

Cultural Awareness Deprivation in EFT in Chinese Rural Primary Schools

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Abstract: The teaching of foreign languages has received attention globally in recent years regarding cultural awareness. The Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards (CECS) (2022)[1] in China specifies specifically that the core competencies that the English curriculum should nurture students encompass language competency, cultural awareness (CA), cognitive ability, and learning capacity. A solid grasp of the CA is a requirement for teachers as their role of mediators and facilitators of students. As nearly 20% of all Chinese primary students come from rural areas, the aim of this study is to gain a thorough understanding of how CA develops in EFT classrooms in primary schools of rural China.

1. Introduction

Since the middle of the 20th century, the teaching of foreign languages has drawn attention to CA these years all around the world. Vygotsky[2] was the among the first scholars to bring forth the viewpoint of the intertwining of language and culture. Other experts supported and expanded on the idea. For example, Kramsch[3] added to the four communication competencies, emphasizing CA, and Byram[4] enriches the theory that it is necessary to foster the elements of CA in the EFT classroom setting, while Coyle, Hood, and Marsh[5] advocate the importance of the integration of language, culture and cognitive processing.

In terms of CA, Chinese scholars contribute their share as they can, the most outstanding of whom are Hu Wenzhong, Liu Runqing and Gao Yihong et al[11][22]. As a compulsory subject in China, the Chinese government issued the new Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards in 2022 which declares plainly that language competency, CA, cognitive ability, and learning capacity are the core competencies that the English curriculum should foster and it provides the definition of what CA in EFT entails: CA encompasses cultural comprehension, attitudes, and behaviour choices that students represent. It is defined as the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures as well as the admiration of wonderful cultures. The cultivation of CA aids students in embracing character, developing civilised literacy, and fostering social responsibility while also strengthening their sense of nation and the community of human destiny. As mediators and facilitators of students, it is prerequisite for teachers to have a good comprehension of the cultivation of CA.

Despite the development in both the fields of CA and language at home and abroad, language instruction continues to be based on a limited comprehension of both language and culture[3], and students frequently have misunderstandings, arguments, and culture shocks when using the language owing to the lack of CA (Wu Weiyan, 2020; Wang Xinxin, 2018; et al.)[6][7]. Although Sharon Chang [8] proposes that teachers are the mediators and brokers between language and culture to students, a more thorough examination of teachers' involvement in it is overlooked, as Sercu[9] puts, it seems that the development of CA is not quite popular among EFT teachers.

In China, the lack of CA in English teaching is a cause for concern as it is across the world questioned by Hu Wen and Ma Xin[10][11]. Some scholars like Wu Jing, Liang Tingting and Chen Ping et al believe that teachers' low CA should be responsible for it[12][13][14]. In spite of the fact that teachers agree in theory on the value of CA, the problem with prioritizing information and ignoring culture in Chinese EFT classrooms looms. Worse still, the majority of them concentrate on a limited comprehension of the lack of CA from the perspective of students, or on teachers of high schools and universities, or city schools throughout China, unusual for them to address the problem

of primary schools in rural China, particularly from the perspective of teachers there whereas rural students cover nearly 20% of the whole population of primary students in China. Hence, this study is to develop a comprehensive comprehension of how teachers in these EFT classes foster CA.

2. Connotation of Eft and Ca in Rural Primary Schools

2.1 Definition of Culture

Different people hold different opinions of what “culture” is. Since Taylor [15] first proposed the idea that culture and civilization are equivalent, till now, more than 250 definitions of culture have been offered by academics worldwide, including Sapir [16] and other super scholars from abroad to Deng Yancheng, Liu Runqing, Chen Shen, and others at home. The CECS (2022) defines culture: culture includes not only material things like inventions and creations related to food, clothing, architecture, and transportation etc., but also non-material things like values, morals, aesthetic interests, social conventions, and customs as well as philosophy, science, history, language, literature, and education and so on with attitudes and values that underlie those facts.

2.2 Definition of CA

Scholars like Hanvey[17] claims CA is the knowledge of one's own culture and the cultures of others, both of which have an impact on how one thinks and behaves, while Tomalin[18] asserts CA is a type of cognition involving the use of language and a communicative style influenced by culturally specific actions which echoes the affirmation that the ability to effectively communicate across cultural boundaries depends in part on the cultural awareness of the communicators.[19]. The Chinese scholar Cao Wen[20] defines CA as being sensitive not only to one's native but also the target culture as well as being aware of how one might adjust their own language and interact with the target culture when using the target language. Gao Yihong believes that CA is to be aware of cultural diversity, tolerant and empathetic of differences[21]. The definitions provided above cover a wide range of topics, but mainly focus on the three areas: cultural knowledge, cultural attitudes, and cultural behaviors.

This study's definition is primarily based on the specification in the CECS (2022) : CA is the cross-cultural understanding, attitude, and behaviour choices. It is defined as the comprehension and admiration of Chinese and foreign cultures. The cultivation of CA aids students in embracing characters, developing civilised literacy, and fostering social responsibility while also strengthening their sense of nation and the community of human destiny.

2.3 Review on the Cultivation of CA

To cultivate students' CA, scholars have also expressed their viewpoints. As early as the first half of the last century, Vygotsky[1] holds that learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of cultural development. Other experts supported and expanded on the idea. After the first academic Lado[22] who suggests a method of language comparison, Breen[23] asserts that developing CA goes beyond simply teaching kids the language but also emphasizes developing their CA. It is evident that foreign academics have conducted more systematic and practical study on the cultivation of CA. Furthermore, Byram[4] advances the theory that culture infiltration involves not only the mother tongue's culture but also the target language's culture. Later on, the four communicative competences were expanded by one of the top experts, Kramersch[3], who stressed CA in her assertion.

As illustrated above, the study of the cultivation of CA is an evolving process. Related to this topic, Chinese scholars have also produced excellent work. Some research looks into the current situation of CA cultivation. In their research, teachers need to improve their own CA, but they are unable to do it in a systematic fashion. And lots of research pay attention to the university English language teaching[24]), while some other studies analyze whether or not textbooks can successfully foster students' CA. In conclusion, Chinese academic has been researching CA development from a variety of perspectives.

Nevertheless, the literature review shows that there aren't many studies on encouraging students' CA at the primary level, for the majority of research on the topic is concentrated at the secondary and university levels.

2.4 Teacher s' Role

Teachers are the brokers and meditators between language and culture. CECS (2022) reiterates the need of instructors in fostering pupils' CA: teachers should be able to help students learn about culture, compare Chinese and other cultures and develop a healthy perspective on the world, a positive outlook on life, and sound moral principles. Therefore, Chinese English teaching should not only concentrate on the transfer of knowledge but attach the significance of the improvement of comprehensive comprehension of CA of students. But only after teachers are well equipped with qualified vision of CA, can they better facilitate students to the active access of CA.

Yet, a dearth of academic research exists on teachers' perspectives on the promotion of CA in EFT classes, just like what Sercu says, "it seems that the development of CA is not quite popular among EFT teachers." [9]

3. Ways and Means to Realize English Culture Teaching in Primary Schools

3.1 Improve Teaching Mode

Textbooks are an important resource for students to learn English. However, the compilation of English textbooks for primary schools does not introduce cultural items systematically, but only appears in sporadic and incomplete forms. With the continuous reform of the new curriculum standards, EFT gradually pays attention to cultivating students' English CA, so English history and culture are compiled into primary school English textbooks when compiling English textbooks. Teachers should rely on teaching materials and combine the age characteristics and cognitive ability of primary school students. When explaining English texts, they should lose no time to introduce some cultural background knowledge of relevant English-speaking countries to students. At present, classroom teaching is still the main way of teaching activities, and students and teachers spend the longest time in the classroom. Classroom teaching is the main position for cultural teaching. Teachers should put English language teaching in a cross-cultural environment and make cross-cultural communication an indispensable part of EFT. Classroom teaching is the main way for most pupils to get in touch with English. In the classroom, teachers should adopt flexible methods to stimulate students' cultural curiosity according to the age characteristics and cognitive ability of primary school students, and infiltrate them in time so that students can accumulate cultural knowledge in English learning. The cooperative communication analysis mode of EFT process is shown in Figure 1.

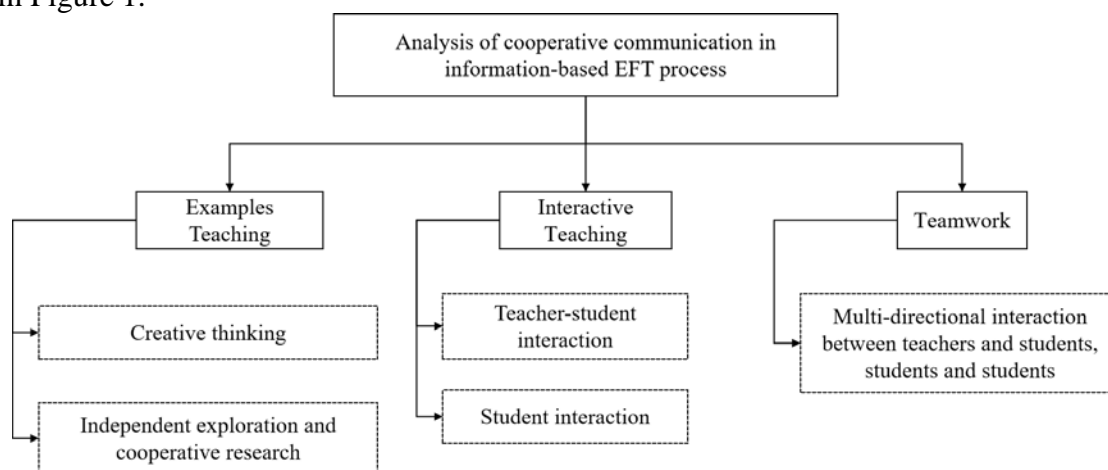


Fig.1 Eft Process Collaborative Communication Analysis Mode

In the process of teaching, teachers should try their best to activate the contents of textbooks, make cultural comparisons, and prompt students to understand cultural similarities and differences

in time. Through this teaching method, students can truly understand the language background knowledge and cultivate their cross-CA. Apply what you have learned, and effectively improve their ability of language use and communication in real situations. The teaching environment is very important, without paying attention to the influence on students' inner feelings. However, the classroom layout in English-speaking countries is different, and there are various columns that students like on the walls, which is enough to give students their imagination and creativity as much as possible. Therefore, teachers should strengthen their own teaching level, prepare lessons well before class, and consult relevant materials to strengthen their mastery of teaching materials, so as to be comfortable in EFT.

3.2 Carry out Activities to Enrich English

The cultivation of CA is a comprehensive process. It is far from enough to master English completely by classroom teaching with limited time. Teachers should not only set up situational teaching combined with teaching materials in the classroom, but also let students experience and use English in a certain real language environment. When students grow up under the influence of British culture, they will gradually take English learning as a part of their lives, and their English level will also be continuously improved. English activities can be carried out not only in class but also outside class. Extracurricular is a vast and colorful world, which is more attractive than in class. If the extracurricular atmosphere is full of English breath, it can subtly infect and edify students. Primary school is the initial stage for students to accept English. The large vocabulary and sentences in English bring great pressure to students' learning, which makes them bored with English. Therefore, changing classroom teaching methods, carrying out English activities in class or leading students to participate in extracurricular English corner activities will change students' views on English. The innovative EFT system model is shown in Figure 2.

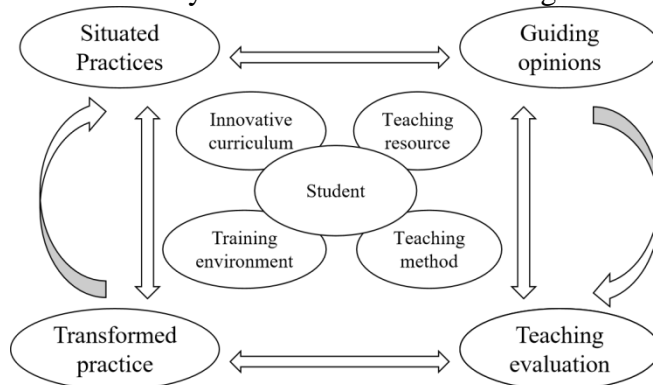


Fig.2 Innovative Eft System Model

In the English learning garden of the class, teachers can write some games that they often play, which are both interesting and can increase their vocabulary. You can also find some English riddles from English reading materials, which can arouse students' interest, let students experience the thinking mode of foreigners, and cultivate students' reading ability and English language sense. These lively and interesting contents can attract students to take the initiative to participate, let students feel the way of thinking of foreigners, and cultivate students' reading ability and English language sense. Language comes from life, and extracurricular activities can cultivate students' oral communication ability, so that students can feel the charm of English culture and learn English in practice. Teachers can also regularly lead students to the English corner so that students can communicate with foreigners and exchange cultures between the two countries. Through this series of activities, students experience not only happiness, but also the perception of western culture and customs. At the same time, it also increases the opportunity of practice and has a good effect of applying what you have learned.

4. Conclusion

Primary school English is a beginner's stage. It is undoubtedly a higher requirement for primary school English teachers to carry out EFT in a proper western cultural background, cultivate students' CA, and make students happy to understand and learn western culture. Culture refers to the history, geography, customs, traditional customs, lifestyle, literature and art, code of conduct, values, etc. of the country where the language is studied. Contacting and understanding the culture of English-speaking countries is beneficial to the understanding and understanding of English and the cultivation of world consciousness. English CA of rural primary school students needs teachers to make full use of English textbooks, carry out colorful English activities and pay attention to the diversification of English assessment methods. This study will help teachers better understand how culture affects EFT, thus helping students develop their communicative competence. The findings of this study are also important for curriculum developers, teachers and educators and policy makers, because they try to propose more feasible and attractive methods to improve the cooperative learning ability of teachers and students in rural areas of China. In EFT, teachers should devote themselves to research, not only pay attention to students' language skills, but also infiltrate the awareness of language and culture into specific teaching, so as to improve students' language communication ability and cultural literacy.

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