

An Investigation of the Cultural Awareness Cultivation in Primary School English Teaching: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

After entering the 21st century, in the context of globalization, more and more people from different cultural backgrounds communicate with each other. As a universal language of the world, the learning of English has become more and more important. The ability to communicate in English is closely related to the English education received. Therefore, English education should not only focus on examination, but also comprehensive language skill, including cultural knowledge, communicative competence, etc. At the same time, the reform of college entrance examination also puts forward new requirements and learning directions for each stage of English teaching and learning in our country. Schools should adjust the traditional English teaching methods and gradually get rid of the shackles of exam-oriented education in order to cultivate students' interest in learning and improve comprehensive language skill. As the initial stage of English learning, elementary schools should be the first to make adjustments and explore a set of teaching methods suitable for the learning rules of primary school students in our country. Based on this, this paper, from the perspective of the current situation of cultivating primary school students' English cultural awareness, explores the achievements and existing problems of primary school English culture teaching, and proposes corresponding strategies, so as to enrich the relevant theories of primary school English education and provide primary school teacher with actionable suggestions.

Keywords: *Cultural Awareness Cultivation, Cultural Awareness, English Teaching.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are closely related and mirror each other [1]. Understanding the relationship between language and culture helps teachers and learners to view different aspects of language [2] and it is commonly accepted that culture plays an important role in language teaching [3].

In the past few decades, the influence of cultural information on language teaching has been the focus of attention. Rodrigues [4] has proposed that language competence and culture are closely and dynamically linked, because the ability to communicate with a language needs to know how to view, interpret and act correctly according to the culture related to the language [5]. Learners who come into contact with the culture related to language can better participate in the real and

functional use of language and achieve meaningful purposes [6]. Bringing culture into the classroom facilitates students' acceptance and understanding of authentic cultural contexts, enhances their cultural awareness, and also improves students' language skills, especially for new cultures that they are exposed to in textbooks. In the process, they even develop empathy for foreign cultures [7]. Therefore, culture needs to be the core of language teaching, so that students can communicate to the maximum extent [8].

Strengthening and enriching cultural knowledge in teaching practice is conducive to building a complete framework system, which helps adjust differences between mere language knowledge and culture [9]. In such a teaching model, culture is not consumed or wasted, but helps to innovate the teaching model and enhance the richness of classroom content as well as its

attractiveness to students. Additionally, teachers play a catalytic role in developing students' analytical cultural thinking. Designing explicit, critical cultural points in the textbook as a cultural guide prior to the lesson is important for teachers to develop students' unbiased view of culture, which can also provide sufficient opportunities for students to learn about pragmatic aspects of foreign languages and develop cross-cultural understanding [10]. Therefore, Matsuda holds that language teachers should integrate culture into daily language teaching, strategically diversify cultural content and pay attention to the diversity of language functions, so that learners can master communication strategies in various situations and contexts [11].

In China, English teaching and student's cultural awareness cultivation is not closely integrated. In recent years, although English is the preferred foreign language in language education for Chinese student of different ages, and has been formally introduced into primary schools as a compulsory course, its teaching hours cannot be compared with Chinese and mathematics. Although English is regarded as a core subject, its status is very contradictory as according to the number of teaching hours, it can be regarded as only a secondary subject [12]. Literally, the English Education Standards for Compulsory Education, in addition to the standards for developing students' language skills and language knowledge, has put forward the requirements of cultivating students' English communicative competence and cultural awareness. It also outlines the main aims of primary school English curriculum, which is to develop students' interests, self-confidence and positive attitude towards learning English, to cultivate the students' language sense which enables their good pronunciation and intonation, and to develop the students' preliminary ability to use English in daily exchanges and lay a good foundation for further study [13]. However, at present, teachers in many areas of China believe that the aim of language education is to teach students certain knowledge of words, sentence patterns and grammar, and to train their preliminary English listening, speaking, reading and writing ability. In daily teaching, the cultivation of students' cross-cultural communication ability and cultural awareness are often not regarded as teaching objectives and contents, which leads to the students' poor performance in language application and a gap between the actual learning outcomes and the national curriculum standard training goals [14]. At present, some English teachers do not pay enough attention to cultivating students' cultural awareness in English teaching, and even though some English teachers are well aware of the fact that there is a continuous interplay between the linguistic and cultural elements of a foreign language. There are still some reasons for the limitations of teachers' efficiency, that is, cultural guides still do exist [15].

Therefore, in China's primary school English teaching, it is necessary for teachers to use various effective ways to help students understand, learn and experience the cultural background, improve their interest in English learning, cultivate their cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication ability, and strengthen their cultural confidence (Huang, 2020). However, in the current practice of English education, there are still many areas that need to be improved.

As there are relatively scarce studies on the practical application of cultural teaching in Chinese primary school English education, this paper aims to explore the attitudes and the practices of English teachers and students on the integration of cultural awareness into English education. Through the questionnaire survey, combined with relevant background information and case studies, this paper analyses the problems and puts forward some development suggestions for promoting future English cultural teaching and students' cultural awareness cultivation.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted the method of questionnaire which is based on the questionnaire designed by Lessard-Clouston (1996), combined with the requirements of The New English Curriculum Standard in 2011(2011 NECS). It is mainly divided into two parts. The first part is the basic information of teachers, including gender, age, teaching time, education and whether they have received training in cross-cultural teaching. The second part is to investigate teachers' understanding of cultural teaching. Four dimensions are involved in the questionnaire, including concepts and goals, content, strategies and evaluation of cultural awareness training. Through the questionnaire, teachers' attitudes, opinions and practices on cultural teaching can be effectively collected.

In this study, the subjects are 25 teachers from five campuses in the Elementary School Affiliated to Renmin University of China. which is one of the researchers' working place. As is shown from Table1, he principle of selecting the subjects of the survey is to cover old, middle-aged and young teachers as much as possible in terms of teaching time.

Table 1. Teaching Time of Teachers

Teaching time	Frequency	%
1-5 years	5	0.20%
5-10 years	4	16%
More than 10 years	14	56%

A total of 25 teachers' questionnaires were distributed in this survey, 23 were returned, and the recovery rate was 92%. After careful inspection, the questionnaires returned were all valid, so the rate of effective questionnaire was 100%. After the questionnaire is collected, the answer to each question is counted, and then the in-depth question analysis is conducted.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part is the data analysis of teachers' questionnaire in the Elementary School Affiliated to Renmin University of China to figure out the current situation of cultural awareness in English teaching. The analysis is as follows.

3.1 The concepts and goals of cultural awareness training

1. The New English Curriculum Standard in 2011(2011 NECS) formulated by the Ministry of Education proposes the requirements for inter-communicative competence and cultural awareness for primary school students. Do you think it is important to cultivate students' cross-communicative competence and cultural awareness in teaching?

(5 4 3 2 1)

2. How important do you think the role cultural awareness plays in learning English well?

(5 4 3 2 1)

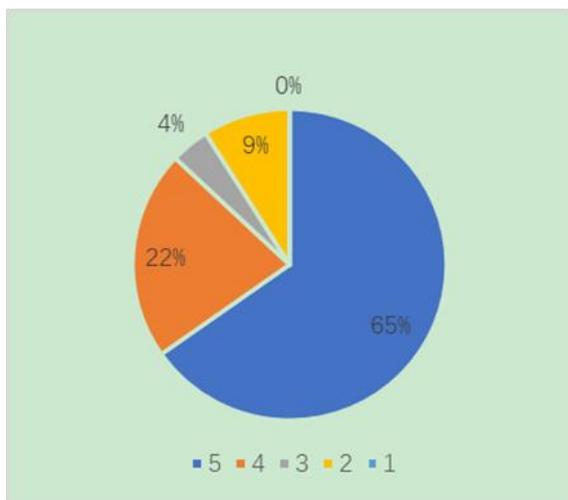


Figure 1 Q1: How important the training of cultural awareness in English teaching

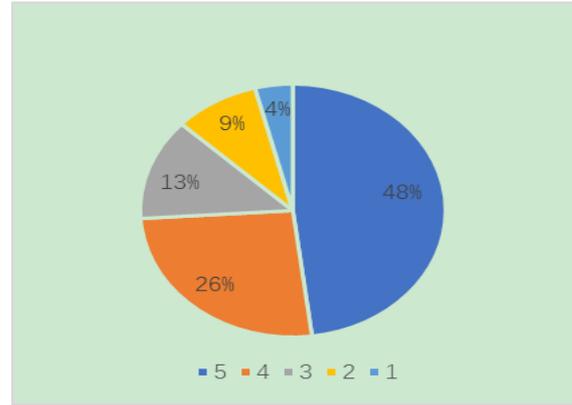


Figure 2 Q2: The role cultural teaching plays in English learning

Q1 and Q2 mainly investigate the teacher's understanding of the role of cultural teaching in primary school class. From Figure1, 65.22% of teachers chose 5, 21.74% chose 4, 4% chose 3, 9% chose 2 and no one chose 1. From the survey results, we can see, most teachers agree with the requirements developed by the Ministry of Education about the cultural learning and believe that learning English-speaking countries' culture has a significant effect on English teaching. From Figure2 we can see, 48% of teachers chose 5, 26% chose 4, 13% chose 3, 9% chose 2 and 4% chose 1, demonstrating that most teachers have realized the significance of English cultural teaching in class. They hold positive attitude toward it in their English teaching. However, only a few teachers believe that learning the differences between Chinese and Western cultures does not help students to learn English better. Teachers of this type usually pay more attention to language teaching in the classroom, and rarely teach students western culture. In fact, people live in different social and cultural backgrounds, and the way they speak and deal with others will also be very different. People often make unnecessary communicative errors because they are not familiar with the etiquette norms and communication principles of English-speaking countries. Therefore, only by understanding Oriental and Western cultures can students avoid communication barriers as much as possible.

3. In your opinion, the main reason for the "Deaf-mute English" of current Chinese students is () (Multiple choice)

A. Insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, lack of relevant cultural background knowledge

B. Lack of necessary communicative context in daily life, and unable to exercise the language learned

C. The acquisition of foreign languages is affected by the negative transfer of the mother tongue and cannot communicate well

D. The timidity of students

4. What is the purpose of cultural teaching in English class? () (Multiple choice)

- A. Enhance cultural sensitivity
- B. Enhance students' cross-cultural communication skills
- C. Understand the culture of the target language country
- D. Inspire students' interest in learning



Figure 3 Q3: Main reason for the "Deaf-mute English"
Q4: Purpose of cultural teaching

Q3 investigates teachers' views on the phenomenon of "Deaf-mute English" caused by the current English teaching. From Figure3, we can see that 82.60% teachers believe that lack of necessary communicative context in daily life and unable to exercise the language learned are the main reasons for students' "Deaf-mute English". At present, in primary school English teaching, teachers' teaching content still focuses on listening, speaking, reading, writing, etc. Furthermore, affected by the school's educational environment and school conditions, students have few opportunities to participate in cross-cultural communication activities, and the knowledge and language skills they learned cannot be used well in actual communication activities.

Q4 is to indicate the purpose of cultural teaching in English class. 78.26% of teachers think that the purpose of cultural teaching in English class is to enhance students' cross-cultural communication skills, 73.91% of teachers believe it is to understand the culture of the target language country. Among the teachers surveyed, most teachers are aware of the purpose of cultivating students' cultural awareness. However, in actual classroom teaching, due to the influence of teaching pressure, little attention is paid to the penetration and introduction of cultural knowledge in the classroom.

3.2 Contents of cultural awareness training

5. Do you think that the textbooks you use involve a lot of cultural content?

- (5 4 3 2 1)

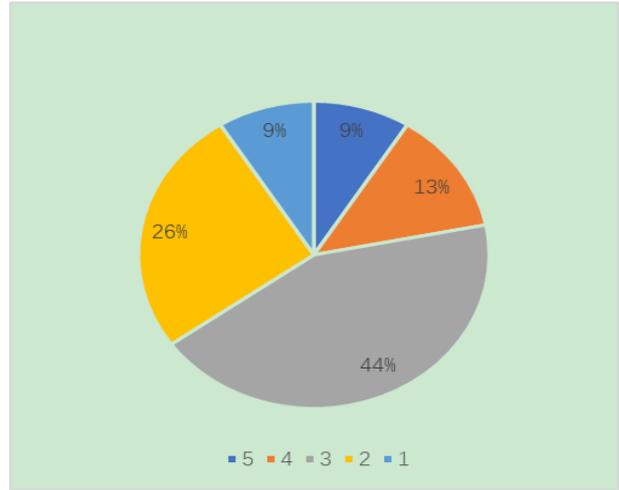


Figure 4 Q5: Cultural content involved in the textbooks

Q5 mainly investigates the teacher's evaluation of the cultural content in the textbook. Textbooks are the main teaching materials for teachers to teach. Teachers' cultural teaching needs to dig out the cultural content in the textbooks. As can be seen from the Figure4, 43.50% of the teachers think that the cultural content of the textbooks is not as much as they think, and 9% of the teachers think that the cultural content is very scarce. Only 2 teachers think that the textbooks contain a lot of cultural content. Generally speaking, teachers think that the textbooks they use contain less cultural content, and the cultural teaching materials used to expand students' cultural knowledge are relatively scarce.

6. Regarding the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness and ability, what do you think should be cultivated? () (Multiple choices)

- A. Help students understand the difference between Chinese and English grammar and sentence patterns
- B. Understand relevant background knowledge of western history and geography
- C. Introduce the different customs, lifestyles and values of Western countries
- D. Guide students to compare the differences between Western and Chinese culture

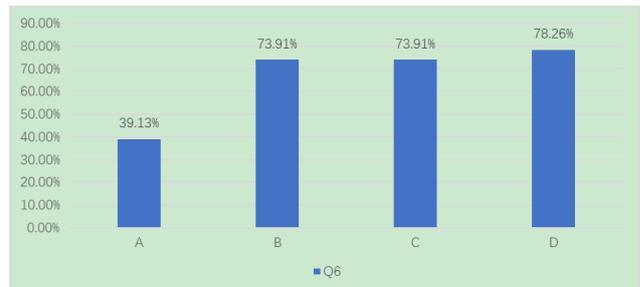


Figure 5 Q6: What should be cultivated in cultural teaching

It can be seen from the data results from Figure4 that teachers are not very satisfied with the cultural content involved in the current textbook. Q6 further discuss about what cross-cultural awareness and ability the students should be cultivated. As can be seen form the Figure5,78.26% of teachers believe they should guide students to compare the differences between Western and Chinese culture, indicating that most teacher are well aware the significance of cultural differences between different countries in English teaching. The number of teachers who chose option B and option C is the same, which is both 73.91%. They pay much attention to make sure students can understand the relevant background knowledge of western history and geography involved in the textbook and introduce the different customs, lifestyles and values of Western countries as much as possible. Only a few teachers think they should help students understand the differences between Chinese and English grammar and sentence patterns, for in the current stage of primary school, grammars are less involved in the teaching plan of teachers.

3.3 Strategies for the cultivation of cultural awareness

7. How much time do you spend on cross-cultural teaching in English class () (40 minutes per class)

A. 0 minutes B. 0-5 minutes C. 5-10 minutes D. more than 10 minutes

8. In class, what teaching methods do you mainly adopt to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness? ()

A. Watch related movies, songs, listen to the radio or read picture books, etc.

B. Enhance cooperation and communication between groups and encourage students to interact actively

C. Set up interesting games to stimulate students' interest in learning

D. Create a vivid situation for role-playing, such as a reader's theater to experience a cross-cultural communication environment

9. After class, what do you think can be used to expand and penetrate students' cultural awareness? ()

A. Carry out a variety of extracurricular activities, such as holding English speech, dubbing, drama and other competitions

B. Inspire students to use network resources to watch movies, TV, and read related English picture books

C. Encourage students to travel abroad under the premise of safety to broaden their cultural horizons

D. Regular lectures on Western culture

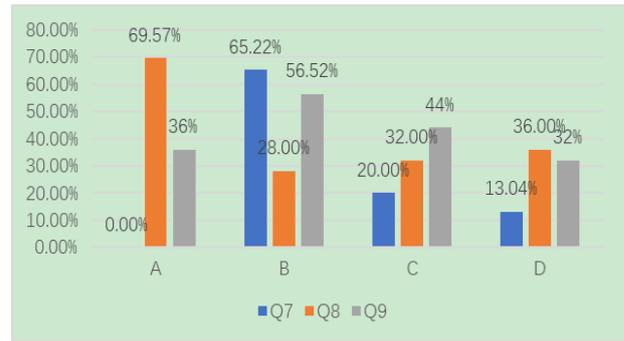


Figure 6 Q7: time for teachers to teach cultural knowledge Q8: teaching methods teachers mainly adopted Q9: effective methods to expand cultural awareness after class

Q7 is to investigate the time for teachers to teach cultural knowledge and carry out cultural teaching in the classroom. According to the survey results of Figure6, 65.22% of teachers spend less than five minutes in cross-cultural teaching, and a small number of teachers said that the time in cross-cultural teaching will be controlled within ten minutes. Among the 23 teachers surveyed, only 3 teachers spend more than ten minutes to teach cultural knowledge to students. It can be seen that most teachers spend less than ten minutes in cultural teaching in the classroom, and a considerable part of their time is spent on language teaching including vocabulary, sentence patterns, grammar and other teaching tasks in one class, and there is almost no time left to expand their extracurricular cultural knowledge for students. Therefore, to achieve the unity of language and cultural teaching, teachers need to make full use of the classroom time to permeate the cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries.

Q8 investigates the teaching methods teachers mainly adopted to cultivate students' cultural awareness. Figure6 shows that 69.57% of teachers chose to watch related movies, listen to the radio or read picture books, which are the easiest ways to cultivate students' cultural awareness. Only a few teachers chose those effective but time-consuming ways, like cooperating between groups, playing games and creating a vivid situation for role-playing.

Due to the time constraints in class, the channels for students to acquire cultural knowledge should not only be limited to the English classes taken in school, but also should explore more other extracurricular cultural activities outside of the class. Q9 investigates effective methods to expand cultural awareness after class. 56.52% of teachers inspire students to use network resources such as watch movies, TV, and read related English picture books, which are the most common way to expand knowledge. 44% of teachers encourage students to travel abroad under the premise of safety to broaden their cultural horizons. 36% of teachers

encourage school to carry out a variety of extracurricular activities, such as holding English speech, dubbing, drama and other competitions, in this way students can have more opportunities to immerse themselves in multiculturalism.

3.4 Evaluation of cultural awareness training

10. What do you think is the biggest difficulty in cultivating cultural awareness in English teaching? ()

- A. There is no suitable teaching material
- B. There is no explicit teaching demand (examination is not taken)
- C. Insufficient English class hours
- D. Teachers lack cultural knowledge about English-speaking countries

11. How do you evaluate the cultural awareness of students? (Multiple choice)

- A. A staged diagnosis based on the mastery of cultural knowledge, such as: making a questionnaire about cultural knowledge
- B. A combination of written and oral tests to test students' cultural knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills
- C. Observe students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural sensitivity through students' participation in discussions, role-playing and other activities, using the methods of student self-evaluation and mutual evaluation.
- D. There is currently no effective evaluation system that can measure the cultivation of students' cultural awareness



Figure 7 Q10: difficulties encountered by teachers Q11: ways of evaluating the cultural awareness of students

Q10 investigates the difficulties encountered by teachers in developing cultural teaching. It can be seen from Figure7 that 36% of teachers believe that there is not enough time for cultural teaching in the classroom. Many teachers said that the teaching task is heavy. In a class time, they have to instruct students to memorize words, practice sentence patterns and do exercises.

There is almost no extra time to explain cultural knowledge. 20% of teachers chose option B, believing that the cultural awareness training goal is out of touch with the exam and cannot grasp the scale of cultural teaching well. Under the current education system in my country, the content of the examination is mostly focus on the mastery of basic knowledge and skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, and the cultural knowledge content required in the curriculum standard is rarely reflected in the test papers. Therefore, teachers will not spend too much time explaining cultural knowledge in class.

Q11 investigates the ways of evaluating the cultural awareness of students. From the data results in the above Figure, it can be seen that 78.26% of teachers chose option B, indicating that most teachers aware that pure examination cannot really prove the sensitivity of students' cultural awareness, and fail to see the true level of students' cross-cultural awareness and communicative competence. Therefore, the oral and written tests should be combined to examine the level of students' cultural knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills. 32% teachers organize discussions, role-playing and other activities in class to make students evaluate each other. For most teachers, they would explore appropriate evaluation methods to evaluate students' communicative skills. However, 8 teachers still think there is currently no effective evaluation system that can measure the cultivation of students' cultural awareness. From data collected above we can see, at present, the lack of effective and operable evaluation system for cultural awareness and cross-cultural teaching in our country is also a huge obstacle to teachers' cross-cultural teaching.

4. CONCLUSION

The necessity of cultural teaching needs to be emphasized repeatedly in English teaching. The present situation of English teaching in China is that schools emphasize language knowledge and pure skills more than the cultural knowledge. To enrich English teaching courses and improve students' learning enthusiasm, teachers are encouraged to provide cultural information in the language class. After having a deep understanding of the language and culture of the country, students can have more cultural inclusiveness in practical communication.

This study adopted the method of the questionnaire and collected 23 questionnaires which involve teachers' attitude and evaluation of cultural teaching. Through the questionnaire survey, we can conclude that in the past ten years, English curriculum standards has been treating the language principles as one of the most important topics in English teaching, but it only stays in the theoretical level. Intercultural communication focus mostly on practice. As non-native language learners,

teachers lack the environment of English learning as well as students, and the cultural knowledge which they have mastered is fragmented. Because of that, teacher's teaching task is heavier than before if they are willing to bring more cultural information into class. As for their own idea, most of them have a positive attitude towards it in English teaching. The knowledge and language skills they teach in class have already involved certain practical communication activities. The lack of preparation time leads to their classes lacking objectives training of cultural awareness towards students. Due to the exam pressure, students' attention is hardly paid to the infiltration and introduction of cultural knowledge in the classroom in the mean while. According to this result, the teachers are generally dissatisfied with the current state, so this situation needs to be changed.

To reform the atmosphere and content of the English classes, different kinds of teaching methods and the corresponding evaluation system should be adopted. Teachers can increase the content of cultural teaching, using various ways to let students feel cultural information, such as role-playing. Moreover, evaluation methods can be more diverse, such as giving grades judging by their reaction to different cultural behaviors, not just exams. These changes can help students to improve their learning motivation, gain more balance in learning, and get more communicative competence.

Finally, although we have carried on the thorough discussion to this cultural research topic, but still has some limitations. Firstly, the recovery rate needs to be improved. It also includes teachers from the researcher's workplace. The basic information of 25 teachers was included in terms of gender, age, education state and cultural awareness. Secondly, these collected information of teachers are not on an average level, and the scope of preparation for candidates is not wide enough. Future studies should send more questionnaires to more teachers of different ages and different regions.

Appendix

Teacher questionnaire

Dear teacher:

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire survey during your busy schedule. The results of this survey are only used for academic research, without any commercial purpose. The specific content is strictly confidential. Your answer will not have any impact on your teaching. In order to ensure the authenticity of the survey results, please answer truthfully according to your actual situation and opinions. Thanks for your cooperation.

The first part is your basic information, please be sure to fill in and select the option "√" that meets your actual situation.

1. Your name:
2. Your gender: male female
3. Your age:
4. Your hometown:
5. Your teaching age: 5 years and below 5-10 years 10 years or more
6. Your educational background: Doctoral degree or higher Master Undergraduate Associate
7. Have you received training in cross-cultural teaching?
 Yes No

The second part is to understand your attitude towards cultural teaching in English class. Please read the following questions carefully and tick "√" on the option that suits your situation.

(The opinion and goal of cultural awareness training)

1. The New English Curriculum Standard in 2011(2011 NECS) formulated by the Ministry of Education proposes the requirements for inter-communicative competence and cultural awareness for primary school students. Do you think it is important to cultivate students' cross-communicative competence and cultural awareness in teaching?
(5 4 3 2 1)
2. How do you think cross-cultural awareness plays a role in learning English well?
(5 4 3 2 1)
3. In your opinion, the main reason for the "dumb English" of current Chinese students is () (Multiple choice)
 - A. Insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, lack of relevant cultural background knowledge
 - B. Lack of necessary communicative context in daily life, and unable to exercise the language learned
 - C. The acquisition of foreign languages is affected by the negative transfer of the mother tongue and cannot communicate well
 - D. The timidity of students
4. What is the purpose of cultural teaching in English class? ()(Multiple choice)
 - A. Enhance cultural sensitivity
 - B. Enhance students' cross-cultural communication skills
 - C. Understand the culture of the target language country
 - D. Inspire students' interest in learning

(Contents of cultural awareness training)

5. Do you think that the textbooks you use involve a lot of cultural content?

(5 4 3 2 1)

6. Regarding the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness and ability, what do you think should be cultivated? () (Multiple choices)

A. Help students understand the difference between Chinese and English grammar and sentence patterns

B. Understand relevant background knowledge of western history and geography

C. Introduce the different customs, lifestyles and values of Western countries

D. Guide students to compare the differences between Western and Chinese culture

(Strategy for the cultivation of cultural awareness)

7. How much time do you spend on cross-cultural teaching in English class () (40 minutes per class)

A. 0 minutes B. 0-5 minutes C. 5-10 minutes D. more than 10 minutes

8. In class, what teaching methods do you mainly adopt to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness? ()

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B. Enhance cooperation and communication between groups and encourage students to interact actively

C. Set up interesting games to stimulate students' interest in learning

D. Create a vivid situation for role-playing, such as reader theater to experience a cross-cultural communication environment

9. After class, what do you think can be used to expand and penetrate students' cultural awareness? ()

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B. Inspire students to use network resources to watch movies, TV, and read related English picture books

C. Encourage students to travel abroad under the premise of safety to broaden their cultural horizons

D. Regular lectures on Western culture

(Evaluation of cultural awareness training)

10. What do you think is the biggest difficulty in cultivating cultural awareness in English teaching? ()

A. There is no suitable teaching material

B. There is no explicit teaching demand (examination is not taken)

C. Insufficient English class hours

D. Teachers lack cultural knowledge about English-speaking countries

11. How do you evaluate the cultural awareness of students?

A. A staged diagnosis based on the mastery of cultural knowledge, such as: making a questionnaire about cultural knowledge

B. A combination of written and oral tests to test students' cultural knowledge and cross-cultural communication skills

C. Observe students' cultural awareness and cross-cultural sensitivity through students' participation in discussions, role-playing and other activities, using the methods of student self-evaluation and mutual evaluation.

D. There is currently no effective evaluation system that can measure the cultivation of students' cultural awareness

Some of your valuable time will be delayed by completing this questionnaire, and I would like to express my sincere thanks to you again!

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