

From “Tool Rationality” to “Cultural Self-Awareness”: The Ecological Construction of Cross-Cultural Competence in College English

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of integrated global economy, international exchanges have become increasingly frequent, making the cultivation of cross-cultural competence in college English teaching more and more vital. The instrumental thinking that prioritizes the delivery of linguistic knowledge and examination-oriented skill training in traditional teaching can hardly meet the talent cultivation requirements of the new era. Based on this, this paper mainly discusses the ecological construction paths of cross-cultural competence in college English teaching, so as to provide theoretical references for the reform of college English education models and the cultivation of cross-cultural talents in the new era.

Keywords: Cross-culture; College English; International exchange; Tool rationality; Cultural self-awareness

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1. Introduction

Under the concept of modern education, college English teaching is no longer confined to the delivery of linguistic tools and examination-oriented ability training. Instead, it undertakes the core educational mission of fostering students' cross-cultural communication literacy, cultural critical thinking and cultural confidence. For a long time, domestic college English teaching has been dominated by instrumental rationality. Teaching practices overemphasize standardized training of vocabulary, grammar and exam skills, simply regarding language as a communication tool and a carrier for further education ^[1]. With the continuous deepening of globalized exchanges, cultural communication has grown more frequent, and greater importance has been attached to cultivating college students' cross-cultural cognition, cultural critical thinking and the ability to interpret local culture. In view of this, universities need to reconstruct the cultivation ecology of cross-cultural competence in college English teaching, promote the in-depth integration of the instrumental value of language and humanistic educational value, and facilitate students' coordinated development of linguistic ability, cross-cultural literacy and cultural self-awareness.

2. The importance of ecological construction of cross-cultural competence in college English teaching from the perspective of cultural self-awareness

2.1. Reshape the core value of English teaching and balance the educational ecology

The ecological construction of cross-cultural competence from the perspective of cultural self-awareness can reconstruct the internal logic of college English teaching at the value level, break the unbalanced teaching ecology unilaterally dominated by tool rationality, and transform English teaching from the cultivation of single instrumental skills to the coordinated coexistence of instrumental and humanistic values. Therefore, universities should base their work on educational ecology and coordinate the dual objectives of language acquisition and cultural literacy cultivation. On the premise of ensuring students' command of basic linguistic application ability, teachers guide them to deeply understand the cultural connotations, value systems, and logical thinking behind language, and realize the organic integration of linguistic skills, cultural cognition, and value-critical thinking. Meanwhile, it eliminates the educational deviation caused by excessive expansion of tool rationality, reshapes the complete cross-cultural educational core of college English teaching, returns language learning to its essential attribute as a cultural carrier, and advances the synchronous progress of language acquisition, cultural immersion and value shaping, so as to comprehensively upgrade and expand the educational value of college English teaching ^[2].

2.2. Improve the cross-cultural education system and build a diversified English teaching ecology

College English itself is an educational discipline where multiple cultures converge and integrate, containing multiple ecological elements such as local culture and foreign culture, traditional culture and modern culture, linguistic knowledge and humanistic literacy ^[3]. Accelerated global economic integration has made cultural diversity more prominent, and cross-cultural competence in college English is no longer limited to basic knowledge of cross-cultural communication etiquette. Guided by cultural self-awareness, college English teaching takes the coexistence of diverse cultures as its core logic, integrates local and foreign cultural resources, breaks the one-sided teaching model of unilateral input of Western culture, realizes equal presentation and two-way interpretation as well as mutual learning of Chinese and foreign cultures, and constructs a diversified and balanced cultural teaching ecology.

In addition, it can standardize the integration logic and teaching orientation of diverse cultures to ensure the orderly coexistence and coordinated empowerment of various cultural elements. This not only enables students to absorb excellent foreign cultures while adhering to local cultural roots, but also promotes the transformation of college English cross-cultural teaching from fragmented cultural indoctrination to systematic, ecological and connotative cultural education ^[4].

2.3. Strengthen students' cognition of local culture and boost their cross-cultural communication ability

Traditional English teaching guided by tool rationality focuses excessively on one-way input of linguistic and cultural theoretical knowledge, neglecting the teaching of translating and expressing fine Chinese culture in English. This leads to a widespread "cultural aphasia" among students, who cannot accurately, standardly, and vividly interpret fine traditional Chinese and contemporary Chinese cultural values and local cultural spirits in English. In contrast, cultural self-awareness places more emphasis on in-depth cognition, active inheritance, and external dissemination of local culture ^[5]. Integrating cultural self-awareness into college English cross-

cultural teaching can realize the equal coexistence and two-way integration of local and foreign cultures in the teaching system, cultivate students' ability to paraphrase local culture in English, interpret cultural comparisons and conduct cross-cultural communication. While grasping the cognitive logic of foreign cultures, students can acquire the capacity to tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese culture to the international community.

3. Dilemmas in cultivating cross-cultural competence influenced by tool rationality

3.1. Deviated teaching objectives

Current English teaching mainly targets the mastery of linguistic skills, improvement of exam scores and acquisition of practical communication tools. College English is positioned as a functional carrier for further education and certificate or employment examinations, while literacy cultivation, including the construction of cross-cultural cognition, critical thinking on Chinese and foreign cultures, and the formation of cultural self-awareness and external interpretation of local culture, is ignored. A gradient objective system ranging from cultural cognition and cultural discrimination to cultural self-awareness and cultural output has not been established, which further weakens the educational attribute of college English teaching ^[6]. Besides, the objective orientation makes resource allocation, teaching arrangements and goal-setting all center on improving instrumental ability. Cross-cultural education lacks corresponding value positioning and top-level support, failing to form a regular, systematic and in-depth cultivation system.

3.2. Rigid teaching modes

Long dominated by tool rationality, college English teaching adopts rigid knowledge-indoctrination and skill-training modes. Its core procedures include standardized theoretical lecturing, unified text explanation and repetitive skill drills, lacking in-depth, inquiry-based and dialogic teaching forms such as cultural understanding, cross-cultural debates, situational performance and cultural output exercises. As a result, cross-cultural teaching remains superficial. Moreover, cross-cultural teaching only involves simple introduction and listing of cultural common sense, without in-depth teaching activities such as exploration of cultural comparisons, critical analysis of cultural differences, judgment of cultural values and deconstruction of cultural logic. Students can hardly analyze the ideological and value disparities as well as social roots behind different cultures. Most importantly, rigid teaching modes keep students in a state of passive reception of cultural information, making it difficult for them to form independent cultural thinking and rational cultural judgment, and develop autonomous cultural discrimination and reflective abilities ^[7].

3.3. Unbalanced structure of teaching content

At present, college English curriculum content mostly relies on instrumental knowledge modules such as vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns, text analysis and exam skills to help students master linguistic tools and adapt to various language tests and basic communication scenarios. However, the cross-cultural knowledge system is imperfect in curriculum frameworks with insufficient introduction of cross-cultural content, resulting in a solidified knowledge structure and monotonous cross-cultural knowledge.

In addition, most current English teaching materials focus on superficial lifestyles and customs of Britain and the United States, lacking in-depth interpretation of the intrinsic values, ideological logic, cultural origins, and social systems of foreign cultures. Meanwhile, content is scarce about expressing Chinese fine traditional culture and contemporary Chinese culture in English as well as cross-cultural comparisons. The long-term

one-sided and fragmented cross-cultural teaching content prevents students from building a complete cross-cultural cognitive framework ^[8].

4. Construction paths of cross-cultural competence in college English teaching from the perspective of cultural self-awareness

4.1. Clarify college English teaching objectives to unify instrumental and cultural values

College English teaching objectives in the new era need to break away from the instrumental framework of pure skill cultivation. Based on the developmental characteristics and cross-cultural attributes of college English, educators should reconstruct educational objectives to achieve comprehensive improvement of students' cultural literacy while they master professional English capabilities.

In objective design, consolidating students' basic linguistic application ability shall serve as the foundation to maintain the basic instrumental value of English teaching by ensuring their comprehensive skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. Meanwhile, the construction of cross-cultural cognition, critical thinking on Chinese and foreign cultures, discrimination of cultural values, interpretation of local culture and international cultural communication shall be incorporated into core objectives to realize all-round cultivation of instrumental ability, critical thinking, cultural literacy and values ^[9].

Relying on the educational concept of cultural self-awareness, a hierarchical objective chain from basic cultural cognition, intermediate cultural critical thinking to advanced cultural self-awareness and cultural output shall be established to guide students to systematically recognize, rationally reflect, dialectically select and actively spread foreign and local cultures layer by layer, forming a complete growth ecology of cross-cultural competence.

The cultivation of cultural confidence, understanding of diverse cultures and shaping of international vision shall be fully integrated into the overall English teaching objectives to clarify the core position of cross-cultural education in foreign language teaching systems of universities and facilitate coordinated development of cultural literacy cultivation and linguistic skill training ^[10].

4.2. Reconstruct curriculum content system to improve the effectiveness of cross-cultural education

Curriculum content acts as a key carrier for promoting cross-cultural education in college English. Its structural integrity, cultural balance and content depth directly determine the overall quality of cross-cultural education and the formation of students' cultural self-awareness. Therefore, universities need to optimize and reconstruct current curriculum content to realize the profound transformation of English teaching from single instrumental training to compound cultural education ^[11].

First, optimize the basic content of college English. On the basis of retaining superficial cultural content such as daily customs and social etiquette in textbooks, teachers shall focus on integrating in-depth theoretical content including ideological paradigms, value systems, social structures and cultural origins behind foreign cultures, guiding students to upgrade their cognition from fragmented cultural phenomena to systematic understanding of cultural essence and form a rational cognitive framework of diverse foreign cultures.

Second, add local cultural content. Integrate fine traditional Chinese culture, contemporary Chinese cultural concepts, local humanistic spirits, values of the new era, cross-cultural interpretation theories and external cultural publicity content, and build a systematic knowledge system for expressing local culture in

English, so as to realize equal presentation and two-way comparison of Chinese and foreign cultural content in the curriculum system.

Third, restructure the logical framework of curriculum content. Traditional college English curriculum prioritizes instrumental content such as vocabulary, grammar, discourse and rhetoric. Now modules including comparison between Chinese and foreign cultures, discrimination of cultural differences, judgment of cultural values and mutual learning of civilizations shall be added to build a thematic, systematic and critical cross-cultural content system and cultivate students' cross-cultural cognition^[12].

4.3. Implement situational teaching modes to cultivate core cross-cultural literacy

To meet the cultivation demands of cross-cultural competence from the perspective of cultural self-awareness, the rigid indoctrination teaching mode dominated by tool rationality shall be broken. Student-centered and culture-inquiry-oriented innovative teaching modes shall be constructed to improve students' cultural literacy and cross-cultural ability.

Diversified situational carriers shall be adopted to restore the essence of cross-cultural communication, enabling students to internalize knowledge, perceive culture and construct thinking in teaching scenarios that fit cultural connotations, thus breaking free from mechanical training of superficial linguistic skills. For example, teachers can set real-life teaching scenarios such as cross-border daily communication, Chinese and foreign banquet exchanges, and workplace interactions based on cross-cultural materials in textbooks, restore real cross-cultural atmospheres with multimedia resources in advance, divide students into interactive groups, and assign different cultural identities to them. Students conduct dialogues based on Chinese social thinking and cultural customs to perceive the diversity and commonality of various cultures.

4.4. Carry out dialogic seminar teaching to develop students' cross-cultural critical thinking

Take core topics including diverse cultural themes, disputes over cultural differences, choices of cultural values and integration of Chinese and foreign civilizations as seminar carriers. Guide students to express themselves freely, communicate with each other and conduct in-depth critical thinking based on their own cultural cognition, local cultural standpoints and rational thinking^[13]. During discussions, students can deeply explore the intrinsic values and contemporary connotations of local culture, and complete cultural self-reflection, cultural discrimination and cultural reconstruction through collision of ideas and exchange of opinions, so as to effectively avoid cognitive problems such as cultural blind obedience, cultural prejudice and cultural aphasia.

For instance, teachers can design open, controversial and critical debate topics combined with cross-cultural teaching themes. Students sort out the advantages and limitations of Western life concepts and value systems independently based on Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge learned in courses, and elaborate viewpoints integrating the core of traditional Chinese culture and collectivist values. This can effectively exercise students' English expression, cross-cultural judgment and dialectical thinking ability, realizing educational upgrading from instrumental language output to conscious cultural critical thinking.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, cross-cultural competence is an essential basic quality for college students in international

exchanges amid globalization. By clarifying college English teaching objectives, reconstructing curriculum content systems, implementing situational teaching modes and carrying out dialogic seminar teaching, universities can optimize the cross-cultural educational ecology and cultivate students' cross-cultural ability and international vision to understand foreign cultures, turning them into high-level compound talents participating in global dialogue and cultural communication.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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