

Research on the Reform of College English Teaching from a Multicultural Perspective

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Abstract: *With the advancement of globalization and the increasing significance of multicultural backgrounds, the reform of college English teaching faces new challenges and opportunities. Multiculturalism has become a major characteristic of globalization. The "Standards for English Courses in Higher Vocational Education" (2021 Edition), issued by the Office of the Ministry of Education in March 2021, states that "intercultural communication" is one of the core competencies of the discipline. It is evident that in today's vocational education, enhancing students' sensitivity to cultural differences, improving their cultural literacy, and developing appropriate communication skills have become goals for talent cultivation. This study aims to analyze the existing problems in current college English teaching from a multicultural perspective and explore strategies for the reform of college English teaching to improve teaching quality, cultivate students' multicultural literacy, and develop them into versatile talents with intercultural communication abilities to meet the needs of national development in the new era.*

Keywords: *multicultural perspective; college English teaching; teaching reform*

1. Introduction

Globalization has promoted interaction and communication between nations and ethnic groups, representing a historical and cultural transformation. "Cultural collisions, influences, conflicts, and integration have become more intense, fully demonstrating the diversity of world cultures." [1] Multiculturalism has become a major characteristic of globalization. Communication and interaction between different cultures have become more frequent and closely intertwined. In this context, college English teaching needs to adapt to the demands of multiculturalism, fostering students' intercultural communication abilities, cultural awareness, and their capacity to communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds to cope with the increasingly internationalized professional environment. The reform of college English teaching from a multicultural perspective not only focuses on the cultivation of English language knowledge and skills but, more importantly, on developing students' abilities to effectively communicate and collaborate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This involves understanding and respecting different cultures and possessing the ability to flexibly use language and communication strategies. The cultivation of these abilities requires teachers to incorporate multicultural content and methods into their teaching and create an inclusive learning environment where students can experience and practice intercultural communication.

This study aims to explore the research on the reform of college English teaching from a multicultural perspective. We will review the concept of multicultural education and elucidate the close relationship between multiculturalism and college English teaching. Furthermore, we will analyze the existing problems in college English teaching to reveal the urgency and necessity of reform. Based on this analysis, we will propose a series of reform strategies and methods to facilitate the effective implementation of college English teaching from a multicultural perspective. These strategies aim to help college English teaching better meet the students' needs for multicultural literacy, develop their intercultural communication abilities and cultural awareness, and adapt to the requirements of national development in the new era.

2. Overview of multiculturalism

The concept of culture was first proposed by the British anthropologist Edward Tylor in the 19th century. He defined culture as a complex whole, which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and habits acquired by individuals as members of society. In other words, culture refers to the way of life of a group of people as social members, including material objects, ideas, values, attitudes, and patterned behavioral ways. Culture is a shared phenomenon, and for something, viewpoint, or behavioral pattern to possess cultural characteristics, it must have a meaning shared by the majority of society. Culture is not transmitted through genetics; instead, it is acquired through learning and interaction with the surrounding cultural environment [2].

"Multiculturalism" has a broad meaning and is a cultural phenomenon where various cultures coexist and interact independently in the development process of multicultural nations. Multiculturalism advocates the recognition of cultural diversity, equality, and commonality. In the late 20th century, the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies for Development defined the concept of multiculturalism as encompassing "the right to cultural identity, the right to social justice, and the need for economic efficiency for all ethnic groups." The rapid advancement of globalization has led to global cultural exchanges surpassing any previous era in terms of scope, intensity, speed, and diversity. No country can exist in isolation from the cultural environment of other countries. A rich and diverse cultural environment with a combination of diverse world cultures and unique indigenous cultures is a prerequisite for a country's long-term stable development and cooperation on a global scale. In contrast, ethnic culture originates from the collective creation and inheritance of all social members of a specific ethnic group. Its content is rich, including material aspects such as dietary traditions, clothing customs, architectural styles, as well as spiritual aspects such as ideas, ethics, religious beliefs, language, and writing. Among them, the spiritual aspect is the core of ethnic culture and the foundation and soul of the ethnic group. Ethnic culture exerts a guiding influence on the thoughts, behaviors, and value orientations of all ethnic members, thus serving as the centripetal and cohesive force of the ethnic group. In short, multiculturalism mainly refers to a country or region having multiple cultures of different natures, including ethnic and foreign cultures, as well as traditional and modern cultures [3].

3. Current Status of College English Teaching from a Multicultural Perspective

"College English" is a compulsory foundational course for non-English majors in higher vocational education, serving as both a language skills course and a cultural enrichment course. The teaching objectives of college English courses are to equip students with solid language knowledge in listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation, and the ability to use English in a workplace environment. It is also essential to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of English culture, improve their overall cultural literacy, and cultivate them into intercultural communication talents [4]. However, in the process of college English teaching, most foreign language teachers focus on imparting English knowledge and improving language proficiency, often neglecting the influence of multicultural integration on language classrooms. There are several issues in teaching practices:

3.1. Weak awareness of multiculturalism

In the context of multicultural integration, university English teaching not only requires imparting basic language knowledge to students but also conveying the cultural implications behind the language knowledge. This aims to deepen students' understanding and appreciation of language knowledge and enhance their cross-cultural communicative awareness [4]. However, current university English classroom teaching shows that most teachers lack this awareness. They tend to neglect the cultivation of students' cultural literacy in setting teaching objectives and overlook the integration of foreign and local cultures in teaching content, which in turn affects students' comprehensive understanding of English language and culture [5]. As a result, students have insufficient knowledge of the similarities and differences between different cultures and lack cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity. Consequently, they often struggle to effectively communicate and collaborate in a cross-cultural environment. This situation warrants significant attention, and corresponding measures should be taken to improve and refine university English teaching, fostering the development of students as well-rounded individuals with the ability to engage in cross-cultural communication.

3.2. Imbalanced Teaching Content

The selection and review of college English teaching materials and textbooks are closely intertwined. For teachers, textbooks serve as both the basis for organizing teaching activities and the reference for guiding students' autonomous learning. Therefore, they play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of teaching. Currently, there exists an issue of imbalance in the representation of multicultural education elements in the college English textbooks. Specifically, while these textbooks do not lack knowledge related to the cultural background of English-speaking countries, they often prioritize increasing vocabulary and reinforcing grammar points. In other words, the textbooks excessively emphasize one-way learning of the target language and culture, while lacking content that fosters students' ability to promote Chinese excellent traditional culture using English. Moreover, there is a serious lack of content that provides comparative analysis between the target language culture and local culture, which is essential for enhancing students' critical thinking abilities^[6].

Regarding the goal of enhancing students' cultural literacy in university English teaching, it is often challenging to put it into practice due to limited class time, insufficient understanding of multicultural content by teachers, and a lack of classroom discussion activities. Consequently, there is a disconnect between the teaching content and the teaching objectives, leading to suboptimal teaching outcomes and a deficiency in students' cross-cultural communication abilities.

To address these issues, it is imperative to carefully evaluate and select English teaching materials that encompass a more balanced representation of multicultural education elements. These materials should not only focus on language skills but also include content that promotes cross-cultural understanding, fosters critical thinking, and encourages the appreciation and dissemination of both English-speaking countries' cultures and Chinese excellent traditional culture. Moreover, teachers should be provided with professional development opportunities to enhance their understanding of multicultural content and be encouraged to design teaching activities that align with the teaching objectives, ensuring that students' cultural literacy and cross-cultural communication abilities are effectively cultivated throughout the English language learning process.

3.3. Insufficient Innovation in Teaching Methods

In recent years, the reform of college English teaching has been progressing in an orderly manner. Many teachers have been exploring innovative approaches to college English teaching, such as OBE (Outcome-Based Education), PBL (Project-Based Learning), and POA (Problem-Oriented Approach). However, due to the lack of effective assessment methods, some of these reform efforts have not yielded satisfactory results. While there are teachers who respond to the call for teaching innovation and attempt to adopt student-centered approaches in their classrooms, the limited class hours and large class sizes have hindered significant improvements in teaching quality. Some teachers, after attempting a phase of teaching innovation, revert to traditional teaching methods, with a focus on teacher-centered instruction aimed at imparting language knowledge and strengthening listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Consequently, student motivation is not high, and the teaching outcomes fall short of expectations^[6].

Furthermore, despite the repeated emphasis on integrating a multicultural perspective into classroom teaching to cultivate students as culturally competent individuals, the design of college English teaching often lacks sufficient focus on improving students' cross-cultural awareness, nurturing their patriotic spirit, and promoting a sense of national identity.

Addressing these challenges requires a thorough evaluation and selection of appropriate teaching methods and materials. English teaching materials should strike a balance by not only emphasizing language skills but also incorporating elements that promote cross-cultural understanding, critical thinking, and an appreciation for both the culture of the target language country and the rich heritage of Chinese culture. Additionally, professional development opportunities should be provided for teachers to enhance their understanding of multicultural content, encouraging them to design teaching activities aligned with the teaching objectives, thus ensuring effective cultivation of students' cultural literacy and cross-cultural communication abilities throughout their English learning journey.

3.4. The Need to Improve Teachers' Cultural Literacy

Teachers, as the core force driving educational reform, have a direct impact on the cultivation of students' qualities through their own cultural literacy. However, there are some foreign language instructors in higher education who lack adequate understanding of the societal development of

multiculturalism and do not give enough attention to issues of multicultural conflict and integration in the content of teaching materials. Many foreign language teachers excessively rely on their understanding of the culture of the target language country in language teaching, while overlooking the significance of incorporating local culture in vocational college English classrooms. The absence of systematic education in traditional Chinese culture makes it challenging for many teachers to effectively integrate the essence of excellent Chinese traditional culture into university English classroom instruction^[6].

4. Strategies for College English Teaching Reform in the Context of Multiculturalism

4.1. Strengthening Cross-cultural Awareness Cultivation

In March 2021, the Ministry of Education issued the "Curriculum Standards for Higher Vocational Education Specialist English" (2021 Edition), which emphasizes "multicultural communication" as one of the core competencies of the discipline. Therefore, vocational English courses should clearly specify the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness as an essential component of teaching objectives. Teachers should strive to establish an organic connection between language knowledge and cultural elements in English teaching practice. During the English teaching process, emphasis should be placed on explaining and imparting cultural content, and cultural education should be introduced appropriately to continuously enhance students' cultural literacy. Additionally, teachers should actively incorporate case analysis and real-life scenarios in the teaching process to allow students to experience the challenges of communication and collaboration in diverse cultural backgrounds. Lastly, organizing students to participate in cross-cultural experiential activities, such as cultural exchange exhibitions and international cultural festivals, can enhance students' cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity.^[7]

4.2. Reshaping Curriculum Development and Enriching Teaching Resources

Traditional English textbooks generally focus on language skills as their core content, and the cultural background related to language teaching is often centered around English-speaking countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. However, in today's world of diverse cultures coexisting equally, English has already transcended the language and cultural rules of traditional English-speaking countries, becoming a tool for understanding and promoting cultures from around the world, including local cultures. Therefore, university English textbooks need to break free from the limitation of teaching only British and American cultures in English and incorporate discussions of world cultures and local cultures. Strengthening the inclusion of traditional Chinese culture in university English textbooks can enrich teaching resources, cultivate students' cross-cultural knowledge reserves, and encourage them to pay attention to Chinese culture, fully leveraging the cultural dissemination function of English teaching in a multicultural context.

This requires a reshaping of the textbook writing approach, namely a diversified approach to textbook writing: it should focus not only on language skill training but also on holistic education - cultivating students into "whole persons." The content of the textbooks centered on language skill training should emphasize listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation exercises, allowing students to focus on language forms and improve their language usage skills through input materials in the target language. On the other hand, the content focused on holistic education should always be student-centered, cultivating students' personal abilities and sense of social responsibility. Specifically, the writing of university English textbooks should aim to nurture talents who not only understand the cultural overview of the target language country but also have a profound knowledge of Chinese culture and the ability to effectively convey it in English. The goal should be to foster individuals with strong cross-cultural communication skills, combining Chinese sentiments with an international perspective.

A student-centered textbook writing approach should emphasize guiding students in self-directed learning and active thinking. It should select materials and design tasks at different levels to cultivate students' innovative thinking and problem-solving abilities, rather than merely providing mechanical language training exercises.

4.3. Utilizing Information Technology and Innovating Teaching Models

With the rapid development of information technology and its widespread application in the field of education, the traditional classroom teaching model is bound to undergo a series of innovations in the technology-driven era. Firstly, the teaching mode will gradually shift from one-way teacher-led

instruction to collaborative interaction between teachers and students. Secondly, teachers should fully grasp modern educational technology and build online learning modules. They can use online teaching platforms to extend limited classroom activities beyond the classroom. If university English teaching aims to not only focus on students' language proficiency but also enhance their cross-cultural awareness and communication abilities, relying solely on traditional classrooms is insufficient. This calls for teachers to construct a blended teaching mode that combines online and offline elements.

Specifically, before class, teachers should explore the rich multicultural factors in the teaching content, carefully design teaching segments, and disseminate cultural background knowledge through online platforms or WeChat groups. Teachers can make use of lectures, TED talks, celebrity interviews, and other concise online resources to fully engage students' interest, guiding them to learn about Western cultures while gaining a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and experiencing the diversity of multiculturalism. During class, teachers can combine the textbook content with group discussions on cultural comparisons. In this segment, teachers act as both designers and facilitators, guiding students to have a correct ideological orientation, enhancing their understanding of foreign cultures while strengthening their identification with Chinese culture and fostering cultural self-confidence. After class, assignments related to the teaching content can go beyond traditional written outputs. Cultural-themed presentations can be encouraged, where students use English to tell Chinese stories and share short videos on online teaching platforms or educational social media such as WeChat public accounts and TikTok. By combining online and offline elements, and making full use of information technology and social media, the blended teaching mode emphasizes student-centered teaching activities. It focuses on both enhancing students' language proficiency and cultivating their cultural literacy. This teaching approach effectively stimulates students' enthusiasm for learning and significantly improves the quality of education.

4.4. Enhancing Teacher Training and Elevating Teacher Competence

In the teaching process, teachers' instructional thinking and their own competence directly influence classroom teaching outcomes. Higher education institutions should place significant emphasis on enhancing foreign language teachers' cultural literacy and establish a systematic training mechanism. Training in teacher cultural literacy should be targeted and practical, adopting a multimodal training approach that combines online and offline methods and integrates theory with practice. The training should focus on improving teachers' understanding and interpretation of the essence of outstanding Chinese traditional culture and enhancing their ability to express Chinese culture in English. Simultaneously, training should also emphasize enhancing teachers' instructional design capabilities, helping foreign language teachers integrate cross-cultural awareness throughout classroom teaching reforms. Improving teacher competence is a dynamic, long-term process. Foreign language teachers should work together, utilizing various forms of team collaboration, such as traditional Chinese culture teaching teams, teacher traditional culture learning communities (PLCs), virtual research rooms for multicultural studies, and workshops, to elevate their cultural literacy. Through interactive exchanges among team members, effective synergy among teachers can be promoted. At the institutional level, university leadership and teacher training departments should attach great importance to the development of cultural literacy in college English teachers. They should improve relevant training policies, expand training avenues, record the results of teachers' training at different stages, establish incentive mechanisms, and stimulate teachers' enthusiasm and proactivity in enhancing cultural literacy. Additionally, the ideological and political orientation of English teachers is an important component of teacher training. Universities can gradually enhance English teachers' ideological awareness and discernment through collaborative lesson planning, teaching seminars, expert lectures, and other means^[7].

5. Conclusion

In the context of multiculturalism, the reform of vocational college English teaching requires attention to various aspects, including the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness, the balance and diversity of teaching content, the innovation of teaching methods, and the enhancement of teachers' cultural literacy. In response to these issues, we have proposed corresponding reform strategies. By implementing these strategies, we can better adapt to the context of multicultural integration, improve the quality and effectiveness of vocational college English teaching, cultivate students' cross-cultural communication abilities, and lay a solid foundation for their future career development.

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