

# **Cultivating Cultural Awareness: Teaching Strategies for Junior High School English Reading Teaching**

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**Abstract:** Against the backdrop of globalization and booming cross-cultural communication, cultivating students' cultural awareness has become a core task in junior high school English teaching. *The Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)* has also listed cultural awareness as one of the key competencies of the English subject. Even so, current English reading classes in junior high schools have obvious drawbacks: formalized cultural teaching goals, monotonous teaching methods and inadequate integration of traditional Chinese culture. This study selects the reading text *Food across Borders* from Unit 3 of Grade 7 Volume 2, published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, as a research case. It discusses how to improve students' cultural awareness through English reading classes, and illustrates the educational significance of such cultivation work. Three core guidelines are summarized in this paper, namely appropriateness, gradual progression and interest integration. Combined with real classroom practice, the author also designs a full range of teaching methods for pre-class preparation, in-class reading and after-class expansion. These methods focus on textbook interpretation, background knowledge activation, in-depth text reading and diverse cultural extension activities. The findings of this research can offer practical guidance for junior high school English teachers, and also contribute to improving students' intercultural skills and overall academic literacy.

**Keywords:** Junior High School English; Reading Teaching; Cultural Awareness; Core Competencies; Teaching Strategies; Case Analysis

## **1. Introduction**

Globalization develops rapidly in modern society, and cultural communication between

different regions becomes increasingly common. For this reason, English teaching does not focus only on language points and skills. Cultivating students' cultural awareness has also become a necessary and important part of English courses [1].

As stated in *the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)*, English teaching should combine subject features to cultivate students' core literacy. In class, teachers aim to improve students' language skills, cultural awareness, thinking abilities and learning capabilities. Among all core literacy elements, cultural awareness is particularly important [2]. It requires students to learn about Chinese and foreign cultures and appreciate fine cultures rationally. This quality can reflect students' cross-cultural cognition, attitudes and judgment skills. When students build good cultural awareness, they will grow to love their motherland and hometown, accept the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, form good manners and a healthy personality, and foster a strong sense of social responsibility. Junior high school English reading occupies an important position in daily teaching. Texts are filled with diverse cultural information, and such content can be well used to cultivate students' cultural awareness [3]. However, in the actual teaching practice, there are still many obstacles in the cultivation of cultural awareness. Most teachers do not set targeted cultural goals and do not thoroughly interpret cultural meanings. Their teaching methods are also too single and lack creativity. In particular, Chinese traditional culture is not well integrated into teaching and cannot be effectively inherited [4]. Therefore, English teachers are eager to find practical solutions to better combine cultural education with reading teaching, which has become a key research direction today.

This paper takes the reading passage *Food Across Borders* from the Reading section of Unit 3 *Food Matters* in Grade 7 Volume 2 (FLTRP Edition) as a case for analysis, and discusses the

specific methods of cultivating cultural awareness in junior high school English reading class. The conclusions of this study can be used as practical suggestions and inspirations for front-line teachers to engage in similar teaching practices.

## **2. Significance of Cultural Awareness Cultivation**

### **2.1 Promoting Language Comprehension and Use**

Language and culture are interdependent. Language is the carrier of culture, and culture depends on the inheritance, dissemination and display of language. In the teaching of English reading, if students lack relevant cultural background knowledge, they will easily run into comprehension misunderstandings. Taking the article *Food Across Borders* as an example, it is mentioned that the origin of ice cream is related to China. In the Zhou Dynasty, people stored winter ice for summer. In the Song Dynasty, ice curd was invented, which was the prototype of modern ice cream. If students do not understand this background knowledge, it is difficult to understand the core fact that the ice cream emphasized in the article comes from China.

Cultural knowledge can help students accurately grasp the rich connotation of vocabulary, because vocabulary does not exist in isolation, and its meaning is often restricted by cultural context. For example, some words may have different extended meanings or symbolic meanings in different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, cultural knowledge also helps students understand the exact meaning of sentences and the deep theme of the text. The sentences in the text are not simple language combinations, but contain the author's thoughts, emotions and cultural values. Through the understanding of cultural knowledge, students can look beyond the surface of language and gain insight into the deep meaning behind the text.

In addition, the cultivation of cultural awareness also has a positive effect on students' ability to use language. In actual language communication and expression, cultural differences are an important factor that cannot be ignored. Students with good cultural awareness can be keenly aware of the differences between different cultures, so as to more accurately grasp the rules of context in the practical application of

language and properly express their thoughts and views. This can not only avoid pragmatic errors caused by cultural differences, but also make students' language expression more natural and smooth, and improve the effect and level of language communication.

### **2.2 Expanding Vision and Cultivating Cultural Inclusiveness**

In the current wave of globalization, cultivating students with a broad international perspective has become one of the important goals of education. Students should have the ability to understand and respect the cultural differences between different countries and ethnic groups, which is the key quality to adapt to the multicultural exchange in the era of globalization. As an important carrier of cultural communication, English discourse opens a window for students to understand the world culture. By reading English texts, students can cross regional boundaries, have in-depth contact with cultures around the world, and have a comprehensive understanding of the historical context, geographical features, customs and traditional customs of different countries.

Taking *Food Across Borders* as an example, in the process of reading, students can not only trace the development track of ice cream across borders, but also deeply understand the diversity of food culture under different cultural backgrounds through the comparative cases of similar food in different countries presented in the text, such as comparing 'roujiamo' with American hamburgers. This text-based cross-cultural cognitive experience can effectively expand students' international vision and promote them to examine the differences in world culture in a more open and inclusive manner. In the long run, students' awareness of cultural inclusion will be significantly enhanced, and cultural prejudices and misunderstandings will be reduced, so as to better adapt to the multicultural environment in the era of globalization.

### **2.3 Fostering Patriotism and Cultural Confidence**

In the context of globalization, the cultivation of cultural awareness has multi-dimensional connotations, which not only covers the understanding and acceptance of foreign culture, but also the deep recognition and ardent love of domestic culture. This two-way cultural

cognition is an important cornerstone for building students' complete cultural personality and improving cross-cultural literacy.

In the practice of English reading teaching in junior high school, it is an effective teaching strategy for teachers to guide students to carry out comparative activities between Chinese and foreign cultures. Through this comparison, students can appreciate the profound and unique charm of Chinese culture in a more intuitive way. Taking the article *Food Across Borders* as an example, when students understand the important historical fact that ice cream originated in China, they will feel a sense of pride in their long-standing food culture. This sense of pride is not groundless, but based on the cognition and understanding of their own cultural roots. Furthermore, when students make a detailed comparison between Chinese traditional cuisine and foreign cuisine, they can deeply understand the characteristics and value of Chinese culture from the dimensions of food selection, cooking methods, dietary etiquette and so on. This understanding not only stays on the surface, but also goes deeper into the cultural core, so as to cultivate students' feelings of home and country, and make them firm cultural self-confidence in the depths of their hearts. In the future cross-cultural communication, students can use this cultural self-confidence to spread Chinese culture in a more confident and calm manner and become the messengers and inheritors of Chinese culture.

### **3. Principles for Cultural Awareness Cultivation**

Based on the above importance, the following principles should be followed in cultivating students' cultural awareness in junior high school English reading teaching.

#### **3.1 Moderation**

To cultivate students' cultural awareness, it is necessary to carefully select cultural content. The teaching content selected by teachers should not only conform to the cognitive level and interest preference of junior high school students, but also be closely related to reading textbooks. Taking the teaching of *Food Across Borders* as an example, teachers can expand the content related to food culture, such as introducing representative cuisines of other countries and the cultural allusions behind them. However, the content of the expansion should not be too

complicated and profound to avoid increasing the learning burden of students. In addition, teachers should give priority to the selection of widely representative mainstream cultural content, avoid obscure or non-mainstream cultural phenomena, ensure that students are exposed to positive cultural knowledge, and help them shape a sound outlook on life and values.

#### **3.2 Gradual Progression**

Junior high school students' cognition of English national culture is still in the initial stage. When teachers introduce cultural content into reading teaching, they need to follow the teaching principles from shallow to deep and from easy to difficult. Taking the teaching of *Food Across Borders* as an example, at the initial stage, teachers can first lead students to analyze the food culture knowledge directly presented in the text and help students construct a preliminary cultural cognitive framework. With the advancement of teaching, teachers gradually guide students to explore the deeper cultural connotations behind food, such as the differences in national character and values reflected by the differences in food culture in different countries. In this way, teaching can be carried out step by step according to the age characteristics and cognitive level of students, so that students can gradually understand, master and apply cultural knowledge, and prevent fear of difficulty caused by high difficulty.

#### **3.3 Interest Integration**

The principle of coordination and interest is very important in the process of cultivating students' cultural awareness based on reading teaching. Cultural elements themselves contain rich interesting elements, which can effectively enhance the attractiveness of English subjects and stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning. However, the reading activity itself has a certain degree of boring, which is easy to cause students to have resistance. In view of this, teachers should follow the principles of coordination and interest in teaching, and properly balance the cultural interest and the boring nature of reading content. Teachers can combine students' interests and preferences to choose teaching methods that students like, such as cultural theme games, role-playing and other activities, so that students can feel the cultural charm in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere, and then improve the effect of cultural awareness training

[5].

#### 4. Strategies for Cultural Awareness Cultivation

##### 4.1 Textbook Analysis and Cultural Goal Setting

As the core support of teaching, the importance of teaching materials is self-evident [6]. Before carrying out reading teaching, teachers need to conduct in-depth analysis of teaching materials and accurately explore the hidden cultural elements in the text. At the same time, teachers need to combine the requirements of curriculum standards and the actual situation of students to set clear cultural awareness training objectives.

Taking Unit 3 *Food Across Borders* as an example, this paper focuses on the transnational development of food, involving ice cream, 'roujiamo', hamburger and other foods, as well as the similarities and differences of food culture in different countries. When interpreting textbooks, teachers can establish the following cultural goals: First, let students understand the origin of ice cream and its evolution in different countries. Second, guide students to understand the diversity and cross-cultural commonality of food culture in different countries. Third, cultivate students' respect for multiculturalism. Fourth, encourage students to pay attention to their own food culture and enhance cultural self-confidence.

In the teaching process, teachers can guide students to think deeply by designing a series of open questions. For example, ice cream originated in China, why can it be further developed and innovated in the West? 'Roujiamo' and hamburgers are similar in form, but what are the differences between Chinese and Western food cultures? Through the discussion of these problems, we can help students achieve cultural goals and enhance cultural awareness.

##### 4.2 Pre-class Activation of Cultural Background

Pre-class preparation is the key stage to cultivate students' cultural awareness in the teaching design of junior high school English reading class. The arrangement of this stage directly affects the final teaching effect [7]. Focusing on the core content of reading articles, teachers can turn to multimedia materials such as pictures and short videos to build a lively cultural classroom

atmosphere.

In addition to visual assistance, problem-based instruction and brainstorming are equally effective in the lead-in process. The thought-provoking questions encourage students to think independently and recall the relevant culture they have learned. This step lays a solid foundation for further exploring the cultural significance hidden in the article [8].

There are many practical methods for the pre-class arrangement of this class. On the one hand, teachers can play video clips to introduce classic cuisines around the world, including Italian pizza, Japanese sushi, Chinese dumplings, etc., to stimulate students' curiosity about food culture. After watching the clips, the teacher can ask a guiding question: What foreign food has entered China? Which Chinese traditional food is popular in the world? Students will then voluntarily share what they know and activate their existing knowledge framework on diet culture. On the other hand, teachers can set up targeted preview assignments. Students are asked to collect background information about the food that appeared in the text, such as how the ice cream was made and its historical story. At the beginning of the class, a group sharing meeting can be held to allow students to exchange their findings. This process helps learners to expand their cultural reserves. At the same time, peer communication broadens their way of thinking, improves their text comprehension ability, and makes full preparations for the subsequent in-depth text research.

##### 4.3 Consolidation of Cultural Awareness in Reading

Activity 1: Initial skimming - accurate access to cultural information

When students start to read *Food Across Borders*, teachers should play a guiding role to encourage students to browse the text quickly and extract the food of different countries mentioned in the article and the cultural information related to it. For example, students can learn that ice cream originated in China by reading. Ice curd similar to modern ice cream appeared in the Song Dynasty and was later brought back to Europe by Marco Polo. Europeans added fresh cream and developed new flavors on this basis. At the same time, the Chinese 'roujiamo' and American hamburgers mentioned in the article belong to different countries, but they are both popular and

convenient foods. In the first reading stage, students can obtain more intuitive cultural information in the text and form a preliminary understanding of the food culture of different countries.

Activity 2: Intensive reading of the text - digging deep into the cultural connotations

In intensive reading, teachers should guide students to analyze the text in detail and dig deeper into the cultural connotations behind the food. People often compare 'roujiamo' to hamburger, which is a symbol of American food. Teachers can ask the question: Why do people compare 'roujiamo' with hamburgers? What are the similarities and differences between the two food cultures? Through group discussion, students can find that although both of them are in the form of meat sandwiched in bread, they reflect a very different food culture. 'Roujiamo' embodies the fine consideration of food materials and cooking methods in traditional Chinese food culture, while hamburger is a typical representative of American fast food culture, emphasizing convenience and standardization. Through in-depth analysis of the details of the text, students can deeply understand the connotation of food culture in different countries and further strengthen their cultural awareness.

Activity 3: Contrastive Analysis - Enhancing Cultural Understanding Effectively

Teachers can guide students to compare Chinese and foreign cultural differences and deepen students' understanding of culture. In teaching, teachers can organize students to compare the differences between China and the West in food production, eating habits, eating etiquette and so on. For example, Chinese food pays attention to color and fragrance, cooking methods are rich and varied, and chopsticks are used during meals. Western diet emphasizes more on nutrition, cooking methods are relatively simple, and knives and forks are used during meals. Through comparative analysis, students can more clearly recognize the differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, cultivate cross-cultural awareness, and improve cultural understanding.

#### **4.4 After-class Extension of Cultural Awareness**

After guiding students to complete text reading, teachers should design extracurricular activities around cultural themes to help students achieve the sublimation of cultural awareness in

migration and expansion [9].

Activity 1: Carry out cultural theme activities

In order to further deepen students' cognition of food culture, teachers can organize thematic activities closely related to food culture, such as food culture festivals. In the preparatory stage of the activity, students take the group as a unit to explore the food culture of different countries, covering the historical origin, production process and cultural connotation of food. Each group can elaborately make posters to show pictures of the special cuisines of the selected countries, supplemented by detailed text descriptions. At the event site, the group representatives need to explain vividly. By participating in such activities, students can not only have a deeper understanding of multi-food culture, but also exercise their language expression and teamwork ability, and promote cultural awareness to a deeper level.

Activity 2: Arranging cultural writing tasks

Writing is an important way to consolidate and apply cultural knowledge. Teachers can assign writing tasks with the theme of *My Favorite Food and Its Cultural Background*. Students need to select a favorite food, and introduce its characteristics, production process and the cultural significance behind it in detail. For example, if you choose Chinese dumplings, you can explain its key position in traditional festivals, which symbolizes reunion and good fortune, along with other cultural meanings. Through writing, students can systematically sort out the cultural knowledge learned in the classroom, deepen their understanding of culture, improve their English writing level, and realize the transfer and sublimation of cultural awareness from the knowledge level to the practical level.

Activity 3: Encourage cultural practice experience

Cultural practice experience is the key to the sublimation of cultural consciousness [10]. Teachers should encourage students to actively experience different cultures in daily life. Students can try to taste the cuisine of various countries, and observe the decoration style and service mode of the restaurant, so as to feel the cultural differences. In addition, students can also actively participate in the exchange activities with foreign friends to understand their eating habits and cultural customs. In practical communication, students can improve their cross-cultural communicative competence,

transform cultural awareness into practical actions, truly realize the sublimation of cultural awareness, and become modern citizens with cross-cultural literacy.

### 5. Conclusion

In junior high school English reading teaching, teachers use diversified activities to explore textual cultural elements and cultivate students' cultural awareness, which is the key to improving teaching quality and cultivating core literacy of disciplines.

Language and culture are closely linked. Language carries culture and culture enriches language. Junior high school English teachers should clearly understand the relationship between the two, establish a scientific concept of reading teaching, and realize that reading teaching has both language and cultural educational functions. Based on this, teachers should deeply study the text and accurately find out the cultural elements contained in it. At the same time, guided by the curriculum standards, around the cultural theme, combined with students' learning needs, carefully designed reading teaching programs. The scheme should be in line with students' cognitive level, interest and learning characteristics to ensure the effectiveness of teaching activities. Through high-quality reading activities, students are guided to understand the cultural connotation of the text, promote their strong cultural awareness on the basis of understanding culture, enhance cross-cultural communication and comprehensive literacy, and lay a solid foundation for future development.

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