Prejudice*, guide students to compare the marriage concepts in Britain in the 19th century with those in China in the same period, and analyze the impact of social systems and economic structures on culture. Such comparison should be based on specific texts, avoiding abstract discussions divorced from linguistic materials. Secondly, teachers with richer knowledge reserves can guide students to conduct vertical comparison of cultural development. For example, for texts involving historical changes, teachers can guide students to sort out the evolution context of the target language culture and compare it with the development track of the mother tongue culture. When reading texts about the origin of Thanksgiving, teachers can extend to the characteristics of multicultural integration in American culture and compare it with the cultural inheritance methods of traditional Chinese festivals. This strategy helps students form a dynamic cultural cognition.

4.3 Experience of Cultural Practice

In class, teachers can use various tools to simulate and reproduce real situations. Teachers can use multimedia resources to create intercultural communication scenarios, such as simulating international conferences and cultural interviews, allowing students to apply the cultural knowledge obtained from reading in practice. For example, after reading texts about Western table manners, organize a Western table manners experience activity, requiring students to practice relevant etiquette according to the text description and reflect on the impact of cultural differences on behavior. Furthermore, teachers can design tasks in virtual scenarios. Through designing tasks such as role-playing and problem-solving, guide students to apply cultural knowledge in virtual scenarios. For example, after providing reading materials on receiving foreign friends, assign the task of formulating a reception plan, requiring students to design specific processes based on the cultural customs in the text. Such tasks need to be closely related to reading content to ensure the pertinence of cultural awareness cultivation.

4.4 Reflection and Evaluation

Reflection and evaluation are an indispensable part of English reading classes. First of all, teachers can guide students to keep cultural

journals. Guide students to write cultural reflection journals after reading, recording their understanding, confusion and insights about the cultural phenomena in the text. For example, after reading the cultural setting of the magic school in *Harry Potter*, students can be asked to compare the house system there with the class culture of Chinese schools and reflect on the connection between cultural fiction and reality. In addition, students can carry out mutual evaluation and feedback through each other's cultural journals. Organize students to conduct mutual evaluation on the cultural analysis in reading, and improve cultural cognition through peer feedback. For example, after group discussions on reading texts about Western environmental protection culture, require students to evaluate the cultural analysis reports of each group, pointing out the cultural understanding deviations or in-depth insights in them. Such evaluation should focus on the core elements of cultural awareness, such as sensitivity to cultural differences and critical thinking on cultural values.

4.5 Teaching Practice Paths

In the pre-class preparation stage, teachers should mobilize various knowledge reserves to assist students in activating and constructing cultural schemas. Teachers need to assess students' cultural schemas through questionnaires, interviews and other methods before reading, and supplement background knowledge in a targeted manner. For example, before reading excerpts from *A Tale of Two Cities*, a short video can be used to introduce the historical background of the French Revolution, helping students construct a cultural cognitive framework related to the text.

In the in-class stage, teachers need to complete the hierarchical cultivation of cultural awareness. Guide students to extract explicit cultural information from the text, such as festivals, customs and values. A cultural information mind map task can be designed, requiring students to sort out the cultural elements in the reading materials. Then, help students understand cultural differences, and analyze the causes and impacts of cultural differences through group discussions, debates and other activities. For example, after reading texts about pet culture, compare the different attitudes of Chinese and Western families towards pets and explore the differences in humanistic spirit behind them.

Finally, realize the criticism of cultural values, cultivate students' critical thinking, encourage students to conduct critical thinking on the cultural phenomena in the text, and form their own cultural attitudes. For example, for reading materials about fast food culture, guide students to evaluate its impact on traditional culture and cultivate dialectical thinking.

After class, teachers still need to guide students to transfer and apply the cultural knowledge they have obtained. Assign intercultural practice tasks, such as writing a comparative report on Chinese and Western differences and designing a simulated scenario of introducing Chinese culture to foreigners, so as to transform the cultural cognition in reading into practical ability. For example, after reading English texts about Chinese tea culture, require students to introduce tea culture to foreign friends in English, realizing the combination of cultural output and language application.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

By sorting out and analyzing the literature and teaching practice data on the cultivation of cultural awareness, and conducting theoretical construction and strategy analysis, this study draws the following conclusions:

- (1) The cultivation of cultural awareness is an important goal of senior high school English reading teaching, and its connotation includes cultural cognition, intercultural understanding and cultural critical ability;
- (2) Theories such as cultural adaptation theory and intercultural communication theory provide solid theoretical support for the cultivation of cultural awareness in reading teaching;
- (3) The strategy system of cultural infiltration - comparative analysis - situational creation - reflection and evaluation can systematically improve students' cultural awareness, and it needs to run through the whole teaching process. In summary, in practice, teachers should first establish the teaching concept of integrating language and culture, pay attention to integrating the cultivation of cultural awareness into the entire English reading teaching, and imperceptibly convey culture to students in the process of analyzing reading materials, avoiding regarding the cultivation of cultural awareness as an additional task. Secondly, in classroom teaching, teachers should deeply explore the cultural connotation of reading texts and design hierarchical cultural teaching activities to avoid

single teaching activities. Furthermore, in specific classroom teaching, teachers should give full play to their leading role, guide students in learning, and at the same time pay attention to students' cultural emotional experience, avoiding cultural teaching staying at the level of knowledge memorization. Finally, after class, teachers should construct a diversified evaluation system and incorporate students' cultural awareness into the evaluation dimension of reading ability.

Starting from theories and potentially implementable strategies, this study explores and discusses how to cultivate students' cultural awareness in senior high school English reading classes. Future research can be deepened from three aspects: first, how to explore the cultivation mode of cultural awareness in digital reading environments, such as using virtual reality technology to create intercultural scenarios; Second, how to carry out in-depth research on the cultivation path of cultural awareness and refine the cultivation goals of different learning stages; Third, how to develop a culture-oriented reading teaching resource library to provide more systematic teaching support for teachers.

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