

# The Analysis of English Literary Reading's Effects on College Humanistic Education

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**Abstract.** This paper explains and demonstrates how to enhance college students' better understanding for Western culture and cross-culture differences by strengthen English literary reading practice and instruction intentionally. It aims to effectively improve college students' awareness of literary qualities and other virtues by reading according to new requirements nowadays for humanistic education.

## Introduction

It's well known that books are the ladder of human progress. Literature is the epitome of society; through literature we can understand foreign ideas, the origins and development of humanities. Language not only reflects the culture, but also becomes as a part of the culture, the ultimate purpose of learning English in order to achieve a more extensive communication, deeper understanding of multi-culture, elimination of cultural barriers, achievements of global exchange, and enhancement of international perspective, expanding cross-cultural communication skills. English teachers should fully understand the importance of college English literature reading, strategically applying reading to English teaching in order to guide students to cultivate humanistic quality. Effective and positive reading can not only improve the practical ability of students' English comprehension, but also can improve the students' moral, ideological quality and personality, so that they establish a reasonable world outlook, values, and outlook on life, which make an effort for colleges and universities to enhance the overall qualities of personnel training strategy in the new era.

## Knowing More about Western Culture

Reading of English literary works can help students better understand the Anglo-American culture, and national culture of other countries. Understanding the culture of other countries can help students better understand the impact of cultural differences, So that students can think from the British and American cultural perspective, because students can realize that the language and culture are inseparable, Only knowing the culture, can we better learn foreign language. I believe that the current English literature materials in College English textbooks in China are still, very few, which are not conducive to students' English learning. Students are usually can not understand some text content in the process of learning, here is an example as follows of names in English Reading practices, which is very common and familiar to students but diversifies and reflects more in different cultures and countries.

If some students think that the name is only a person's label, which is due to the Eastern and Western cultural differences. Each country's name will be a certain view of cultural values. In case of China, it has gradually formed a long and orderly, hierarchical, patriarchal society, during the development of the feudal society for more than two thousand years, therefore, China's name also reflects this feature; and Western society is the same, they are deeply influenced by religions, so the name are commonly used from the Bible. In the history of English literature, the Bible has had a great impact on Anglo-American culture. Therefore, teachers in the college English curriculum

should introduce some of the cultural background knowledge, and to guide students to see some Western classic works, combining with textbooks from time to time, which may help students learn English better.

Language is the carrier of culture, learning one of the important content of a foreign language is to understand the country and regional culture where the language is spoken. And reading English literature is an effective way for students to master the culture of those countries where English is a mother tongue, which help students better understand the cultural connotation of the English world. For foreign language learning, cultural knowledge the teachings should have at least three aspects of the advantages: 1. Help students understand the cultural differences; 2. help language learners out of the circle of their own culture, take another stand from the perspective of the target language to consider the problem; 3. Emphasizing the inseparable understanding of language and culture, and promoting foreign language learning through a variety of classroom exercises.[1]The author believes that in college English textbooks Related to Western cultural background knowledge and literature in the field of less content, to a certain extent, hinder the students on the textbooks Understanding, thus affecting the effect of learning English language.

For example, the author of the text "As His Name is, So Is He" quotes the saying "As his name is, so is he" from the bible and also introduces the definition of the name and other examples to support his point of view from Webster's Dictionary, in order to prove that person's name's importance. In this lesson, there is also the example of the prejudice against the name affecting classroom performance: Diego State University and Georgia State University, the study found that teachers always give lower scores to the name of Elmer's and Hubert's writing, whereas scores will be higher if the names of the two essays are changed into Michael and David. In the course of learning, students can not understand results described in the text. Some students even think that the name is no more than a symbol or a label only, which is typical misreading phenomenon due to cultural differences. The names of Chinese and Western names reflect respectively their own cultural connotation and values. In china, because of two thousand year feudal society, it is a patriarchal society, with a patriarchal clan, strict and orderly grades, so, naming comply with it according to this system and the order; while the West, worshipping Christianity or Catholicism mainly, people are willing to use the name of the Bible, and it's so prevalent that phenomenon of same names is serious.[2] From students' reflection, they know very little about Bible, which is known as the source of Western culture, one of the world's top ten and its impact of Western culture, and how it occupies such an important position in the history of world literature.

Therefore, due to the absence of English literature in college English, teachers should introduce Western cultural and literary background knowledge taking advantage of textbook teaching and reading practice, to guide students to read English literature and ethical classics after school, to understand the Western cultural allusions, which help students to absorb the English language knowledge. As a message saying from the China Daily, it helps students understand impacts of names of the Bible and the names of the celebrities on the Western life:

'Jacob' few popular

'Jacob' has been the most popular name for US baby boys for 10 long years while 'Emma' has replaced 'Emily' as the No. 1 baby name for girls, according to the list of Most popular baby names 2008 released by the US Social Security Administration "Barack" has moved up from No.12535 in 2007 to No. 2409 as Obama entered the White House. [3]

The above mentioned Jacob, Michael/Mike, Dave and other names are from the Bible who are favored by God. In Western countries, naming babies with given names express parents' earnest wishes and expectations and it is a tradition, which embodies the values of Westerners.

### **Enhancing Cross-Cultural Understanding**

Literature is the mirror of the society, and through literature we can understand the origin of foreign ideas, humanities and development. Language not only reflects the culture, but also becomes as a part of the culture, so that purpose of learning English in order to achieve a more extensive communication in another culture. With the development of the times, the international

exchanges between become more frequent and important, and related to academic exchanges, ideological exchanges, customs and cultural aspects of understanding and so on. In the context of globalization, it is necessary to understand the culture of English-speaking countries. Only Clearing the language barrier does not guarantee that people can communicate fluently, cultural barriers are more needed to clear. Successful cross-cultural communication is based on the perspective of each other, feel, and understand the problem. Therefore, the English teachers should add teaching of supplementary literature to explain, guide students to read English literature after school, so that students better understand the Western culture, understanding of Western culture in values and moral standards, social relations, social etiquette and society customs and other aspects of the differences. Specifically, in order to ensure a valid cross-cultural communication, we can not simply do so, in order to ensure that the effective intercultural communication, in order to ensure the effective intercultural communication, we can not simply explain the law of “what kind of person, for what purpose, what time to say” [4] With their own cultural traditions, values, social customs, to understand, judge, evaluate the cultural expression of different cultures, discourse behavior, language performance, so that we can achieve a successful communication, to avoid learning exchange cross-cultural misreading and culture conflict phenomenon.

English is not only the carrier of cultural heritage; it is also a part of culture. The purpose of learning in English is ultimate. Speaking English and achieve a more extensive exchange as it is the first international common language, so gets more and more attention. International exchanges involve all aspects of human society, such as ideas, literature, and business and so on. The ability of proficient English does not mean that there is no obstacle to communicate with English native speakers. In daily life, we often encounter unnecessary misunderstandings because we don't really understand the culture of other countries. In order to achieve barrier-free communication, cultural barriers to understanding must be removed. Cross-cultural understanding needs dialogue of both sides standing on the other side of the position. Therefore, in college English teaching, teachers should make use of materials involving the knowledge of the literature, to guide students in their spare time to read English literature for further understanding the differences between the East and West culture, as well as in the moral, values, ethics and other aspects.[5] Teachers in the teaching process should impose students should to set up such a concept that cross-cultural understanding is to make our students fully consider the East and West cultural ideas, customs, value differences, to communicate with reasonable expression ways and discourses, so as to achieve the purpose of effective exchange between the two sides. At the same time, we also pay attention to avoid entering Cross-cultural misunderstanding.

### **Reading English Literature Can Promote College Students' Humanistic Education**

English literature contains a large number of humanities education materials, and college English teachers must be fully aware of the humanistic quality education running through college English teaching, which is one of the important ways to improve the humanistic accomplishment of contemporary college students with quality education and moral education based on a large number of English literature works. Blindly emphasizing on the input of knowledge and examination relatives is far away from the goal of university education. Nowadays, with more and material explosion, people tend to seek for a quick success, so they could not slow down and keep quiet, and the students in this ivory tower are also affected by the atmosphere of the fast society. The absence of humanistic literacy of college students is not uncommon, filled with many non-moral events on campus, such as the abuse of small animals, free destruction of public facilities. Therefore, it is extremely important for university teachers to shape students' noble personalities with the humanistic education. Good examples in classical English works of literature improve students' moral character and noble personalities, through literary works, students learn to critically examine their own behavior, to establish a healthy, upward role model, so as to effectively resist the impact of bad society, slowly and subtly developing college students' excellent humanistic accomplishment. Steven Allen said “Reading literary works can make you mature and more in-depth understanding for your life, nature and ego.”[6] Students should read as much as possible English literature,

especially those that have produced far-reaching impact of the classic works in the West in the process of learning college English, which will not only improve the practical ability of students to apply English, but also improve the moral, ideological and personality of the students. It helps students enhance the ability to judge and distinguish right from wrong, effectively avoid the differences caused by cultural differences between East and West, and to establish a reasonable world outlook, values, outlook on life. The ways of literature quality education, moral education with literary instructions education is positioned humanistic education and aesthetic education.

Literature is human science, Writings are for conveying truth. Applying moral education to the English teaching with literature reading is an important means of quality education that can not be ignored. Western philosopher Montaigne has long criticized knowledge infusion education “Only our tirelessly to fill our memory, any of our understanding and conscience empty, if the soul of our walking is not more serene, if our judgment is not more sound, I would rather my students spend time playing tennis, so at least his body will be more flexible.”[7] In the highly developed modern material society, people's minds are more impetuous, and they are always blindly pursuing fashion, neglecting thinking. Of course college students are no exception. College students of new era are in lack of moralities for various reasons, so teachers should insist teaching and educating, education should go first, which means teaching students to be a real man. Literature reading is suitable for students to improve the qualities, improve the overall personalities, with a high literary accomplishment to resist the invasion of unhealthy culture, and the course of reading is a subtle role in it. A foreign scholar Steven Allen gives the reasons of necessities to appreciate the literary masterpiece as follows: it can make your mind acute; it can help you continue to mature; it can help you have an in-depth understanding on life, the world and their own.[8] Therefore, in college English learning, a large number of reading English literature books, especially Western literary masterpieces, ethical classics, not only help students improve their English knowledge and skills, improve the quality of students' humanities, but also help students improve the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, Cultural differences caused by misunderstanding, and then establish a correct world outlook, outlook on life, values.

## **Summary**

In summary, the importance of English literary reading in college English is evident. At present, the absence of Chinese English textbooks and English teaching in English teaching should be paid enough attention. English teachers should fully understand the importance of reading English literature, and improve English teaching, on the basis of literary works with deep-rooted impact on Western culture, from student interest-oriented start, through the various types of English literature reading activities, for setting up a good environment of reading English literature, teachers should actively explore the teaching reform of college English, so as to truly improve the comprehensive application of English students and humanities literacy..

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