

# Strategies for Cultivating Cross-Cultural Awareness in High School English Reading Teaching under the Guidance of the New Curriculum

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**Abstract:** Due to the advent of the information age, English, an internationally spoken language, is playing an increasingly important role in international communication. Language is a carrier of culture, so strengthening the cultural integration into reading teaching can improve students' language ability. At the high school level, reading and culture are two important components of learning English and deserve to be emphasized. Based on the new standards for high school English, this paper analyzes the characteristics and shortcomings of the current intercultural awareness cultivation by combining the new textbook in New Standard English of Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, teachers' teaching design and teaching practice. After elaborating the importance of intercultural awareness in high school English learning, this paper further proposes corresponding teaching countermeasures to help cultivate students' intercultural awareness, improve students' cultural confidence, and provide a reference for students' comprehensive quality of students is provided.

**Keywords:** New Standards; High School; Reading; Cross-cultural Awareness.

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## 1. Introduction

In 2014, the Ministry of Education promulgated the Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening Curriculum Reform and Implementing the Fundamental Task of Establishing Virtue and Educating People, and the document clearly pointed out that in the new round of curriculum reform, constructing students' core quality system is a major initiative to promote the new curriculum reform [2]. In 2017, the issuance of the General High School English Curriculum Standards promoted a new round of curriculum reform, in which the goal of cultivating students' core literacy was proposed for the first time in the country, and the importance of cultural awareness in the core literacy system was explained in detail in the new standards. [2] Cultivating students' cultural awareness can effectively help them form correct values, enhance their cultural confidence, and improve their cultural sensitivity, thus helping them to become talents with an international perspective.

The GCSE English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition Revised 2020) clearly states that language is a vehicle for culture and a tool for thinking [3]. The cultivation and development of the three aspects of students' language ability, cultural awareness and thinking quality are not independent of each other, but are mutually reinforcing and develop together. This means that educators should not only train students' language skills in the process of teaching English, but also develop students' thinking quality along with their language skills, while organically integrating cultural knowledge to promote the formation of correct moral values.

Language is an important cultural carrier, language and writing contain rich cultural content, and culture is the soil in which language lives. Therefore, when communicating in a language, it must be established in a cultural environment that is compatible with it, so that accurate expression of the language can be achieved and the important value and function of language knowledge in spreading ideas and expressing emotions can be fully realized[5]. Language and

culture are inextricably linked. In foreign language teaching, culture mainly refers to a country's people's way of life, history and geography, customs, literature and art, traditional customs, codes of behavior, values, etc. English learning is different from language learning because English is a foreign language. Most of the authentic materials in English come from foreign countries, which gives English subject teaching a natural advantage to develop its cross-cultural awareness. In English teaching, we should combine "instrumentality" and "humanism" organically. In the new curriculum, specific requirements have been set for students' language and culture quality, and most of the new textbooks for high school have been added to develop students' intercultural awareness. A series of teaching reforms and practices reflect the goal of establishing moral education, and also serve as a good guide for teachers' teaching.

As an important form of English teaching in high school, reading class has an important role to play in cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness. Reading materials contain rich cultural knowledge and the process of reading is also the process of reflecting thinking, so reading class is an indispensable learning platform for improving students' level of cultural awareness and developing the quality of their thinking. Under the guidance of the new curriculum standards, the curriculum of general high school English majors must keep pace with the times, apply advanced educational ideas, make a series of reforms to classroom teaching, and optimize the training objectives of high school English. In the context of today's great changes in the world economy and society, China's high school English education must strengthen the education of cross-cultural awareness, enhance the comparison, understanding and application of different languages and cultures, strengthen students' cultural confidence and expand their international vision.

However, in the current process of teaching English in secondary schools, some teachers do not pay attention to the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness and do not explore the cross-cultural factors from English teaching

materials. The phenomenon of emphasizing textual knowledge and neglecting the cultivation of cultural awareness is still everywhere, which results in students' inability to understand English knowledge correctly on account of the lack of cross-cultural awareness, and often fail to understand correctly the meaning that another language must convey in the process of cross-linguistic communication. Therefore, English teachers should strengthen the cultivation of students' intercultural awareness and improve their intercultural communication skills. In the teaching process, teachers should gradually expand the connotation and scope of their cultural knowledge according to students' age characteristics and cognitive level, combine the cultural knowledge and background of English-speaking countries learned with students' daily life, knowledge structure, and cognitive level, mobilize students' interest in English culture, broaden their horizons, and improve their sensitivity and judgment to the differences between Chinese and foreign cultures. It lays a good foundation for developing their ability of cross-cultural communication. In that case, this thesis analyzes the characteristics and shortcomings of cultural awareness cultivation in current high school English reading teaching, taking into account the new textbook, teachers' teaching design and teaching practice in the high school, and further proposes corresponding teaching countermeasures to help cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness, improve their cultural confidence.

## **2. The Current Status of Teaching Culture and Reading in High School English**

Since its entry into secondary school, English language teaching has been limited by language learning contexts and is currently still dominated by classroom instruction. This is why our English teaching is dominated by the grammar-translation method, which emphasizes vocabulary and grammar knowledge but neglects the development of cultural knowledge of the target language.

As far as it is concerned, the following problems have emerged: first, English teaching favors language over culture. "Most high school English teachers are trained from exam-oriented education, and they lack sensitivity to English culture and understanding of language and culture." [5] Language is divided into language's own meaning and cultural meaning [7]. At present, most of the English teaching focuses on English vocabulary, grammar and reading, but not deep enough understanding of culture. Most teachers habitually adopt the "sea of problems" tactic, shoving a lot of reading materials and exercises into students' hands to improve their reading ability through a lot of practice. This approach, although effective in the short term, does not solve the problem at root, nor does it allow students to form good reading habits, nor does it allow them to develop good reading skills. On the contrary, such an approach will lead to students' weak cross-cultural awareness and even cause "cultural shock". In the process of teaching English, there is a phenomenon of "partial food", which directly affects students' reading performance. Secondly, the classroom teaching is in a single form and lacks actual language situations. The purpose of intercultural awareness training is to improve students' English language communication skills so that they can express themselves correctly in cross-cultural communication situations. However, in the current process of

intercultural awareness training for students, there is a lack of practical training and a good English practice environment for students, which results in students' intercultural communication skills not being well improved. In addition, there is also a lack of advanced concepts in reading teaching, and the traditional word-by-word translation explanation is still used, so students have no thinking of their own at all and can only accept passively. Finally, the content of the test about cultural knowledge is lacking. English test results are an important indicator of high school students' English ability. However, in the test, most of the content revolves around language knowledge, and there is relatively little testing on cultural knowledge. Even if cultural knowledge is tested, it is an indirect way of testing, and its main purpose is to check students' language knowledge, not simply to test their mastery of cultural knowledge. The mindset of "college entrance exams are everything" and "college entrance exams are above everything" makes teachers ignore the importance of English culture in communication and just treat cultural knowledge as a tool to help students learn English better without giving it the attention it deserves.

Under the guidance of the new curriculum standards, the teaching objectives have been changed and a series of optimizations have been made, and the development of intercultural competence for students has been emphasized in it, while the new textbooks used in high schools have added many texts on intercultural communication. However, in the actual teaching of English in secondary schools, many teachers do not pay enough attention to students' intercultural competence and do not realize the influence of cultural factors on students' English learning. Therefore, many teachers still focus on teaching the basic knowledge of English language and teach English vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing in a step-by-step manner according to the relevant requirements of exam-oriented education and the examination syllabus. Teachers do not dig deeply into unit themes and independent textual themes, and do not focus on the messages of cross-cultural communication conveyed by the texts, thus leading to students' lack of knowledge in that part, their lack of cross-cultural awareness, their inability to understand the texts they read in depth, their inability to use grammar flexibly, and to some extent, their hindrance in understanding and using English vocabulary. Even though some teachers are aware of the importance of developing students' cultural awareness, they lack methods to integrate it with the course content and fail to infuse students with cultural knowledge in a step-by-step manner based on the course content [8].

## **3. The Significance of Cultivating Intercultural Awareness in High School English Classrooms**

With economic globalization and the concept of community of human destiny, coupled with social informatization, cultural exchanges between different countries are becoming more and more frequent, and different and diverse cultures exist directly in different countries, which leads to the increased frequency of intercultural communication. Intercultural communication refers to people with different cultural backgrounds interacting and communicating with each other in a certain context. Intercultural communication involves cultural cognition, cultural emotion and cultural behavior. Currently, in

secondary school English reading classes, teachers only pay attention to the explanation of the basic contents involved in the texts they read, but neglect the infiltration of cultural contents, resulting in students' lack of thorough understanding of the texts they read and even many misunderstandings. Reading itself is a process of using multiple language skills, and only a comprehensive explanation of the texts read can help students accumulate a wealth of language knowledge and enable them to use vocabulary and sentence patterns accurately in the process of expression. It is not enough to understand the surface meanings of the texts they read; students should also summarize and generalize their thinking patterns based on what they read and effectively master these language expressions to truly appreciate the cultural meanings behind linguistic communication (Yao Hongzhi 2020). Under the implementation of the new curriculum standards, teachers should pay attention to cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness so that they can better understand the cultural connotations in the texts and improve their comprehensive language application skills.

To become truly proficient in English, learners need to have a corresponding knowledge of the cultural background of the target language country along with their knowledge of the language. Lack of cultural background knowledge makes it difficult to understand texts[9]. Learn about the customs and manners of the target language, and understand the cultural background of the target country, such as literature, history, etc. Students can broaden their horizons, compare and contrast the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and constantly enrich their cultural knowledge, so that they can improve their cultural understanding of the superficial meanings of the reading materials they have learned in the process of reading, and thus improve their ability to apply the language in a comprehensive manner, and overcome the cross-cultural barriers they encounter in the process of reading. In this way, students can improve their reading skills, overcome the cross-cultural barriers they encounter in the reading process, fundamentally improve their reading level, help them develop reading habits, and improve their reading ability.

From an economic point of view, with the increasing acceleration of globalization, English has become a top priority for every student's learning and future development. Language is not just a form, it also carries a rich culture, therefore, understanding the cultural characteristics embedded in different languages will help to improve students' language skills.

In terms of cultural characteristics, English is very different from Chinese, and each country has its own culture. Therefore, if students do not have a cross-cultural concept, they will still express themselves in the Chinese way and use English vocabulary when expressing themselves in English, then they will have grammatical problems and even expression problems. Through the in-depth analysis of Chinese and Western cultures, students can have a deeper understanding of the connotation and value of their own country's culture, enhance their cultural confidence, and help them to correctly view multicultural development.

From a pedagogical point of view, first of all, intercultural awareness can effectively improve the teaching quality of English education. As we all know, English plays a pivotal role in our learning life and is a subject that many educators hope to help our students improve. By adopting the method of cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness, we can

change some of the resistance created by students in the original English teaching, shift the focus of English education learning from vocabulary, grammar and other language knowledge, and make English a tool of communication while bringing into play the humanistic characteristics of the English subject, which not only can reduce the pressure of teachers' English teaching, but also can increase students' interest in English and thus This can not only reduce the teachers' English teaching pressure, but also increase students' interest in English, and thus improve the quality of English teaching. This requires us to continuously strengthen and improve students' cultural literacy in the process of English teaching. Second, intercultural awareness can greatly increase students' motivation in English teaching. For a student, curiosity and interest are always the best teachers. In the process of teaching using intercultural awareness, the first thing students will be exposed to is different cultures and different ways of life, which will make them interested in English, and their curiosity will motivate them to understand English and learn how to use it so that they can understand the world better and open their eyes. Then, cross-cultural awareness can improve students' communicative skills. To learn a language well, you cannot just speak it without practicing it. You need to have both basic language knowledge and certain language communication skills so that the quality of English teaching can be improved. By integrating intercultural awareness into English teaching, students can well improve their ability to use English and make better use of the language when they communicate and express themselves in English. Finally, integrating intercultural awareness with modern English teaching can make it better adapted to modern society. The development of any discipline needs to be in line with social development[10]. In China, a series of activities of English education and teaching were originally intended to adapt to the development of society and opening up to the outside world.

## **4. Specific Strategies for Cultivating Cross-Cultural Awareness in High School English Teaching in the Context of the New Curriculum**

### **4.1. Overall Grasp of the Teaching Design of High School English Reading Class**

Under the new curriculum, the English curriculum design of general high school should follow the development requirements of the times and adopt advanced educational concepts to constantly innovate the classroom teaching mode[11]. Applying the concept of "wholeness" to English reading classes in secondary schools is conducive to improving students' English learning outcomes and promoting the formation of their language skills. The development of intercultural awareness should be a gradual and silent process that needs to be integrated into all teaching processes.[12] In the perspective of teaching design in high school, students should understand and master the language and information at a superficial level, then let them understand the article in depth in terms of the author's point of view, emotional attitude and the main idea of the writing, and then use appropriate reading methods to reprocess the information and express clearly the pulse level, structural features and layout of the article, and finally appreciate the wording, sentence construction, and discourse skills of the

article. Finally, you can appreciate the cultural connotation of the text from the perspective of its wording and layout techniques.

From the perspective of classroom design. In order to effectively achieve these goals, it is necessary to have a holistic grasp of the secondary English reading lesson plan. For this reason, educators must establish a holistic educational concept of English reading when designing the classroom and grasp the three aspects of reading in secondary English as a whole, namely, "before," "during," and "after." In the pre-reading stage, it is important to make full use of the knowledge background of high school students to clear the obstacles of vocabulary beforehand and to make predictions about the content of the text, so as to prepare the mind and spirit for reading the text. Teachers can use the teaching activity of watching a short film in class during the pre-reading session to introduce the vocabulary of the lesson topic as a way to stimulate students' interest in learning to read. This is followed by a free-flowing discussion in which students are happily engaged and able to respond to the teacher's questions based on their prior knowledge and experience, while preparing them for later learning. Students' prior background knowledge plays a greater role in reading than the linguistic difficulty of the reading material and the reader's language skills [13]. On this basis, students are trained to listen and read in conjunction with what they have already learned about English, to use old knowledge, to promote the learning of new knowledge, and to introduce new texts in a gradual manner so that the difficulty of reading English for high school students decreases significantly. At the reading-in stage, emphasis is placed on the learning of vocabulary, phrases and sentence patterns, and emphasis is placed on instructing high school students to understand the content and structure of the text as well as the author's writing intentions based on the information they have obtained. Before formally launching reading instruction, teachers should make full use of existing textbooks and other teaching resources to prepare a lesson and grasp the principle of holistic teaching based on the unit theme and teaching objectives, while developing a deeper dissection and processing of the reading text. At this stage, teachers should first clarify their teaching objectives and consciously uncover the cultural awareness goals they contain, use them as a basis for deeper excavation and comparison of cultural content in the textbook, and then pay attention to supplemental materials after the lesson to expand the content and scope of cultural knowledge. When selecting supplementary materials, teachers also pay attention to the rationality and topicality of the selection and content design so as to enhance students' cultural awareness. In the post-reading process, the main focus is on analyzing and summarizing what was learned and what was taught during the reading process. The post-reading session is the best stage to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness and develop their thinking quality. Teachers should grasp the post-reading session to promote the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness.

From the perspective of teaching content, in order to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills, we should adhere to the principle of wholeness, combine listening, speaking, reading and writing organically, improve English reading as a whole, change the mindset of "learning English only by reading books", and strengthen the cultural understanding and language application of English reading. The students should

improve their English reading as a whole, change the mindset of "learning English by reading", and strengthen the cultural understanding and language application of English reading.

#### **4.2. Based on Our Own Culture, Strengthen the Practical Application of Intercultural Communication**

Teaching English reading in high school has always been one of the most important ways to develop students' cross-cultural awareness. Reading is both a process of learning language and a reader's processing of background knowledge [14]. In reading teaching, students improve their understanding of other countries' cultures through reading and teaching activities of different cultural contents, thus laying a solid knowledge foundation for the cultivation of intercultural awareness and the improvement of intercultural communication skills.

From the perspective of teaching materials, the new curriculum standards classify English cultural knowledge according to three levels: compulsory, optional, and advanced elective, so that students can independently choose the appropriate extension materials to better understand English cultural knowledge according to their own prior knowledge level and their level of interest in the content. In the actual English classroom, students will be exposed to a variety of different cultures. Therefore, teachers should consciously guide students to analyze in depth the cultural background, cultural connotation and ideology of the texts they read, encourage students to do extended reading on relevant topics, and let them express their own ideas and opinions so as to eliminate the cultural background gap in English reading.

However, the proportion of target language culture in the current textbook repertoire is almost twice the proportion of native language culture, and this unbalanced cultural component leads to a bias in the development of cultural character literacy in textbooks. Effective Chinese cultural integration and strengthening the proportion of native language culture in English subjects not only meet the requirements of learning language rules and the development of the times, but also meet the needs of students' learning. To improve the cultural quality of students in secondary school English reading classes, teachers should select and handle materials based on the principle of "integration and integration", combining national and global cultures, and enriching the content of cultural comparisons. The teaching content should include elements of national culture, and the influence of national cultural factors should be emphasized in the teaching process. The inclusion of native culture in secondary school English reading materials is not only a kind of cultural overlay, but more importantly, to achieve a balance between foreign and domestic cultures while maintaining the national culture, and to enhance students' confidence in their own culture while effectively using their original knowledge to look at other cultures in a correct way.

In terms of extracurricular materials, first of all, extracurricular materials need to respect students' interests and ability levels in the process of reading selection. Then, the extracurricular cultural reading materials selected should be up-to-date and should not be chosen for their meaninglessness, so that students can pay attention to international developments and develop world consciousness, which is a key way for New World citizens to understand the world to achieve self-growth. In terms of material selection, although we acknowledge the indelible role of native

language culture in the development of intercultural awareness in high school English, if understanding native language culture is the prerequisite for intercultural awareness development, then extra-curricular supplementary materials for the target language countries are the main body of learning, and teachers should draw more on direct media from English-speaking countries in the process of high school English reading teaching for the selection of reading materials other than textbooks. The materials should be based on direct media from English-speaking countries. Language cannot exist in isolation from culture.[16]. Whether it is the main textbook reading materials or the supplementary learning materials before and after class, teachers should choose authentic local materials, such as famous TV stations in English-speaking countries, such as VOA in the United States, BBC in England, ABC in Australia and some other famous newspapers and magazines. In addition to using real-life English materials, such as English poems, literature, dialogues from movies, etc., you should also include topics related to cross-cultural communication, such as idioms, allusions, ways of interpersonal communication, etc.

In conclusion, when teaching reading and guiding students, whether teaching the content of textbooks or choosing extra-curricular materials, teachers should adhere to the principle of centering on their own culture, enhancing students' cultural confidence in their country, guiding students to correctly view and understand other cultures, and remembering not to flatter foreigners and blindly advocate other cultures. Teachers should guide students to look at different cultures and customs in the right way. At the same time, teachers should guide students to look at different cultures with a dialectical perspective through teaching activities in and out of class, and to reflect on, experience and compare other cultures in order to achieve a harmonious exchange between the two cultures so that students will not blindly imitate and "westernize" them. For example, in the article "A child of two cuisines" in English Compulsory 2 in high school, the differences between Chinese and Western food cultures are described. Rather, they should respect each other and seek a harmonious balance between the two cultures. When conducting cross-cultural communication, they should combine what they have learned about the commonalities and differences between the two cultures, and take the understanding of the differences between the two cultures as the main starting point to avoid cultural misunderstandings among students when conducting cross-cultural communication.

### **4.3. Improve Academic Evaluation Mechanism and Develop Students' Cross-cultural Awareness**

Student assessment is a kind of value judgment that takes students as the subject of assessment, according to certain criteria and using corresponding technical tools [15]. Academic evaluation is an important part of student assessment, so how to choose the criteria for academic evaluation will be a key factor in assessing students' learning status. As an integral part of the curriculum implementation process, academic assessment is derived from curriculum evaluation, which means that the needs of students for assessment should be fully taken into account when developing curriculum standards, and the focus on students' development is the core orientation of academic assessment standards. The standards established regarding academic assessment should be at a level that is attainable by students

and actively achieved so that most students can reach it with effort. To develop students' intercultural awareness, then, cultural character literacy should be incorporated into students' academic assessment criteria, and academic assessment criteria appropriate to the development of cultural character literacy in English should be pursued while following the macro concept of academic assessment.

The Outline of Basic Education Curriculum Reform (for Trial Implementation) specifically mentions the need to "improve the assessment system in order to enhance the overall quality of students." In the assessment process, attention should be paid to students' learning performance as well as to the exploration and development of their potential in all aspects, and their needs in the development process should be fully understood so that they can better understand themselves and build up their confidence. We should give full use of the educational role of assessment and promote the benign development of students on the basis of their original level. This reflects the basic idea of "promoting students' development" in the new curriculum assessment, and is in line with the requirements of quality education for educational assessment, as well as the general trend of international educational assessment reform. This means that the academic assessment standards for the development of students' intercultural awareness must be based on the premise that all activities must take human needs and development as the starting point and end point, and be directed toward the overall development of students. This is not only the basic requirement of the curriculum standards, but also the starting point and destination for the formation of students' key competencies and essential characters. Under the "student-centered" learning assessment standard, certain assessment principles should be observed, that is, the basic requirements to be observed in the assessment process, which is also an important basis to ensure the effectiveness of learning assessment.

Cultures are different, and cultures are diverse. Under the influence of multicultural knowledge, the academic assessment methods for the development of students' intercultural awareness need to be diversified so that the test of learning outcomes of intercultural awareness can be better conducted. In order to better use the multiple assessment methods, first of all, the evaluation subjects need to be diversified. For the development of intercultural awareness, the roles of teachers, students, and schools in multiple assessments need to be clearly defined. From the teacher's perspective, the teacher's teaching influences the formation of students' intercultural awareness, so the assessment process needs to be incorporated into the teacher's teaching content. From the student's perspective, students should be evaluated from multiple perspectives, combining self-evaluation with evaluation by others. From the school's point of view, the school should provide the appropriate environment and do a good job of guidance. Second, diversity not only emphasizes the subject of assessment, but also the plurality of methods of assessment. Then, the application of diversified assessment methods to the assessment of students' intercultural awareness requires the combined use of "reward and punishment assessment" and "developmental assessment". Scientific assessment of learning should give students the opportunity to develop, acknowledge their weaknesses and shortcomings, and view them correctly. From the perspective of rewards and punishments, teachers can praise students who take the initiative to organize their cultural knowledge or express their

views on cross-cultural content in a public class setting. And punishment can urge individual students to learn. The so-called developmental approach to academic assessment is not meant to make a definitive statement about students' current abilities and levels, but rather to help students identify problems and improve them in a timely manner. Then the assessment methods of reading teaching can be divided into three forms, which are classroom sex assessment, homework demonstration and post-class quiz. Finally, focus on the combination of reward and punishment assessment and developmental assessment, so that students can keep improving in mutual communication and learning from each other, and develop cross-cultural awareness.

In conclusion, the new curriculum standard attaches importance to the introduction of culture in English teaching and the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness. To be reflected in our English reading teaching, we should pay attention to the accumulation of English cultural knowledge, the comprehension of the spiritual connotation of English culture, and cross-cultural communication, so as to lay a good foundation for cultivating a group of high-level and high-quality English professionals with international vision and cross-cultural thinking. High school English teachers should change their traditional educational concepts under the guidance of the new curriculum. They should not only strengthen the transfer of language knowledge to students, but also pay attention to the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness, fully explore cross-cultural factors in the classroom, and constantly innovate teaching methods according to students' needs for cross-cultural awareness. Through theoretical explanations and practical exercises, students' cross-cultural awareness is strengthened and their cultural quality and English proficiency is enhanced. Design teaching activities for English reading classes based on the principle of wholeness. At the same time, based on our own culture, we strengthen the practical application of intercultural communication and guide students to look at different cultures with a dialectical perspective. Finally, we improve the evaluation system and increase the evaluation content for the development of intercultural awareness, so as to promote the formation of students' intercultural awareness with various strategies.

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