

A Survey Research on the Current Status of the Integration of Qinghai's Regional Culture into College English Instruction

Wenjing Zhang*

School of Foreign Languages, Qinghai University, Xining 810016, Qinghai, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

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Abstract: Language learning and cultural communication are inherently intertwined and mutually reinforcing. In the context of college English instruction, emphasizing “telling China’s stories well” aligns with the principles of foreign language education and inevitably promotes cultural exchange and mutual understanding across different cultures through foreign language learning. Many researchers have explored ways of cultivating students’ ability to communicate Chinese stories and spread Chinese culture in English. However, a few studies have been performed on exploring paths of incorporating regional culture into English language education. In particular, incorporating Qinghai’s indigenous cultural resources into college English teaching practice is rare. Therefore, a survey was conducted to ascertain the present situation concerning integrating Qinghai’s regional culture into college English teaching practice at Qinghai University. Based on the data from the survey, the present study discusses the results and implications obtained during the present teaching process and probes into practical strategies for the infiltration of Qinghai’s regional culture into college English teaching from the dimensions of curriculum, teaching materials, approaches, teachers’ professional development, and teaching evaluation, intending to achieve the goals of language teaching and cultural education in the college English course.

Keywords: Regional culture; College English instruction; Strategies

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1. Introduction

As a compulsory course for non-English majors in higher education institutions, college English is an effective means of enhancing students’ language proficiency. Moreover, it is a practical platform for them to carry out intercultural communication. For a long time, college English instruction has emphasized language skills training and information transfer while neglecting to emphasize the development of intercultural communication skills^[1]. Language, being the carrier and representation of culture, demands that we emphasize cultural inheritance and development in language learning^[2]. College English possesses the dual objectives of language

teaching and cultural education^[3]. It is argued that college English teaching must go beyond the mere delivery of linguistic knowledge; it is crucial to focus on conveying cultural essence. The concept of the new liberal arts has offered a new insight into incorporating regional culture into English instruction while inspiring innovative approaches to its implementation^[4]. It is the mission of every college and university to pass on and carry forward the excellent traditional Chinese culture^[5]. Regional culture represents the distinctive embodiment of a region's history, customs, ecology, craftsmanship, etc. It is an integral part of China's outstanding traditional culture, providing rich teaching resources for college English teaching. Qinghai Province is a region with a long history and rich cultural heritage. The province boasts remarkable tourism resources, vibrant ethnic minority traditions, and precious intangible cultural heritage resources. Therefore, it is recommended that we present Qinghai topics in college English instruction through a range of perspectives. In this way, language learning would be facilitated by enriching teaching content, and the spread and promotion of Qinghai's indigenous culture would be boosted to ensure the preservation and continued evolution of this rich cultural heritage. The present study focuses on the status quo of the integration of regional cultural resources into the college English course at Qinghai University, concluding with an exploration of the effective paths and methods of integrating indigenous culture into English instruction.

2. Survey research

2.1. Survey design

To better understand the specific implementation of the particular integration of Qinghai's indigenous culture in the present English teaching, a questionnaire was released among the 2023 and 2024 cohort students of Qinghai University. A total of 210 valid questionnaires were collected, comprising 97 male students (46%) and 113 female students (54%). For the distribution of survey respondents, first-year and second-year students accounted for 48.1% and 51.9%, respectively. The results and implications obtained during the present teaching process are analyzed using questionnaire data, and the effective paths and methods of integrating regional culture into English teaching are explored.

2.2. Analysis of the survey

2.2.1. The ways in which students gain knowledge and understanding of Qinghai's regional culture

According to the data from the questionnaire, students have a good knowledge of Qinghai's regional culture overall. More than 60% (64.76%) of respondents have a good understanding of Qinghai's indigenous culture, indicating that it has been effectively promoted to a certain extent. 28.1% of the students surveyed have learned about some cultural elements but are not clear about details, suggesting that some students have a general awareness of Qinghai's regional culture but do not know much about it. 5.71% have heard of it a little, knowing only that Qinghai has unique regional cultures. 1.43% are entirely unaware of them, which may be because a considerable proportion of students at Qinghai University are non-locals, which limits their knowledge of Qinghai's regional culture to a certain extent. Regarding how students learn about Qinghai's indigenous culture, narratives and traditions passed down by family elders (62.38%) play an essential role in cultural inheritance, which is a traditional and direct way. The second most popular way is learning through school courses (58.1%), which indicates that school education plays a significant role in promoting regional culture. Qinghai University has offered cultural courses with regional characteristics, providing students with rich learning resources to understand the regional culture. Third place goes to the Internet (57.60%), reflecting the fact that, in the digital

era, young people are more inclined to obtain information through digital media, leading to a decline in the use of traditional media such as TV, broadcasting, books, and newspapers, which accounted for a relatively low percentage. Because of the intuitive cultural experiences provided by field trips^[6], it not only enhances students' understanding and memory of regional culture but also increases their interest and participation in learning, accounting for a certain percentage (50.48%).

2.2.2. The degree to which Qinghai's regional culture is integrated into college English instruction

The analysis of the questionnaire data indicates that the majority of students (81.91%) have encountered the regional culture of Qinghai within the context of their college English courses. The findings demonstrate the integration of Qinghai's indigenous cultural resources within the college English curriculum, with these resources being presented in diverse forms. The proportion of students who selected the form of presentation indicates that teachers have endeavored to employ varied strategies for integrating regional culture into English courses. It is evident that reading English articles introducing Qinghai's regional characteristics is a prevalent and widely accepted approach. This pedagogical method enables students to broaden their knowledge of Qinghai's regional culture while concurrently acquiring English language competencies. The infiltration of Qinghai's indigenous culture into English vocabulary and grammar instruction is a successful method for enabling students to acquire Qinghai's regional culture without necessarily perceiving it as such^[7]. The other two forms of teaching, "English oral practice topics" and "English classroom presentation topics or English speeches," emphasize students' language output and practical application. By using the indigenous culture of Qinghai as a topic or theme in classroom teaching, students can practice their oral expression skills and, at the same time, enhance their understanding and expression of the regional culture. To facilitate students' ability to describe and explain regional culture in English, students are encouraged to write about Qinghai's regional culture in English. The viewing of English-dubbed and subtitled documentaries on Qinghai culture, together with the subsequent discussion and communication of these documentaries, will allow students to feel the charm of Qinghai indigenous culture more intuitively. Furthermore, discussion and communication will deepen their understanding of the culture further. Generally, it is evident that Qinghai's regional cultural resources have been incorporated into college English courses to a certain extent and are presented in various forms. In future college English teaching, this integration will be maintained. We will continue to give full play to the advantages of multiple forms of presentation to realize the goal of broader and deeper cultural education.

2.2.3. The interest and acceptance of students in Qinghai's regional culture

The questionnaire results reveal that an overwhelming majority (92.86%) of the students have a favorable attitude towards integrating Qinghai's regional cultural resources into college English classroom teaching, reflecting the students' expectations of and support for this teaching method. Only a small percentage of students (6.19%) selected the option that it was of no consequence and had little impact on English language learning. This group of students may adopt a neutral stance on this matter, perceiving this kind of integration as not having an obvious facilitating or hindering effect on their English learning. Alternatively, they are more concerned about English language knowledge, with relatively limited consideration given to cultural integration. The percentage of students who asserted that "There is no need, and English classrooms should prioritize common knowledge of English" is a mere 0.95%, indicating that a negligible number of students are in complete opposition to integrating Qinghai's regional cultural resources into college English classroom instruction. The vast majority of students acknowledge the significance of culture in language learning. In

light of the data above, it is imperative to emphasize the integration of Qinghai's indigenous cultural resources within the context of college English instruction. As for students exhibiting a neutral attitude, we can guide them to recognize the positive impact of culture on English learning. For the small number of students who hold opposing views, it is possible to understand their specific thoughts and communicate with them in a targeted manner to promote their understanding and acceptance of this teaching method. Overall, students have widely recognized and supported Qinghai's regional cultural infiltration into college English classroom teaching. It is important to note that this infiltration has significant teaching value and is worthy of further promotion and deepening.

2.2.4. The demand among students for the integration of Qinghai's regional culture in college English instruction

The highest proportion of the sample (65.24%) reported a preference for the "field visit experience," suggesting a preference for engaging with regional culture through an immersive approach. This approach has been shown to enhance interest and participation in learning and improve understanding and memory of regional culture. Additionally, it provides a real language environment for English learning. The majority of students (61.9%) selected the option of "expanding reading materials." This choice indicates that reading is a favored method among students for enhancing their comprehension of Qinghai's indigenous culture. The proportion of students choosing "presenting a theme speech" and "simulating a scenario" is the same, both at 54.29%. Theme-based speeches have been shown to improve students' oral expression and logical thinking skills while also allowing them to study and present Qinghai's regional culture in depth. Scenario simulations, on the other hand, have been demonstrated to improve students' ability to use English through role-playing in simulated situations. The "Display of Cultural Creation" (42.86%) is an initiative designed to motivate students to harness their creativity and showcase their comprehension of Qinghai's regional culture through the creation of paintings, writings, handicrafts, etc. This initiative functions as a platform for students to exhibit their work, thereby fostering their cultural literacy and innovation ability^[8]. Compared with other forms of teaching, the proportion of students opting for "group project work" is lower (31.9%), which may be attributed to the fact that cooperative learning demands higher levels of organization and time management. Alternatively, the practical operational challenges inherent in this approach could be a contributing factor. The absence of any alternative options being proposed by students suggests that no other formats are considered to be of interest to them beyond the current one. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the formats listed comprehensively cover the aspects that may interest students.

It is anticipated that the integration of Qinghai's indigenous cultural resources into college English classes will prioritize enhancing two specific competencies: cultural translation (69.52%) and intercultural communication (64.76%). Most students, approximately 70%, identified the accuracy of the English translation of Qinghai cultural terms as their primary objective, suggesting that a significant proportion of students expect to achieve greater precision in their translation of Qinghai cultural terms. This underscores their commitment to mastering strategies for translating culturally loaded words, intending to address the issue of semantic gaps in intercultural communication^[9]. The students' high expectations of "communicating regional culture appropriately" indicate their aspiration to articulate the distinctiveness of Qinghai's culture in English in intercultural communication contexts, thereby enhancing their proficiency and self-confidence in cultural exchange. The importance attributed to "stimulating the desire to explore regional culture" (52.38%) confirms the function of regional cultural resources as "cognitive scaffolding." That is to say, these resources activate

learning motivation through emotional resonance, thereby promoting students to shift from passive acceptance to learning to active construction of knowledge. Furthermore, they encourage cultivating habits and abilities to explore knowledge actively. 51.43% of the students anticipated reflecting on the regional culture of Qinghai and other cultures by comparing Chinese and foreign cultures. This anticipation reflects the students' ambition to evolve a more profound and comprehensive understanding through cultural comparison and reflection, and develop skills in logical argumentation and intercultural problem analysis. 41.43% of the students desired to obtain materials with more diversified perspectives, thus expanding their writing ideas. The expansion of English vocabulary accounted for the least longed competency (27.62%) among the set of competencies that students expected to improve. This observation may signify that students emphasize the capacity to apply language in cultural contexts instead of mere enlargement of vocabulary in isolation. In summary, integrating Qinghai's regional cultural resources into the college English teaching necessitates blending Qinghai cultural symbols. The fundamental concepts underpinning this approach are cultural translation and intercultural communication. It is of paramount importance that critical thinking training is embedded within cultural comparison activities ^[10] and that independent learning ability is fostered through project-based learning ^[11], forming a triad of mechanisms for the enhancement of "language-culture-thinking" competence.

3. An exploration of the strategies for integrating Qinghai's regional culture into college English instruction

3.1. Restructuring the curriculum

The college English curriculum system needs to be enriched through a multi-channel, hierarchical course setting, providing students with a more diversified range of learning choices. The program of study comprises compulsory courses, elective courses, and lectures on Qinghai's regional culture, which will be adopted to establish a special section on Qinghai culture within the college's English curriculum system. This initiative allows the allocation of a designated portion of class time to instruction on regional cultural themes, which can be undertaken within the framework of regular college English courses ^[12]. Moreover, in the existing English elective course entitled "Introducing Chinese Culture in English" offered to second-year students, elements of Qinghai's indigenous culture are systematically infiltrated under the themes of the course chapters. Furthermore, a selection of courses, including "Amazing Qinghai," is to be offered to facilitate an in-depth and systematic understanding of Qinghai's rich and diversified regional culture. Concurrently, specialized English lectures on indigenous cultures are to be held regularly.

3.2. Redesigning the teaching materials

Based on the interdisciplinary concept of "regional culture + English" and the "collation + translation" method ^[13], a comprehensive tapping and mining of the regional cultural resources of Qinghai has been undertaken to establish an extensive and multifaceted collection of teaching resources. Qinghai cultural resources are categorized according to themes. With the assistance of AI tools and technologies, English news reports and audio-visual materials related to Qinghai culture are collected and collated from the perspectives of material mining, content generation, and content expansion ^[14], aiming to establish an English teaching resource bank. Qinghai's regional culture is the theme of this multimodal English teaching resource library, which contains audio, video, pictures, texts, etc. These materials offer a rich and diversified selection of reading and audio-visual materials for students and supplement the existing English teaching materials.

3.3. Refining teaching methods

The emphasis is placed on the in-depth coordination of the first and second classrooms to facilitate the establishment of a trinity teaching mode comprising theoretical learning, cultural experience, and practical application. Innovative teaching methods such as situational and project-based learning should be proactively adopted in the initial classroom teaching practice. Through the authentic language situation, students can learn by doing. The design of practical projects based on the theme of Qinghai culture aims to facilitate students' in-depth internalization and comprehensive application of knowledge in a practical context. Practices are increased in the second classroom. Building a multi-level and multi-dimensional practice teaching system ensures that students improve their English proficiency and deepen their understanding of Qinghai's regional culture.

3.4. Enhancing teachers' professional development

To broaden their teaching horizons and knowledge reserves, English teachers should strengthen their cultural literacy through self-study, research, and training. At the same time, they should actively explore effective paths for integrating regional cultural resources into classroom instruction. Secondly, teachers should regularly carry out experience exchanges and be encouraged to constantly reflect on their teaching strategies, solve practical teaching problems through sharing and mutual learning, and explore the path of blending regional culture and language learning to effectively improve their intercultural teaching ability.

3.5. Optimizing teaching evaluation

It is crucial to measure students' learning and the improvement of their literacy in multiple dimensions by establishing a diversified evaluation system in which the learning of regional culture and the cultivation of values are incorporated into the scope of evaluation of college English teaching. In terms of the assessment methods, a three-dimensional evaluation framework will be devised, encompassing written tests, oral expression, and presentation of project results. With a focus on process evaluation, the study pays particular attention to students' participation, learning attitude, and value cultivation in learning about regional culture^[15]. In the summative evaluation, content related to Qinghai's regional culture should be added. In this way, teachers' and students' enthusiasm to explore the regional culture of Qinghai is stimulated to promote the realization of the goals of language teaching and cultural education in the college English course.

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