

Research on Cultural Identity and Development Strategies of English Majors in the New Era

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Abstract: The core goal of English teaching is to cultivate comprehensive and applied talents with solid English language foundation, strong language application ability, as well as certain humanistic and social science literacy, critical thinking ability, innovation ability and self-development ability. The core approach to achieving this teaching goal lies in strengthening students' cultural identity. With the rapid development of science and technology, globalization has become an irresistible trend of the times. Through advanced information technology and developed mass media, different cultures around the world are accelerating exchanges and integration, placing us in a complex multicultural environment. Taking cultural identity as the research entry point, this paper, based on a practical problem-oriented perspective, explores students' cognitive understanding and value orientation towards their mother tongue, target language, and their surface and deep cultures, and then proposes targeted development strategies. It aims to help English majors form rational cognition and value judgment of the two types of cultures, and promote the optimization and improvement of English education quality.

Keywords: Cultural identity; Target language culture; Native culture; Development strategies

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1. Problem statement

English learning is by no means merely the acquisition of language skills, but also involves the understanding and cognition of related cultures. Language and culture are inherently inseparable, there is no language that exists independently of culture, and the use of language is always influenced and restricted by culture. For this reason, the important value of cultural identity for foreign language learning has attracted increasing attention. This paper mainly addresses the following three issues:

- (1) The current situation of foreign language learning in a multicultural context: How to objectively understand the impact of English learning on the cultural identity of English majors from the perspective of the relationship between language and culture.
- (2) The era demand for enhancing national cultural soft power: Giving full play to the educational function

of university culture, guiding English majors to consciously inherit and carry forward excellent traditional Chinese culture, and helping students effectively and correctly learn from the essence of Western culture are not only important measures to enhance national cultural soft power but also an inevitable requirement of the times.

(3) The cultivation of core values of contemporary English majors: Exploring effective strategies to enhance English majors' identification with excellent traditional Chinese culture, further deepening their cognitive depth and breadth of traditional Chinese culture, and enabling them to enhance their humanistic literacy, national sense of responsibility and socialist core values under the influence of excellent Chinese culture have very important contemporary significance and far-reaching impact^[1-4].

2. Investigation and discussion on the current situation of cultural identity of undergraduates in Shiyuan College of Nanning Normal University

2.1. Research objects

The research objects are 132 English major undergraduates from Shiyuan College of Nanning Normal University. A total of 132 questionnaires were distributed and 132 valid ones were collected, including 46 freshmen, 43 sophomores, and 43 juniors. The gender distribution of the sample is 11.4% male and 88.6% female; 47.8% of the samples are from urban areas and 52.2% from rural areas.

2.2. Research methods

This study mainly investigates the current situation of college students' cultural identity, adopting two methods: questionnaires and interviews^[5-7].

2.3. Questionnaire Survey

2.3.1. Language and cultural identity

Table 1. Statistical data on language and cultural identity (%)

| Items | Strongly Agree | Agree | Not Sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| I hope to learn English expressions of Chinese culture to promote English learning | 50% | 20% | 8% | 15% | 7% |
| It is necessary to introduce Chinese culture to foreigners when communicating with them | 58% | 26% | 10% | 6% | 0% |
| English teachers should increase the proportion of explanations on cultural background knowledge related to China and English-speaking countries | 56% | 43% | 0% | 1% | 0% |
| To learn English, one only needs to study the target language culture, and there is no need to invest energy in learning Chinese culture | 0% | 15% | 0% | 45% | 40% |
| Amid the current upsurge in foreign language learning, some people advocate paying more attention to the study of Chinese and excellent traditional Chinese culture | 20% | 55% | 5% | 14% | 6% |

From the survey data on language and culture (Table 1), it can be found that the vast majority of students hold a positive attitude towards the role of Chinese culture and English-speaking countries' culture in English

teaching. They expect teachers to increase the proportion of explanations on these two types of cultures in English classes, believing it is necessary to improve their ability to express Chinese culture in English to spread Chinese culture to foreigners, and also hope to further understand the relevant cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries. Only a few students have vague cognition or believe that culture does not have a positive promoting effect on English teaching.

2.3.2. Cultural behavior identity

Table 2. Statistical data on cultural behavior (%)

| Items | Approve | Indifferent | Disapprove |
|---|---------|-------------|------------|
| I prefer celebrating Western festivals (e.g., Christmas, Valentine's Day, April Fool's Day) | 89% | 4% | 7% |
| I tend to choose Western fast food and beverages such as KFC, McDonald's, and Coca-Cola in daily life | 80% | 7% | 13% |
| Going Dutch when dining out | 95% | 3% | 2% |
| I think Western music, movies and other audio-visual works are better than domestic ones | 55% | 10% | 35% |

From the data in **Table 2**, it can be concluded that Chinese college students tend to prefer Western festivals to a certain extent in terms of cultural behavior, reflecting their relatively low identification with Chinese culture in the field of festivals. College students also generally recognize the popularity of Western fast food in China. Especially in terms of payment habits when dining out, 95% of students support the Western practice of going Dutch. Regarding the view that "Western music, movies and other audio-visual works are superior to Chinese works," students hold a more rational attitude; only 55% of students agree, 35% clearly disagree, and 10% are in a state of vague or uncertain cognition. Overall, college students have a high degree of identification with Western culture in specific cultural behaviors.

2.3.3. Value identity

Table 3. Statistical data on value identity (%)

| Items | Strongly Agree | Agree | Not Sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| In the process of learning about foreign cultures, do you think some concepts in traditional Chinese culture are relatively imperfect? | 14% | 23% | 8% | 35% | 20% |
| Many young people in society advocate Western individualistic values. What is your opinion? | 9% | 36% | 0% | 50% | 5% |

The two questions in **Table 3** focus on Chinese and Western values. From the data, although less than half of the students believe that traditional Chinese culture is inferior to foreign cultures and that Western individualistic values are more worthy of advocacy, the proportion is close to 50%. This result indicates that the values of contemporary college students are significantly impacted and influenced by Western culture, and thus tend to tilt towards the West in the shaping and formation of their own values.

2.3.4. Religious and political system cultural identity

Table 4. Statistical data on religious and political system cultural identity (%)

| Items | Completely Unacceptable | Partially Unacceptable | Not Sure | Basically Acceptable | Completely Acceptable |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Western countries often criticize China's socialist democracy. Can you accept it? | 35% | 52% | 8% | 5% | 0% |
| Many young people now recognize Western political systems such as democracy and the rule of law. Can you accept it? | 2% | 21% | 10% | 56% | 21% |
| Many people now join Western religions such as Christianity. Can you accept it? | 3% | 20% | 3% | 29% | 45% |

Combined with the survey data on college students' identification with Chinese and Western religious and political cultures in **Table 4**, the following conclusions can be drawn: Faced with Western countries' frequent criticisms of China's socialist democracy, college students hold positive and correct values, with 87% clearly expressing their firm stance in safeguarding Chinese culture. At the same time, the data shows that most college students recognize the advanced nature of Western democratic, political, and legal system cultures and are willing to accept them. In the survey on the acceptance of Western religious culture, 74% of college students hold a tolerant attitude towards Chinese people joining Christianity. Although this result does not mean they have the willingness to join themselves, it at least reflects their tendency to identify with Western religious culture.

The summary of the questionnaire survey data shows that contemporary college students generally tend to identify with Chinese culture, but the degree is not very high (accounting for nearly half). At the same time, more than half of college students identify with Western culture and values in many aspects, and even tend to favor Western culture in behavioral experiences. This indicates that China's foreign language teaching has indeed affected college students' identification with Chinese culture to a certain extent. Some college students also show certain confusion in cultural identity, leading to vague or uncertain choices. Therefore, we must not take it lightly, we need to guard against the gradual penetration of Western cultural imperialism into college students, and attach importance to strengthening students' Chinese cultural identity education in foreign language teaching.

2.4. Interviews

2.4.1. Purpose and content of interviews

The purpose of this interview is to understand the specific level of college students' cultural identity and their ability to express Chinese cultural content in English. The interview content consists of three questions. Three students were randomly selected from freshmen, sophomores and juniors respectively to complete the interviews independently. The specific interview content is as follows:

- (1) What problems do you think exist in the current foreign language and cultural teaching classrooms?
How should they be solved?
- (2) How would you rate students' ability to express Chinese culture in English: Low Average High Performance?
- (3) What suggestions do you have for integrating target language culture and native culture in foreign language and cultural teaching?

2.4.2. Conclusions and analysis of interviews

After nearly a month of interviews, the nine interviewees reflected common problems in foreign language and cultural teaching classrooms: Firstly, the cultural content involved is relatively insufficient; secondly, teachers talk more about Western culture and barely mention Chinese culture in class; thirdly, the form of teaching cultural content by teachers is relatively single and boring. More than 50% of students believe that their ability to express Chinese culture in English is low; 30% think it is average; 20% believe there is great room for improvement. Specifically, they struggle with untranslatable keywords in oral expression, unsmooth content, occasional inability to express ideas accurately, and even difficulty understanding Chinese texts. The main reasons include insufficient cultural input, single practice methods, and a lack of learning motivation. Regarding solutions and suggestions, five interviewees proposed that teachers can integrate relevant cultural knowledge into classroom teaching. For example, targeted exercises can be carried out in the first few minutes of class, focusing on cultural knowledge of China and English-speaking countries, with special emphasis on cultural differences. Students can be guided to compare Chinese and Western cultures through discussions or debates. Taking the teaching of etiquette-related knowledge as an example, students can be organized to discuss differences between Chinese and Western behaviors, eating habits, etc. When teachers explain texts involving Western cultural background knowledge, they should first remind students to pay attention to it, then analyze similarities and differences in combination with Chinese culture, and answer questions promptly. Another six interviewees suggested making full use of audio-visual resources and intuitive teaching aids to help students better absorb and experience their own and foreign cultures.

The interview results indicate that contemporary Chinese college students are quite lacking in the ability to express Chinese cultural content in English, which is consistent with the fact that we have not paid sufficient attention to Chinese culture in daily English teaching^[8]. During the interviews, it was found that most students want to express familiar poems or topics but do not know how, reflecting their strong interest in Chinese culture and desire to improve their ability to express Chinese culture in English.

4. Discussion on cultural identity education in English teaching

In the context of cultural globalization, various national cultures not only show distinct differences and rich diversity but also their cultural identities encounter many challenges and impacts. For a long time, China's foreign language education has tended to separate from the mother tongue and mother tongue culture, and has an insufficient understanding of the value of mother tongue culture in foreign language teaching. This has led to the long-term lack of autonomy in Chinese English teaching, which has become a simple copy of British and American English, disconnected from the actual needs of Chinese society^[9,10]. This model of "valuing learning over application" has to a certain extent, affected students' formation of objective and positive identification with their own culture. Particularly importantly, as the backbone of the country's future and the core force of social development, the cultural identity of contemporary college students directly affects the inheritance and continuity of national culture.

Based on this, to promote the cultivation of college students' cultural identity, efforts can be made in the following four aspects:

- (1) Build correct cultural cognition: Optimize the cultural attitude orientation in English education;
- (2) Create cross-cultural contexts: Improve the cultural acceptance process in English education;

- (3) Cultivate cultural skills: Optimize cross-cultural communication strategies in English education;
- (4) Deepen educators' humanistic care: Improve the main cultural literacy of English teachers.

5. Conclusion

It is difficult to learn a language well without understanding the cultural characteristics of that language. Language carries cultural connotations, and it is unrealistic to learn a language well by separating it from its cultural background. On the contrary, the more thoroughly one grasps the historical culture, traditional customs, lifestyle, and details of the country where the target language is spoken, the more accurately one can understand and flexibly use the language. Based on this, two advocacies are put forward: (1) Integrate mother tongue culture: Avoid the generation of subtractive cultural identity; (2) Explore the core of target language culture: Help cultivate productive cultural identity.

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