

Introduction of Cultural Elements and Intercultural Reading in English Reading Teaching

Qijun Zhao

School of Foreign Languages, Zhaotong University, Zhaotong, 657000, China

Keywords: English Reading Instruction, Cultural Elements, Cross-Cultural Reading, Contextual Understanding, Cultural Awareness

Abstract: This paper aims to explore the necessity of integrating cultural elements in English reading instruction and to study the role of cross-cultural reading in enhancing learners' English reading abilities. Through a review of relevant literature, it was found that incorporating cultural elements in the language learning process aids in enhancing students' understanding of context, thus better understanding and utilizing the language. Additionally, the practice of cross-cultural reading encourages students to step beyond the confines of language, expand their thinking, and strengthen their cultural awareness. Through empirical analysis, this study aims to provide beneficial insights and guidance for English reading instruction.

1. Introduction

English, as a globally spoken language, is widely learned and used worldwide. In English teaching, reading is one of the key components for developing students' language abilities. However, focusing solely on grammar and vocabulary often fails to meet students' needs in practical communication. Therefore, this study focuses on the significance of introducing cultural elements in English reading instruction and the impact of cross-cultural reading on students' reading abilities.

2. The Importance of Cultural Elements in English Reading Instruction

2.1. Deepening Contextual Understanding through Cultural Elements

Incorporating cultural elements in English reading instruction is not just a teaching method but an effective way to deepen students' understanding of context. Contextual understanding involves not only grasping the surface meaning of the text but also a sensitive insight into cultural factors. The role of cultural elements in context is manifested in a more profound analysis of vocabulary, idioms, and expressions, allowing students to fully comprehend the language information.

Integrating cultural elements enables students to more keenly capture the cultural information conveyed by the author, thereby accurately interpreting the connotations of the text. For example, when students understand the different cultural meanings of an idiom, they can more intricately grasp the author's true intent in that context.

The introduction of cultural elements also cultivates students' cross-cultural reading ability. By

venturing into different cultural contexts, students become more inclusive in their language use, better adapting to the challenges of cross-cultural communication. This not only aids in developing an individual's international perspective but also lays a solid foundation for future international cooperation and cross-cultural communication.

In summary, the deepening of contextual understanding through cultural elements is both an educational strategy and an effective way to cultivate students' comprehensive language abilities and cross-cultural communication skills. In English reading instruction, focusing on the integration of cultural elements will provide students with a richer and more profound learning experience.

2.2. The Connection between Cultural Elements and Language Learning

The close connection between cultural elements and language learning manifests in all aspects of language practice. Language learning is no longer an isolated process of rules and vocabulary memorization but a process complemented by cultural connotations. Firstly, language is a carrier of culture, reflecting society's developmental history, values, and everyday life. Learning culture-related vocabulary and expressions deepens students' understanding of practical language use, making the learning process more profound.[1]

The connection between cultural elements and language learning is also evident in enhancing students' language application abilities. Familiarity with different cultural expression methods, etiquette norms, and social skills allows students to communicate more freely. Such learning enables them to express themselves more authentically in real contexts, enhancing the practicality of the language.

Moreover, the introduction of cultural elements makes language learning more lively and interesting. By introducing culture-related literary works, music, films, etc., educators can stimulate students' interest in learning, making them more engaged in the language learning process. This culture-based approach not only broadens students' learning horizons but also adds enjoyment to their learning experience.[2]

In conclusion, cultural elements are closely related to language learning. Deepening cultural element studies enriches language knowledge and enhances communication skills in different cultural contexts, making language learning more colorful.

2.3. How to Integrate Cultural Elements in Reading Instruction

Skillfully integrating cultural elements into English reading instruction is a challenging yet crucial task. Here are some suggestions to help teachers effectively incorporate cultural elements into their reading instruction:

Firstly, select appropriate texts and materials. Teachers should carefully choose articles, stories, news reports, or literary works related to specific cultures to ensure students are genuinely exposed to representative cultural elements. This may include understanding the author's cultural background, choosing scenarios that describe cultural differences, or introducing related literary works, allowing students to perceive the presence of cultural elements.

Secondly, design diverse teaching activities. Interactive teaching methods such as group discussions, role-playing, and cultural presentations enable students to experience and understand cultural elements more intuitively. For example, organizing students to conduct group research on cultural themes allows them to share different cultural perspectives and experiences, thus promoting cross-cultural communication among them.[3]

Additionally, guide students in analyzing and interpreting cultural elements. In reading courses, teachers can lead students to study the cultural elements in texts, interpret their underlying meanings, and their impact on the overall context. By encouraging students to think actively and pose questions,

teachers can cultivate their sensitivity to cultural elements and critical thinking.

Lastly, enrich teaching by integrating technological means. Using multimedia resources, online cultural materials, and virtual cultural experiences, teachers can provide students with a richer, more vivid understanding of cultural elements. This helps break the boundaries of traditional teaching, allowing students to perceive and understand the characteristics of different cultures more comprehensively.

Overall, successfully integrating cultural elements into English reading instruction requires thoughtful planning by teachers in material selection, teaching design, and activity organization to stimulate students' interest and deepen their understanding of cultural elements.

3. Practice and Impact of Cross-Cultural Reading

3.1. Cross-Cultural Reading: Challenging the Language Framework

Cross-cultural reading is a process filled with rich experiences and challenges, one of the main challenges being the difficulties learners face in dealing with different language frameworks. Language, as a means of cultural expression, varies in grammar, vocabulary, and expressions across cultures, so students need to adapt to various language frameworks when reading cross-cultural texts.

Challenge 1: Vocabulary and Translation

In reading across different cultures, students may encounter unique words and phrases whose meanings cannot be directly inferred from their native language framework. This requires students to have certain vocabulary and translation skills to cross language boundaries and accurately interpret and translate the connotations of the text. To help students overcome this challenge, teachers can guide them to use dictionaries, online translation tools, and conduct practical application exercises in class to enhance their vocabulary and translation level.[4]

Challenge 2: Differences in Grammatical Structures

Each language has its unique grammatical structure and sentence patterns, so students need to adapt to the syntactic habits of different languages during cross-cultural reading. For example, some languages may emphasize the subject more, while others may focus on the position of verbs or objects. Teachers can demonstrate different grammatical structures of languages through comparative analysis, helping students understand and adapt to a variety of grammatical patterns.

Challenge 3: Cultural Metaphors and Idioms

The use of cultural metaphors and idioms in cross-cultural reading can be puzzling for students, as these expressions are often deeply rooted in cultural backgrounds. Teachers can explain the cultural meanings behind the metaphors and idioms in the text, aiding students in better understanding and integrating into the context of the text. Encouraging students to delve deeper into the characteristics of different cultures cultivates their sensitivity to cultural elements.

Challenge 4: Ambiguity Caused by Cultural Differences

Cultural differences can lead to ambiguous interpretations of information. An expression that is normal in one culture may be interpreted as impolite or misleading in another. To address this challenge, teachers can use case analysis and discussions to help students identify and resolve ambiguities caused by cultural differences, fostering their sensitivity to cultural factors in reading.[5]

In overcoming these challenges, students not only enhance their language skills but also gain a deeper understanding and respect for the differences between cultures, laying a solid foundation for cross-cultural communication. The role of educators is to guide students beyond the limitations of language frameworks, stimulating their interest in and understanding of diverse cultures.

3.2. Cross-Cultural Reading: Challenging and Expanding Thought Processes

Cross-cultural reading is an insightful learning process, not only fostering language skills but also deeply expanding thinking. This process triggers thoughts that involve more than linguistic expressions; it encompasses different cultural modes of thinking, cognitive patterns, and concepts.

3.2.1. The Importance of Expanding Thought

Cross-cultural reading significantly promotes students' expansion of thought. Each culture harbors unique ways of thinking and problem-solving models, which are crucial for students to transcend narrow perspectives and broaden cognitive horizons. By engaging with texts from diverse cultures, students are guided to ponder why certain issues are discussed in one way within a culture and differently in another.[6]

3.2.2. Introduction of Multicultural Texts

Educators can introduce a variety of texts from different cultures, such as literary works, historical records, and news reports, to expose students to diverse modes of thinking. For instance, by comparing character traits and plot development in Eastern and Western literary works, students can appreciate different cultural attitudes towards individuals and collectives, thereby expanding their understanding of the complexity of human nature.

3.2.3. Cultural Background Analysis in Texts

In cross-cultural reading, students need to analyze the cultural background of texts and understand how cultural elements shape ways of thinking. This analysis not only aids in interpreting the text itself but also profoundly affects students' recognition of cultural differences. Educators can guide students to analyze cultural elements in texts, helping them see how culture influences thinking and expression.

3.2.4. Implementation of Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis is a powerful tool for expanding thought. By comparing texts from different cultures, students can identify and understand differences in thinking. This fosters sensitivity to multiculturalism and better prepares them for cross-cultural communication environments. Educators can encourage students to conduct comparative analyses, promoting more open and inclusive ways of thinking.

3.2.5. Promotion of Interdisciplinary Teaching

Cross-cultural reading should be combined with interdisciplinary teaching to enhance the expansion of thought. Integrating literary works with history, sociology, and other disciplines allows students to understand texts from multiple perspectives, cultivating their comprehensive thinking and interdisciplinary problem-solving abilities.

3.2.6. Guiding Deeper Thinking

Beyond surface-level text understanding, educators should guide students in deeper thinking. This can be achieved through open-ended questions, group discussions, and writing tasks. Deep thinking involves not just text interpretation but also students' profound insights into cultural, social, and human nature issues.

In this process, students not only learn language application but also develop understanding and respect for diverse cultures, expanding their thought processes. Thus, cross-cultural reading is not

just a cultivation of language skills but an intellectual adventure, leading students into a broader cognitive world.

3.3. Effective Ways to Enhance Students' Cultural Awareness

Enhancing students' cultural awareness is a crucial goal in cross-cultural reading education. Through effective methods, educators can help students better understand, respect, and adapt to different cultural backgrounds, nurturing their cross-cultural communication skills and global perspective.

3.3.1. Introducing Diverse Texts

A pivotal approach is the incorporation of texts from various cultures, including literary works, historical records, and news reports. By studying texts from different backgrounds, students can perceive the uniqueness of each culture, fostering interest in cultural diversity. Educators can choose representative texts, encourage in-depth reading and analysis, enabling students to understand cultural differences and experience different cultural thought processes.

3.3.2. Experiential Cultural Activities and Interactive Exchanges

Another avenue for enhancing cultural awareness is through experiential cultural activities and interactive exchanges. Organizing students to participate in cultural events, museum visits, and cultural festivals can provide a direct appreciation of cultural charm. Moreover, interactions with other students, educators, and cultural experts allow for sharing of cultural experiences, promoting cross-cultural understanding.

3.3.3. Developing Cross-Cultural Group Projects

Group projects are an effective way to elevate cultural awareness. Dividing students into groups representing specific cultures and having them research, present, and share cultural elements can trigger deep cultural cognition. Such projects can include cultural exhibitions, oral presentations, art displays, etc., enabling comprehensive understanding and respect for other cultures through active participation.

3.3.4. Guiding Cultural Comparison and Analysis

Educators can guide students in cultural comparison and analysis, helping them recognize the differences and similarities between cultures. Analyzing texts, films, and news reports, students can discern the variances in values, social structures, and behaviors among cultures. This stimulates thought, enhancing sensitivity and understanding of cultural contexts.

3.3.5. Integrating Cross-Cultural Education into Curriculum

Incorporating cross-cultural education into regular academic courses is crucial for enhancing cultural awareness. For example, integrating elements of cross-cultural communication in language courses or introducing multicultural concepts in social sciences. By incorporating cross-cultural content, students can develop cross-cultural thinking within formal disciplines, making their learning more systematic and profound.

3.3.6. Promoting Reflection and Open Discussions

Encouraging students to reflect is vital for cultural awareness. Classroom discussions, writing, and group sharing prompt students to ponder their cultural perceptions, understanding their individual roles and impacts within cultures. Open discussions allow students to share their cultural viewpoints,

cultivating an open and inclusive attitude towards different cultures.

3.3.7. Cross-Cultural Training and Cognitive Exercises

Introducing cross-cultural training and cognitive exercises can enhance students' adaptability to different cultures. Simulating cross-cultural scenarios, these trainings develop students' communication and collaboration skills in diverse cultural environments. Such training helps students understand and adapt to cultural differences, enhancing their responsiveness in cross-cultural settings.

By utilizing the above methods comprehensively, educators can effectively elevate students' cultural awareness in cross-cultural reading education. This not only aids students in understanding the world better but also lays a solid foundation for their future cross-cultural exchanges and international collaborations.

4. Empirical Study and Case Analysis

4.1. Research Design and Methodology

4.1.1. Research Design

The research design forms the foundation of the empirical study, determining its credibility and efficacy. We adopted an experimental research design, dividing students into experimental and control groups to observe the impact of cultural elements' introduction on cross-cultural reading. The experimental group received English reading courses with integrated cultural elements, while the control group underwent traditional English reading courses for contrast. This design helps us more clearly identify the impact of cultural elements' introduction, eliminating interference from other factors. By comparing both groups, we can more accurately determine whether the introduction of cultural elements significantly affects students' reading comprehension and cross-cultural cognition.

4.1.2. Participants

The selection of study participants is directly related to the study's generalizability and applicability. We chose students from two different grades to ensure a degree of universality in our results. To eliminate potential confounding factors, we matched gender, age, and English proficiency level between the experimental and control groups. This design ensures similarity in initial conditions between the two groups, enhancing the internal validity of the study. Through a broad selection of participants, we aim to understand more comprehensively the impact of cultural elements' introduction on students of different grades, genders, and language levels.

4.1.3. Instructional Content

The design of instructional content directly impacts the experiment's effectiveness. In the experimental group, we focused on introducing diverse cultural elements, including literary works, historical events, and social customs. In contrast, the control group continued with traditional English reading courses emphasizing grammar and vocabulary. This design highlights the impact of cultural elements' introduction on students' reading experience and cognition. Through this contrast, we can more clearly understand whether the introduction of cultural elements plays a positive role in reading courses, thus providing actionable suggestions for teaching practice.

Combining these three aspects of design will help us analyze the actual effects of introducing cultural elements on cross-cultural reading, providing strong support for teaching practices and future research.

4.2. Case Analysis: The Actual Effect of Introducing Cultural Elements on Cross-Cultural Reading

In our in-depth study, we conducted specific case analyses to explore the actual effects of introducing cultural elements on cross-cultural reading. Through detailed observation of individual students' learning performance and course experience, we discovered a series of beneficial actual effects.

First, students' interest in reading significantly increased. After taking courses with introduced cultural elements, students showed higher motivation and engagement. They exhibited intense interest in the diverse cultural elements introduced in the classroom, actively participating in cultural discussions, group activities, and seeking more knowledge about different cultures. This increased enthusiasm helps create a more interesting and attractive learning atmosphere.

Second, students made significant progress in reading comprehension. Through empirical data analysis, we found that students in the experimental group improved their reading comprehension test scores compared to the control group. In specific cases, a student, through a deep understanding of the learned cultural elements, successfully applied them to reading, enhancing their grasp of the text. This indicates the positive role of introducing cultural elements in promoting reading comprehension.

Additionally, students' cross-cultural communication skills were exercised. We observed that students were more willing to actively engage in cross-cultural communication by introducing texts from different cultures. In cases, some students actively participated in extracurricular cultural activities, sharing their culture with other students, enhancing team cohesion. This not only reflects the actual effectiveness of introducing cultural elements in expanding students' cross-cultural communication abilities but also provides them with a broader social platform.

Overall, the case analysis shows that introducing cultural elements positively and practically affects enhancing students' reading interest, comprehension level, and cross-cultural communication skills. These specific cases provide educators with actionable experiences in practice, emphasizing the importance and effectiveness of introducing cultural elements in cross-cultural reading education.

5. Conclusion

Through a literature review, theoretical analysis, and empirical research, this paper finds that the introduction of cultural elements and the practice of cross-cultural reading in English reading instruction have a positive impact on enhancing students' language abilities and cultural awareness. Therefore, future English education should focus more on integrating cultural elements into reading instruction to promote students' comprehensive development. Simultaneously, the practice of cross-cultural reading should become an essential component of English reading instruction to cultivate students' international perspectives and cross-cultural communication skills.

References

- [1] Jia Jia. "Teaching Cases of School-Based Curriculum of English Reading with Chinese Traditional Culture." *Jiangsu Education*. 2023(37): 83-84.
- [2] Chen Yang. "Incorporating Chinese Traditional Culture to Improve Comprehensive English Abilities." *Xueyuan Education*. 2023(20): 82-83+96.
- [3] Xu Fangzhou. "Exploration of Integrating Chinese Culture into University English Teaching from the Perspective of 'Cultural Confidence'." *Campus English*. 2023(37): 130-132.
- [4] Jiang Zhichun. "Strategies for Integrating Chinese Traditional Culture into University English Teaching: Taking Tea Culture as an Example." *Fujian Tea*. 2023, 45(09): 104-106.
- [5] Deng Yinqiao. "Construction of a Chinese Culture Communication Community in University English Teaching under the Output-Oriented Approach." *Journal of Heihe University*. 2023, 14(09): 91-94.
- [6] Chen Juan. "How to Integrate Cultural Elements into English Reading Instruction." *Language, Mathematics, and Foreign Languages Study (High School Edition Mid-Month)*. 2021(09): 63.