

Challenges and Countermeasures in Integrating Chinese Traditional Culture into English Listening and Speaking Course

Jiaxue Cheng*

English Department, School of Foreign Languages, Guangzhou City University of Technology, Guangzhou 510800, Guangdong Province, China

*Corresponding author: Jiaxue Cheng, chengjiaxue_111@163.com

Copyright: © 2024 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: Foreign language education involves not only language education but also cultural education. It is the new mission of today's foreign language education to integrate Chinese traditional culture into foreign language teaching and cultivate foreign language talents who can tell Chinese stories well and spread Chinese voice. As a basic course for English majors, English Listening and Speaking faces many challenges when it is integrated into Chinese traditional culture, such as complex teaching content, limited teaching resources, insufficient teachers' literacy, and students' listening and speaking difficulties. In order to solve these problems, teachers and universities should work together to sort out the connotation of Chinese traditional culture, develop audio-visual teaching materials, organize teacher training, and innovate teaching methods, so as to effectively promote the connection between Chinese traditional culture and English Listening and Speaking curriculum system.

Keywords: Chinese traditional culture; English Listening and Speaking course; Higher foreign language education

Online publication: September 30, 2024

1. Introduction

Foreign language education is not only the cultivation of language skills but also the communication and call for cultural diversity^[1]. Since the reform and opening up, China's foreign language education has developed vigorously. However, foreign language learners often neglect the importance of Chinese culture when acquiring foreign languages and cultures, which leads to the phenomenon of "Chinese culture aphasia." Higher education urgently needs to "cultivate a group of new people who know, love, understand China, and tell Chinese stories well"^[2]. Therefore, it is of profound practical significance and necessity to integrate Chinese culture into higher foreign language teaching and cultivate students' ability to disseminate Chinese culture. As an essential part of Chinese culture, Chinese traditional culture is the foundation of Chinese civilization and the spiritual lifeblood of the Chinese nation. However, how to combine the characteristics of foreign language courses, and what and how to integrate them, is a difficult problem faced by foreign language teachers.

As a basic course for English majors in colleges and universities across the country, the English Listening and Speaking course undertakes the important task of improving English majors' listening and speaking skills, which are closely related to the ability to spread Chinese culture. Therefore, this paper focuses on the English Listening and Speaking course and explores the challenges and countermeasures of the integration of Chinese traditional culture into the course.

2. Traditional Chinese culture and foreign language teaching

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars and teachers have explored and practiced the value and strategies of integrating traditional Chinese culture into foreign language teaching. The incorporation of traditional Chinese culture aligns with the development of the discipline, serving as a source of wisdom for the "Chinese characteristics" of foreign language education and providing important ideological support for the subject ^[3]. It is essential for foreign language educators to integrate excellent traditional Chinese culture into the teaching process, focus on the ideological connotation of cultivating learners' intercultural competence, and be oriented towards "moral education and serving the country." Emphasis should be placed on students' inheritance and dissemination of Chinese culture, highlighting Chinese elements, achieving a transformation in discourse methods, and nurturing world citizens and international talent with a sense of national identity ^[4]. The integration of traditional Chinese culture is also a key aspect in enhancing college students' confidence in their national culture ^[5]. Foreign language teaching in universities provides crucial talent support for China's participation in global exchanges and the promotion of Chinese culture. By incorporating traditional Chinese culture into foreign language curricula, students can better understand and appreciate the charm and essence of traditional culture while learning the language. Furthermore, the integration of traditional Chinese culture can cultivate learners' humanistic qualities and enhance their language skills ^[6]. Engaging with historical stories, poetry, and literary allusions not only deepens students' understanding of traditional culture but also fosters their sense of social responsibility and historical mission. By combining foreign language teaching with traditional culture, we can utilize the function of cultural education to help learners develop positive, independent personality traits, nourish their souls with profound Chinese cultural heritage, and assist them in establishing correct views on life, values, the world, and culture ^[6].

Regarding strategies, Guo and Ma suggested that pathway selection should consider aspects such as content integration, textbook alignment, skill enhancement, methodological innovation, and effectiveness assessment to promote the connection between excellent traditional Chinese culture and higher foreign language education systems ^[3]. Qiu believed that teachers can organically integrate excellent traditional Chinese culture by adjusting teaching content, developing diversified teaching methods, and constructing a "whole-process education" model before, during, and after class ^[6]. Meng and Ding emphasized the need to integrate teaching resources, build a teaching system from a holistic perspective, and innovate teaching models to create dynamic classrooms ^[5]. Tang argued that we should ensure the central position of excellent traditional Chinese culture in textbooks and examinations, and carry out learning and practical activities to cultivate students' traditional virtues ^[7]. The aforementioned research presents valuable concepts and methods, but few have addressed the specific challenges and strategies of integrating traditional Chinese culture into specific courses.

3. Challenges of integrating Chinese traditional culture into English Listening and Speaking course

3.1. Limited audiovisual teaching resources

Teaching resources related to Chinese traditional culture are abundant, especially in the modern Internet environment where access to resources has become more convenient. In addition to various teaching materials provided by publishers, there is also a vast amount of online resources related to Chinese traditional culture. However, most of these resources exist in textual forms such as e-books, articles, and research reports, which are inadequate for English courses that focus on audiovisual content.

English Listening and Speaking course emphasizes listening and speaking practice, so teaching resources integrating Chinese traditional culture should primarily be in video or audio formats to meet the teaching needs of the course. For example, the “Understanding Contemporary China” series of textbooks provides abundant textual resources for English extensive reading, intensive reading, and speech classes, but falls short in terms of resources for English audiovisual courses. Despite the richness of content, this series lacks specialized video or audio materials for audiovisual speaking courses, making it challenging for teachers to find suitable resources to support listening and speaking training.

Teachers often have to rely on a limited number of existing audiovisual materials or conduct extensive searches online to find appropriate resources. However, the challenges faced by teachers in this process cannot be ignored. Firstly, although there are many videos and audio resources available online, not all of them are suitable for teaching purposes. Teachers need to filter these resources to ensure content accuracy and cultural appropriateness, and the listening difficulty of these resources must match the students’ actual level. This process is not only time-consuming but also presents a significant challenge in finding resources that meet the requirements.

Moreover, even if suitable resources are found, they may require certain modifications and adjustments to be better integrated into classroom teaching. This includes editing audio and video content, adding voiceovers, subtitles, etc., to ensure that students have the best learning experience in their listening and speaking practice. These tasks require teachers to have certain technical skills and creativity, which adds to the difficulty of implementing the resources into teaching.

3.2. Difficulty in systematizing teaching content

Traditional Chinese culture is profound and covers a wealth of history, art, philosophy, and social customs, while English Listening and Speaking course has only two class hours per week and only 32 class hours in a semester, which poses a great difficulty in effectively integrating such a wide range of cultural content into the course. With such a limited amount of teaching time, teachers are challenged to sift through the many cultural themes to ensure that the selected content is both representative and relevant to students’ language learning needs. Each aspect of traditional culture has a deep background and complex connotations, such as poetry, theatre, festivals, and customs, which need to be condensed and refined in a very short period of time to suit the pace of the course and students’ receptive abilities.

Furthermore, how to systematize these cultural contents so that students can understand and master them systematically is also a huge challenge. Teachers need to design a reasonable teaching framework within the limited class time, effectively integrating the scattered cultural elements, which requires teachers not only to have an in-depth understanding of the cultural content but also strong teaching organization and content integration capabilities. The arrangement of each lesson needs to be carefully planned to ensure that students can acquire sufficient cultural information within the limited time, while also improving their listening and speaking skills.

At the same time, the limited classroom time also means that teachers must make difficult choices when selecting teaching materials and activities. Choosing the most interesting and meaningful content from diverse

cultural resources, and then effectively applying them in listening and speaking training undoubtedly increases the complexity of teaching design.

3.3. Insufficient ability of teachers to disseminate traditional Chinese culture

The insufficient ability of teachers in the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture is reflected in two aspects: first, the lack of traditional Chinese cultural literacy, and second, the inadequate ability to express traditional Chinese culture in English. Currently, many foreign language teachers in universities face challenges in terms of cultural literacy, specifically in the depth of understanding of Chinese culture and personal cultivation. Teachers often have a basic grasp of traditional cultural knowledge, but their in-depth understanding of culture and inner spiritual comprehension is not thorough enough, which affects their ability to effectively convey the essence of Chinese culture in the classroom.

Furthermore, teachers also face significant difficulties in expressing traditional Chinese culture in English. This is not just a language expression problem but also involves how to accurately convert complex cultural backgrounds and concepts into English content that is easy for students to understand. Teachers need to have the ability to accurately transform the essence of Chinese culture into the target language, including choosing appropriate vocabulary and expressions, so that students can have a real and profound experience of Chinese culture in the listening and speaking process.

3.4. Students' difficulty in listening and speaking

Among the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, listening and speaking have always been challenging for Chinese English learners, especially when traditional Chinese culture involves many culturally specific and non-daily vocabulary. This difficulty is particularly evident in listening and speaking and it deeply impacts students' understanding and expression of cultural content.

Firstly, in terms of listening, students often feel confused when facing listening materials that involve traditional cultural terms and backgrounds due to a lack of relevant cultural knowledge and background information. For instance, when hearing content related to ancient Chinese festivals, traditional customs, or historical allusions, students may find it difficult to grasp the deeper meanings. This can result in missing or misunderstanding information when listening to related content.

Secondly, in terms of speaking, students often struggle to find appropriate vocabulary or expressions when trying to describe traditional Chinese cultural phenomena in English. Many concepts, customs, and values in traditional culture may not have direct equivalents in English, making it challenging for students to express themselves. This not only affects their confidence during cultural exchanges but also hinders their ability to accurately convey Chinese culture to others.

Moreover, these difficulties also affect students' deeper understanding and application of Chinese culture. The lack of proficiency in listening and speaking prevents students from fully showcasing cultural depth during discussions and sharing of cultural topics, limiting their comprehensive grasp and application of cultural content.

4. Strategies for integrating Chinese traditional culture into English Listening and Speaking course

4.1. Developing new textbooks and utilizing modern information technology

To address the challenges faced by teachers in searching for audiovisual teaching resources, developing new textbooks that incorporate Chinese traditional culture is a direct and effective solution. As the core tool in

teaching, textbooks directly determine the content provided by teachers and the standards of teaching methods.

Firstly, cultural content should be balanced in textbook design. Textbooks should integrate both Chinese and foreign cultural materials, reflecting the uniqueness of Chinese traditional culture through a reasonable proportion while also introducing cultures from other countries and regions. This approach allows students to understand and absorb the essence of different cultures through comparison. Specifically, the textbook can include units comparing Chinese and Western cultures, enabling students to deepen their understanding of Chinese culture and other cultures' similarities and differences while learning English.

Secondly, core concepts of Chinese traditional culture, historical anecdotes, customs, and traditions should be incorporated into textbooks using appropriate language difficulty and video formats. Through dual sensory stimulation of visual and auditory inputs, students can better understand the cultural background and experience the rich content of Chinese culture. For example, short videos about traditional Chinese festivals, stories of ancient celebrities, and the process of traditional crafts can effectively help students enhance their language skills in authentic cultural contexts.

Moreover, modern information technology can play a significant role in supplementing teaching resources. Teachers can use technologies like ChatGPT to convert textual resources into audio materials, providing a wider variety of listening materials. Additionally, technological tools can adjust difficult listening texts to a more suitable difficulty level, aligning with students' actual proficiency, thereby more effectively improving their listening comprehension skills.

4.2. Systematically integrating the essence of Chinese traditional culture

The first question that needs to be answered in integrating the excellent traditional Chinese culture into higher foreign language education is "What to integrate?" The "Guiding Outline for the Construction of Ideological and Political Courses in Institutions of Higher Education" clearly states that "education should guide students to deeply understand the essence of thought and the contemporary value of the ideas of benevolence, people-centeredness, honesty, justice, harmony, and the pursuit of great unity in the excellent traditional Chinese culture, and guide students to inherit the Chinese cultural context, with a Chinese heart, sentiment, and flavor"^[8]. This provides a basic guideline for integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture into foreign language education.

In general, the spiritual essence of excellent traditional Chinese culture includes the following core aspects:

- (1) Benevolence and etiquette: Emphasizing care and respect between people, advocating the Confucian idea of benevolence and etiquette norms.
- (2) Harmony and moderation: Advocating natural and social harmony, pursuing the golden mean, and avoiding extremes.
- (3) Respecting heaven and ancestors: Respecting nature and ancestors, emphasizing the idea of the unity of man and nature.
- (4) Perseverance: Encouraging individuals to constantly strive and self-improve in the face of adversity, reflecting the tenacity and fighting spirit of the Chinese nation.
- (5) Integrity and responsibility: Emphasizing personal integrity and social responsibility, promoting social stability and trust.

These basic spiritual essences can be embodied in the following specific topics:

- (1) Philosophical thoughts: Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, and Legalism, emphasizing ethics, natural harmony, and social governance.
- (2) Literature and art: Ancient poetry, prose, opera, calligraphy, and painting, reflecting the aesthetic view and creative style of the Chinese nation.

- (3) Historical classics: The *Book of Changes*, *Analects*, *Tao Te Ching*, *Records of the Grand Historian*, recording the history, culture, and wisdom of the Chinese nation.
- (4) Traditional festivals: Spring Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Dragon Boat Festival, reflecting the traditional customs and celebration methods of Chinese culture.
- (5) Customs and habits: Traditional etiquette, family ethics, and festival customs, shaping the social behavioral norms and lifestyle of the Chinese nation.
- (6) Traditional skills: Traditional Chinese medicine, traditional handicrafts, and traditional architecture, demonstrating the practical technology and artistic aesthetics of Chinese culture.

Since English Listening and Speaking course is usually offered for four consecutive semesters in the first and second years, teachers should treat these four semesters as a whole and systematically integrate the basic elements of traditional Chinese culture into the course teaching.

4.3. Enhancing the ability of foreign language teachers to promote traditional Chinese culture

To address the issues of inadequate understanding of traditional Chinese culture among university foreign language teachers and their limited ability to promote it in the classroom, universities can implement the following measures. Firstly, universities should regularly provide systematic training courses on traditional Chinese culture for teachers, covering topics such as cultural history, philosophical thought, and traditional arts to enhance their cultural understanding. Secondly, universities could organize teaching competitions focused on the promotion of traditional Chinese culture, encouraging teachers to innovate their teaching methods and techniques, thus improving their teaching abilities and knowledge base. Additionally, establishing cultural exchange platforms and inviting cultural experts to give lectures and hold seminars can offer teachers practical opportunities to further enhance their ability to promote traditional Chinese culture in the classroom.

4.4. Innovating teaching methods

Teachers should break away from traditional teaching methods and instead adopt an output-oriented approach to innovate teaching methods and enhance classroom effectiveness. For example, in teaching based on the production-oriented approach, teachers can design oral output tasks related to Chinese traditional culture, such as role-playing situational dialogues of traditional festivals or simulating communication activities in ancient cultural settings. In the enabling phase, teachers can use listening activities to input language, content, and discourse frameworks to help students overcome output difficulties in the motivating phase and form a complete language knowledge structure. In the assessing phase, a teachers-student collaborative assessment is conducted, encouraging students to improve the quality of oral output through peer and self-assessment. This method of “assessing as learning” not only enhances students’ language expression skills but also deepens their understanding of Chinese traditional culture.

Furthermore, teachers can fully utilize modern information technology to break the time and space constraints of traditional teaching through blended learning. With the help of online learning platforms and virtual classrooms, teachers can provide students with more flexible teaching activities, such as online group discussions and virtual role-playing. These activities not only increase student engagement but also encourage them to apply the knowledge they have learned in practical scenarios, facilitating better understanding and application of the learned content. Through these innovative teaching methods and technological means, teachers can effectively enhance students’ oral expression skills and deeply promote Chinese traditional culture during the process.

5. Conclusion

Integrating traditional Chinese culture into foreign language education and cultivating a group of talents who can effectively tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese voices is a new mission entrusted to contemporary foreign language education by the times. Although English Listening and Speaking course currently faces several challenges, teachers and universities should work together from various aspects, such as textbook development, teacher training and development, and innovation in teaching methods. This effort aims to address the difficulties of integrating traditional Chinese culture into the English Listening and Speaking curriculum. Ultimately, this approach will effectively nourish students' spiritual world with traditional Chinese culture, enhance students' cultural confidence, and improve their ability to communicate Chinese culture across cultures.

Funding

Special Group on Philosophy and Social Science Planning of Guangdong Province “The Construction and Practice of the POA-Based Teaching Mode of Integrating Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture into English Listening, and Speaking Course for English Majors” (GD23WZXY02-06)

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Jiang H, 2019, Some Ideas on Foreign Language Education Reform in the New Era. *Foreign Language World*, 2019(1): 13–16.
- [2] Wu Y, 2022, Chinese-Style Modernization and Innovation in Higher Education Reform. *China Higher Education Research*, (11): 21–29.
- [3] Guo J, Ma J, 2023, The Value, Goals, and Pathways of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into Higher Education Foreign Language Teaching. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 44(04): 63–68.
- [4] Sun Y, 2021, *Research on Intercultural Foreign Language Teaching*, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Beijing.
- [5] Meng X, Ding J, 2024, The Value and Pathways of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into College Foreign Language Teaching, *China Culture Daily*, February 29, 2024, (007).
- [6] Qiu Y, 2023, Exploring the Practice of Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into Foreign Language Curriculum Ideological and Political Teaching. *Language and Culture Research*, 30(05): 90–94.
- [7] Tang B, 2022, Pathways for Integrating Traditional Chinese Culture into University Foreign Language Teaching. *Journal of Shanxi University of Finance and Economics*, 44(S1): 196–198.
- [8] Ministry of Education, 2020, Notice on Issuing the Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Courses, viewed May 20, 2024, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2020-06/06/content_5517606.htm

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.