

A Study on Cultural Contents in English Textbooks in Junior High Schools from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication: A Case Study of PEP Edition

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Abstract As cultural exchanges around the world become closer, the cultivation of cultural awareness has become a need for social development. The English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education (2011 edition) explicitly incorporates cultural awareness into the English curriculum objectives, and good cultural awareness helps language learners to understand correctly and use the target language appropriately for intercultural communication. This paper therefore examines the effectiveness of the PEP English textbook in developing students' intercultural awareness and communicative competence through textbook evaluation, literature analysis and content analysis, in order to find out whether the cultural content in the textbook helps students develop cultural awareness, with a view to further improving the layout and design of the cultural content in the textbook, as well as providing suggestions for teachers to make better use of the cultural content in the textbook. The study also provides suggestions for teachers to make better use of the cultural content in textbooks, so that they can teach culture more effectively, thereby achieving the goal of cultural awareness development and effectively raising students' cultural awareness. The results of this study show that the cultural content set in the HRE textbooks is basically in line with the requirements and objectives of cultural awareness development in the Curriculum, but there are some areas for improvement. This study only focuses specifically on the textbooks at the junior secondary education level, selecting the content of the reading section, and does not cover all parts of the textbooks. In future studies, the research objects in the textbooks can be extended to other areas to make the research results more comprehensive and complete.

Keywords Cultural awareness; Intercultural awareness; Intercultural communication skills; PEP edition of junior English

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Introduction

Background of the Research

With the development of globalization, the role of culture in interpersonal communication and social development has become increasingly prominent, the imparting of cultural knowledge has become an important topic in today's education and teaching, and language learning has become an indispensable part in the cultivation of cultural awareness (San Yao, 2019). Interpretation of English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2011 Edition) points out that in the process of learning and using English, the cross-cultural communication elements play an important role. On the one hand, the knowledge and comprehension of the English language culture contributes to the learning of the target language, and on the other hand, it is helpful to the learners' deeper comprehension of the native culture and the enhancement of patriotism. At the same time, one of the significant tasks in cultural teaching is to teach learners cultural knowledge and develop learners' cultural awareness and world awareness (Chen Lin, Wang Qiang, Cheng Xiaotang, 2012). Language and culture are inseparable, learning English will inevitably contact with the cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries and cultural knowledge is the basis for the formation of cultural awareness. The purpose of learning cultural knowledge is to accumulate humanistic spirit and realize the formation of cultural awareness behind knowledge. Therefore, English learning is also a kind of cultural learning, and cultural learning is a significant way to shape cultural awareness. The cultivation of students' cultural awareness is a long-term process, and English textbooks are the core part of English curriculum resources, as well as the important content and means of students' learning and teachers' teaching (Ma Li, 2018). The PEP junior high school's English textbook is the most widely used junior high schools' English textbook in China. According to statistics, of the 93 regions in China, nearly 80% of them have chosen the PEP textbooks of 2013 version of for junior high schools English learning, which shows that this set of textbooks has its advantages, and its cultural content is also worth studying.

Significance of the Research

Through the analysis of the cultural content in the textbook of PEP Junior high schools, this paper studies whether the textbook conforms to the objectives of cultivating cultural awareness in the curriculum standards. By summarizing the display forms of its cultural content, this paper studies whether it can achieve the purpose of improving students' cultural awareness and cultivating their intercultural communicative competence. This paper takes the cultural content of the English textbook of PEP edition as the research object, combining cultural awareness cultivation objectives and English textbooks, researching the embodiment of the cultural awareness of English teaching. It aims to provide some advice and inspirations for textbook editors and English teachers by analyzing the statistic results presented in the three dimensions of cultural content themes, cultural content distribution and cultural content activity designing, which is of

great practical value.

Literature Review

The definition of intercultural communication

The definition of intercultural communication is extensive, refers to the communication between native speakers and non-native speakers, and refers to the communication between people with different cultural backgrounds. Language is the main carrier of culture and the main way to spread culture. Language is influenced by culture, which in turn influences culture. Different language users have different understandings of a word due to their different cultural and historical backgrounds. In English vocabulary teaching, teachers find that the obstacles many students encounter in learning the target language are not formed by language knowledge, but due to the lack of understanding of the cultural background of the target language country and cultural differences. Therefore, in college English vocabulary teaching, teachers should not only teach the surface meaning of vocabulary, but also deeply explore the cultural meaning of vocabulary. Deepen vocabulary teaching and better cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness.

Foreign Studies on Intercultural Communication

As an independent interdisciplinary, intercultural communication came into being in the United States in the late 1950s. Its birth can be said to be marked by the following three signs: First, the first landmark work of intercultural communication research: *The Silent Language* written by Hall was published in 1959. Second, the International Communication Association formally established the Intercultural Communication Department in 1970. Third, the *Yearbook of International and Intercultural Communication* was published in 1974.

In western language teaching, vocabulary has not received much attention. For a long time, English teaching has focused on grammar. Compared with grammar and language, vocabulary has not received as much attention as they do. Most people feel that vocabulary does not need to use any means to memorize. So, there is no specific research on vocabulary teaching.

Domestic Studies on Intercultural Communication

The research on intercultural communication in China began in the 1980s. At that time, Xu Guozhang wrote "Culturally loaded words and English language teaching", which symbolized that China began to pay attention to cross-cultural communication. Since then, the study of intercultural communication has become popular in China. From 1981 to 2004, Chinese scholars have showed more and more interests in intercultural communication research. And they have published hundreds of research papers and more than 30 monographs, which not only promote the development of our cross-cultural communication, but also have a significant impact on other humanities. The intercultural communication degree has made rapid progress in the past 20 years and has achieved

remarkable results, but the theoretical research is not perfect. The key solution to this problem in China is to create an original intercultural communication theory.

Through the global research review, the survey on English vocabulary teaching has received extensive attention and played a key role in teaching. Researchers around the world have been focusing on this topic for a long time. The western research on vocabulary teaching needs to relate to psychology and linguistics. The survey scope of English vocabulary teaching in middle schools in China is very extensive. It explains the means of English vocabulary teaching in middle schools in many aspects, emphasizes the relationship between theory and teaching means, and effectively illustrates the far-reaching impact of vocabulary teaching in middle schools. However, most of them focus on the investigation of vocabulary teaching methods in middle school English teaching. At the same time, most of them are based on theories. There are few operational means in English teaching, especially the investigation on vocabulary culture around cross-cultural communication needs to be improved.

Methodology

Research Objects

The object of this study is the junior high school's English textbooks of PEP edition. This set of textbooks is compiled by People's Education Press in cooperation with American Sage Learning Group in accordance with the basic concept, content and requirements of the Curriculum Standards issued by the Ministry of Education. Five volumes are composed of this set of textbooks. The whole set of textbooks consists of 48 units. Each unit consists of four parts: Section A, Grammar Focus, Section B, and Self Check, which concerns the parts of listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar. This paper only takes the passages related to cultural contents as research objects. This paper selects the reading part of five textbooks for cultural contents analysis.

Research Questions

On the base of the cultural awareness requirements in the Curriculum Standards, this paper takes PEP Junior High Schools English textbooks as the main research object, analyzing the cultural contents in the five textbooks of the current People's Education Edition from the first to the third grade, and specifically analyzing how the textbooks cultivate students' cultural awareness. This paper aims to explore:

What themes of cultural contents are involved in PEP English textbooks for junior high schools?

How are regions of the cultural contents distributed in PEP English textbooks for junior high schools?

What types of the cultural activities are designed in PEP English textbooks for junior high schools?

Based on the research and discussion of the above three questions, the characteristics of textbooks in terms of cultural awareness cultivation are revealed, and suggestions on

teaching and textbooks compilation are discussed.

Research Methods

This study takes Cheng Xiaotang's textbooks evaluation method as the theoretical basis, and mainly adopted literature analysis method and content analysis method.

Cheng Xiaotang's Textbooks Evaluation Method

Professors Cheng Xiaotang and Sun Xiaohui (2011) proposed that impression evaluation and systematic evaluation can be used to evaluate textbooks. If a systematic evaluation is adopted, it can be further expanded into two methods, internal and external evaluation. The impression evaluation is carried out by selecting first-line teachers with rich teaching practice, and the evaluation is mainly carried out based on the teacher's own teaching experience. This kind of evaluation method is highly subjective and has distinct personal characteristics. There is no specific framework as a guide for evaluation, and the evaluation results obtained are also different. In the systematic evaluation, the internal evaluation mainly evaluates the standardization and scientific of the textbooks compilation, and the external evaluation is the applicability evaluation based on the target of the textbooks. Applicability evaluation should start from the learning needs of students and the teaching needs of teachers. Based on Cheng Xiaotang's systematic evaluation method, this study explored the cultural content of the junior high school's English textbooks of PEP edition from the internal evaluation to judge whether it can conform to the requirements of the objectives of cultural awareness in the Curriculum Standards, and whether it can achieve the objectives of cultivating students' cultural awareness.

Literature Analysis

Malcolm Tate (2007) proposed that literature analysis is a basic method of education research. Literature analysis refers to a research method in which relevant information is obtained by consulting the literature according to certain research purposes. It involves 31 the process of first collecting and browsing many relevant literatures and materials, and then selecting the information needed to achieve the research purpose through reading. By sorting out the research status of cultural awareness and cultural awareness training at home and abroad as well as the research status of the cultural content of textbooks at home and abroad, a general understanding of this topic and the overall picture of the research topic are formed, which provides a theoretical basis for the research of this paper. The author also found a breakthrough point for the research of this paper, to find out the shortcomings of previous literature research, continuing to study.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a systematic and reproducible technique for converting many text words into fewer content categories based on explicit coding rules (Weber, 1990). It aims to convert literature materials into statistical data, and then analyze literature contents

according to these data, finally make judgments and inferences about facts on this foundation. This paper, taking the latest the textbooks of PEP edition as the main object of study, collates the cultural contents in the junior middle school's English textbooks from grade one to grade three, analyzes its themes, regions and activity design, and specifically analyzes how the textbook cultivates students' cultural awareness.

3.5 Research Procedures

This paper explores the cultural contents in the reading passages and the reading activities related in each volume. There are five steps involved in the current research in total.

First, the sample reading passages and reading activities are selected carefully. Then the volume, unit, topic, page and section of each reading passage and reading activity are located. In this process, both explicit and implicit cultural content and cultural activities are included in the statistics, involving cultural comparisons and cultural communication activities, etc. Explicit cultural content and activities refer to the cultural contents and activities directly presented in the textbooks. For example, in the tenth unit of the second volume of the ninth grade, the content of the reading passage is French table manners. One of the reading activities clearly requires students to compare Chinese and French table manners. This is an explicit cultural contrast activity. For another example, in the tenth unit of the second book of the seventh grade, the reading passage is about the comparative introduction of birthday food in China and Britain. The reading activity includes completing a comparison table of Chinese and English birthday food and special meanings. Obviously, students need to make cultural comparisons in this activity, which is also an explicit cultural comparison activity. Implicit cultural content and activities refer to cultural content and activities that are not directly presented in the textbook. For example, in the first unit of the first volume of the seventh grade, five common English names and one Chinese name are presented in the reading passage and one of the reading activities is the circling of the first name and last name and in the passage. In this activity, students are not explicitly required to compare Chinese and English names, but it implies an understanding of the differences between Chinese and English names, so this is an implicit cultural understanding activity.

Second, to find out the cultural content in this set of textbooks from cultural themes: history and geography, traditional customs, lifestyle, behavioral norm, literature and art, and values.

Third, it analyzes the distribution of cultural content from three aspects: target language culture, native language culture and world culture. Fourth, the activity design is analyzed. In this step both activity categories and the activity types of each activity were located. These activity types consist of checking the facts compare, express attitudes, behavior and ability demonstration. Then the activity categories are identified.

Fourth, in this step the data collected in the previous steps is counted. The types of cultural themes, types of cultural regions, categories and types of cultural activities in each book.

Finally, based on the characteristics of cultural themes and cultural regions of reading

passages and cultural types of reading activities, the evaluation on the extent to which the cultural content in reading passages and reading activities design satisfies the cultural awareness cultivation requirements in the Curriculum Standards is made and some examples are given in the evaluation.

Chapter Four Major Findings

This chapter clarified the research findings, provided some suggestions to the textbook compilers and teachers based on the research findings, and finally explained the limitations of this paper. Major Findings Based on the cultural awareness cultivation requirements in the Curriculum Standards, this paper analyzed the cultural content of the PEP textbooks. It focused the three dimensions of cultural theme types, cultural region distribution, and cultural activity types in the PEP English textbooks for junior high schools. In the research process of this paper, the author had the following findings:

Firstly, the PEP textbooks list multiple cultural themes, such as important festivals, traditional recreation and sports activities, dietary customs, lifestyle and behavior habits, etc. These rich cultural themes will help students better understand the culture of various themes promotes students' accumulation of cultural knowledge and encourages them to learn more about foreign cultures, which is of great significance to broaden students' cultural horizons. This confirms to the cultural knowledge requirements of cultural awareness cultivation objectives in the Curriculum Standards. However, the textbooks are less involved in the important history and value themes of target language countries, and these aspects play an important role in understanding the cultural content of target language countries.

Secondly, the choice of cultural regions contains not only themes in English-speaking countries, but also themes outside of English-speaking countries and in China. The types of cultural region mainly introduce Western culture, the proportion of Chinese cultures rank second, and the content of world culture is less. There are many differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, but they are all products of human cultural development. By learning the content of Chinese and foreign cultures, students can not only understand the differences of different cultures, but also better understand the richness and diversity of English. The learning of Chinese culture in an English environment can show the charm of mother tongue culture from different perspectives, guide students to learn and respect the similarities and differences of different cultures. Therefore, this method can improve students' learning ability in a multicultural context.

Finally, as far as the design of cultural activity is concerned, both the cultural understanding activities and cultural skills activities in the textbooks are involved, which meets the requirements of cultural awareness cultivation in the Curriculum Standards. However, the number of the two types of activities is unevenly distributed, the cultural understanding activities are fully positioned, and cultural skills activities account for a small proportion. From the perspective of activity forms, the four forms of reading activities are included: check the facts, compare, express attitude and behavioral and ability demonstration. This shows that the reading activities in textbooks are involved in cultural knowledge, students' attitudes and objective evaluation of different cultures,

while rarely cross-cultural communication. Many cultural understanding activities in the textbook help students to grasp Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge more firmly and these activities fully meet the needs of students to learn cultural knowledge. Cultural understanding activities are of great significance for students to understand cultural differences. However, the number of compare and express attitude activities in the textbooks is small, which does not provide students with ample occasions to express their attitudes. Thus, it is not beneficial to the learning of cultural differences and similarities and is not conducive to students' deep understanding of cultural differences. Cultural communication activities help students to perform cultural output exercises. Students are immersed in the scenarios and contexts simulated by these activities, which can effectively improve their cross-cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication ability. However, there are few cultural communications activities in textbooks, and there are few opportunities for students to practice cross-cultural communication, which is not conducive to the formation of students' cross-cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication competence. In addition, it is worth noting that reading activities have a significant feature--comprehension, so the cultural activities in the reading part are mainly comprehensive activities, but the goal of cultural learning is to reach the level of cultural communication, that is, to communicate based on understanding. Therefore, it is still necessary to add more cultural communication activities in the reading part.

In short, the cultural contents presented in this set of textbooks are largely in line with the requirements of cultural awareness cultivation in the Curriculum Standards. These cultural contents allow students to perceive the living customs, ways and values of people in English-speaking countries, and compare the living habits of Chinese people. It also helps students make clear the similarities and differences between the two cultures and deepens the comprehension of Chinese culture. Moreover, it provides language and cultural background support for students to integrate into exotic situations in the future, and help students understand world culture and cultivate world awareness. In addition, it's clear that these textbooks are designed in a gradual and logical way. However, there is also the problem of uneven distribution of the number of different cultural theme types, cultural regions and cultural activity categories and types the cultural content of the PEP textbooks covers a wide range, but not in-depth.

Suggestions

To make the textbooks' cultural contents setting more reasonable and cultural teaching more effective, suggestions were given to the textbooks compilers and teachers based on the research findings.

5.1 Suggestions for Textbooks Compilers

The textbooks of the People's Education Edition are carefully compiled by senior education experts, and many years of teaching practice in various places have also proved the advantages of the teaching materials. But based on the research in this paper, the author puts forward some suggestions for improvement.

First, it is recommended to increase the contents and proportions of native language

culture and world culture, and systematically arrange courses. This improvement is not only the need for the cultivation of students' cultural awareness, but also conforms to the laws of language disciplines. The increase in the cultural content of the mother tongue can guide students to compare and think about Chinese and foreign cultures and accelerate the development of national pride and cultural confidence. Let students fully experience the artistic conception of native language culture in the context of foreign language expression, thereby inspiring students' desire for knowledge. This kind of improvement is also a requirement for the cultivation of intercultural communication ability.

Second, the textbook editors themselves must have deep cultural literacy and broad cultural vision, and they must be able to accurately grasp the characteristics and essence of foreign cultures and extract specific components and arrange them in the textbooks. Students must use language to learn to understand foreign cultures, but also to build up the cultural self-confidence of the nation. The scientific incorporation of cultural content into English textbooks can activate students' thinking, broaden their horizons, update their concepts, and allow them to fully appreciate the charm of multiculturalism, thereby establishing a preliminary awareness of cultural contrast. Only by completing this process, can the content of cultural contrast be included in subsequent teaching.

Third, the cultivation of cross-cultural communication awareness and cross-cultural communication competence requires the input and output of cultural content learning. Therefore, more consideration should be given to cultural communication when designing activities to allow students to develop their cross-cultural communication awareness and abilities in different activities.

In a word, the textbooks compilers need to have a deep understanding of the expressions and requirements of the Curriculum Standards for the cultivation of cultural awareness, and fully and appropriately present the cultural contents in the textbooks. Then the world is constantly developing and advancing, and cultural contents are not static. This requires textbooks editors to keep up with the times and update cultural materials regularly, so that students can keep up with the times to master cultural knowledge and cultivate cultural awareness.

5.2 Suggestions for Teachers

There is a difference between the content of the textbook and the teaching content. A good textbook is of great significance. At the same time, it is also very important for teachers to make full use of the textbook. Therefore, based on the research results of this paper, the author proposes a few suggestions for teachers to effectively use the textbooks and carry out cultural teaching.

First, according to the research results, the cultural contents of the textbooks are designed in accordance with the principle of gradual arrangement. Therefore, teachers should consider the age characteristics and cognitive ability of students in teaching, adhere to the principles of applicability, stage and interest, and adopt various strategies to make students have a rough understanding of the similarities and differences of Chinese cultures and foreign cultures at the beginning of teaching, and stimulate students' interest in learning. In the higher stage of English learning, by expanding the scope of

students' contact with foreign cultures, students can expand their horizons, improve their sensitivity and discrimination of the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, and then cultivate students' cultural awareness and improve their cross-cultural communication ability.

Secondly, through the research on the cultural content of textbooks, it can be found that the emphasis of the cultural content of different grades in the textbook is different, which requires teachers to deal with it flexibly in daily teaching activities. The textbooks present different regional cultures in a comparative way, which helps students increase their sensitivity to cultural differences, form a cross-cultural awareness, and thus cultivate the ability of cross-cultural communication. What's more, teachers should not be too abstract when explaining knowledge about cultures. If the teacher's explanation is too abstract, it is not conducive to the understanding and acceptance of students and cannot achieve the teaching objectives. Therefore, teachers must consider the cognitive characteristics of students. When teaching the knowledge of cultures, teachers' explanation should be specific and vivid. In daily teaching, teachers can use videos, pictures, actual objects and other forms to provide students with rich cultural contrast materials, such as festivals, comparison of typical foods and literary works, to help them perceive cultural differences and increase their sensitivity to cultural differences independently.

Thirdly, many Chinese and foreign cultural contents are presented in the textbooks. In addition to allowing students to understand the cultural contents in the textbooks, teachers must also guide students to use the rich cultural resources provided by the textbooks to dig out the knowledge hidden in the textbooks and stimulate students' positivity in learning. Teachers can help students understand and analyze cultural information according to the cultural teaching content of each unit, and discuss the connotations and values contained in the article. This requires teachers to consciously promote students' cultural cognition through various methods and means in the process of cultural teaching, gradually help students form a good cultural awareness, absorb the essence of foreign culture, deepen their understanding of Chinese culture, and form correct values and develop good behavior habits.

Finally, cultivating students' cultural awareness is a long-term process. Teachers should integrate and use textbooks and use diversified teaching methods to infiltrate the classroom, such as English annotations on textbooks, comparison of Chinese and Western cultures, and authentic English culture. Teachers should use a variety of methods to design classroom activities ingeniously, so that cultural rendering can penetrate every part of teaching. Teachers can use relevant materials to set topic contexts, so that teaching content can be effectively combined with culture and students can understand and use different cultures in real life and communication. To be specific, teachers create certain situations based on cultural contents, and require students to conduct oral, bilateral and multilateral communication activities in combination with the context through role-playing, group discussion and dialogue, and encourage interaction among students and between teachers and students, to gradually improve students' ability to use what they have learned to conduct cultural communication.

All in all, teachers ought to deeply interpret the requirements of the Curriculum

Standards for the cultivation of cultural awareness and improve their own cultural awareness literacy. Then teachers are required to carefully study the textbooks and have a comprehensive and clear understanding of the cultural content in the textbooks. Eventually, teachers need to use textbooks flexibly according to the actual situation of teaching, appropriately delete or add cultural content presented in the textbooks, provide students with a good cultural awareness training environment, and help students effectively improve their cultural awareness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is essential to pay much attention to cultural differences in English language teaching and their impact on language, not only by focusing on language teaching, but also by strengthening the introduction of cultural background knowledge of the language. It is impossible to master and use English accurately without its culture. Therefore, English teachers should strive to guide students to deepen their understanding and knowledge of English culture, gradually develop their cross-cultural awareness based on learning to use English, and ultimately develop their intercultural communication competence.

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