

# The Application of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory to Middle School English Teaching

Yan Gao\*

School of Foreign Languages, Huzhou University, Huzhou, Zhejiang, China, 313000

spss11@163.com

\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** In the era of economic globalization and cultural diversity, cultural differences are everywhere, and the most important difference between different cultures is the difference of values, and the most important conflict between different cultures is the conflict of values. Cultural differences have a direct impact on our middle school English teaching. This paper introduces the basic connotation of Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, analyzes the current situation and existing problems of western cultural education in China, and puts forward effective ways and methods to improve western cultural education. Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is used to analyze the differences of cultural values between target countries and to reduce and avoid the barrier effect caused by cultural differences, which can provide reference for the current Western cultural education in China.

**Keywords:** Hofstede; cultural dimension, English teaching, cultural education, cultural confidence

## 1. Introduction

Cultural difference is one of the main factors leading to the failure of cross-cultural communication. Hofstede defined the culture as the "common psychological program" of people in the same environment. So culture is not an individual trait. It's a psychological program shared by people who have the same social experience and the same education. People in different countries and regions have different psychological procedures. Because of social condition, different education, different work, they have different ways of thinking. Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is an important theory for analyzing cultural differences. Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is to measure the cultural differences and value orientations of different countries from the perspective of countries. It is one of the most influential theories in the field of culture so far.

## 2. The Basic Connotation of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

Hofstede's cultural Dimension theory is a framework proposed by Dutch psychologist Hofstede to measure the cultural differences between different countries. Since its emergence, its theory has been widely concerned by the society and regarded as a classic in the field of cultural theory research.

Hofstede summed up the four basic dimensions of cultural differences after several rounds of research, and analyzed that cultural differences can be traced back to one or several of the basic dimensions. The four dimensions are power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculine / feminine society and uncertainty avoidance. Later, he added the dimension of time orientation. Hofstede's cultural dimension theory provides an empirical theoretical framework for the interaction between people in cross-cultural situations. Hofstede's five cultural dimensions are also known as a universally applicable framework of cultural theory, which can explain the cultural values of most countries. Hofstede's theory of cultural dimension includes:

Power Distance, which refers to the extent to which the society can accept the unequal distribution of the rights of an organization (company) among its members. Uncertainty Avoidance refers to the degree to which an organization or group feels threatened when facing Uncertainty and tries to avoid Uncertainty by formulating safety rules and using other means. Individualism/Collectivism refers to how people see themselves and others and the society, and whether the society is focus on the interests of the individual or collective interests, and what is the relationship between individuals and groups in

a society. Masculinity/Femininity refers to the roles of men and women and the functions of men and women. That is, the dominant standard of value in society. Since Hofstede adopted western thinking mode in his survey, Professor Michael Peng of The Chinese University of Hong Kong designed a questionnaire including non-Western culture in 1980, which added Chinese values. Michael Peng's results reveal another dimension about future orientation and its opposite, past and present orientation. Hofstede calls this "long vs short-term orientation," and uses the findings as the fifth universal dimension. It can be said that Hofstede's cultural dimension theory has presented a systematic pattern of multidisciplinary development, multi-level association, multi-dimensional overlap and multi-perspective integration.

### **3. The Current Situation of Western Culture Education in Middle School English Teaching**

#### ***3.1. Lack of Understanding of Cultural Differences between China and the West***

Hofstede believed that the cultural difference between the West and the non-West is obvious. Different nations belonging to the same cultural circle will also have differences in various indicators of regional culture. Cultural difference is one of the main factors leading to the failure of cross-cultural communication. These differences will directly affect the effect of the cross-culture communication. In the teaching of western culture in colleges and universities, many teachers pay more attention to the cultural differences between China and the West, especially the cultural differences between China and the UK and the US, while ignoring the differences between China and other western developing countries. To a large extent, the differences between Chinese and Western languages in terms of structure and other aspects make the Chinese and Western ways of thinking significantly different. From a deep perspective, this difference is one of the most fundamental reasons for cultural differences. It will also lead to a lack of understanding of the differences between Chinese and Western cultures.

#### ***3.2. Unitary Mode of Cultural Teaching***

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is an important theory to analyze the cultural differences among countries. It concretizes and digitizes the previous abstract cross-cultural studies, and has an extremely important influence on transnational economy and trade, international communication, foreign language teaching and other aspects. At present, the cultivation of cultural ability is neglected in western culture teaching, and the cultural teaching modes and cultural information sources are unitary. Students receive western culture education only in schools and classrooms, and teachers generally infuse the knowledge to the students by unitary teaching method. Due to the lack of emphasis, simple content and unsystematic plan of cultural teaching, the lack of knowledge of Western culture and the weakness of students' cross-communication ability have been highlighted in the teaching of Western culture.

#### ***3.3. Subordinate Position of Cultural Teaching***

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory plays an important role in facilitating people to understand the cultural differences of different countries better, and then overcome cross cultural barriers and improve cross-cultural communication level. The reason why western culture teaching in foreign language teaching is not paid attention to is that western culture teaching lacks theoretical support and only describes some cultural phenomena. Therefore, western culture teaching has always been a subordinate and additional part of language teaching and has been filling in the gaps in foreign language teaching. Although the time allows, students are only introduced to some scattered and not systematic knowledge of Western culture, and the contents and methods are far from the goals required by the cultural teaching.

#### ***3.4. Inefficiency of Cultural Teaching***

The essence of Hofstede's comparison of cultural values of different countries is the comparison of dimensions. The relationship between education and culture is a mutual cause and effect relationship, and the two are intertwined. From the perspective of culture, cultural education is essentially a cultural activity with value as the entry point. The low efficiency of cultural education is due to the rupture and resistance to culture. Effective cultural education is a process of taking the initiative to receive cultural edification. Many students in China cannot communicate with foreign friends smoothly, because they

do not understand English customs, thinking mode and historical culture. The lack of knowledge of western cultural background is not conducive to the elimination of the cultural gap between China and the West.

#### **4. The Effective Path of Western Cultural Education under Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory**

##### ***4.1. Re-Understanding of Cultural Differences between China and The West***

Hofstede's model of national cultural dimension plays an important role in promoting people's better understanding of cultural differences in different countries. On the other hand, although the personalities of individuals in a society vary widely, there are some common and enduring traits of character at the national level. Therefore, cultural teaching itself is a sensitive issue

Different countries on each dimension are distributed at different positions on the continuum from high to low, and their cultures are not completely different. Take the power distance dimension for example. The cultures of high power distance and low power distance are not in two extremes, but are distributed at different positions on the continuum from high to low. For example, Chinese culture is a typical collectivist cultural value dimension, while The United States is a typical individualistic value oriented cultural model. The differences between the two cultural models are clearly reflected in the deep values.

With the closer of the international communication space and the economic changes of different countries, the cultural dimension differences of each country are also changing. Hofstede believes that the historical traditions of different countries are the origin of the differences in the uncertainty avoidance index among countries. Hofstede's model of the cultural dimension of a country helps people understand the differences between different cultures, but it also tends to create an "alien stereotype" of that country's culture, within which all the people in that country are grouped. We should keep pace with the times and adapt to the changes of cultural dimension differences. For example, with the continuous growth of China's economy, in terms of the cultural dimension of power distance, many changes have taken place in China's family, school and social norms: student-centered teaching philosophy is advocated in classroom teaching, the relationship between teachers and students and family members tends to be equal, and the public's awareness of participating in and discussing government affairs has gradually increased.

In intercultural communication, we should see that each dimension of cultural values is based on the national level, rather than the individual level. Hofstede's model of national cultural dimension helps people to understand the differences of different national cultures. The overall cultural differences at the national level can't be identified with each individual in the culture, and the cultural differences should not be treated with a stereotyped impression. For example, China is a collectivist country with a high power distance and a long-term orientation towards the strongest countries. The United States, on the other hand, is the country with the strongest individualism and the lowest power distance.

##### ***4.2. Multicultural Teaching Model***

###### ***4.2.1 The Change of Teaching Concept***

Hofstede believed that culture is a psychological process shared by people in an environment, which can distinguish a group of people from others. The target and subject of middle school English teaching are students, whose interests require us to pay more attention to the "individuation" and "diversification" in the target orientation of middle school English teaching. Through Hofstede's theoretical framework of cultural dimension, we can concretize and datatize abstract cultural differences and apply them to practical classroom teaching. Therefore, English learning is not just a course of study, it can help students broaden their horizon and learn to appreciate and accept the differences between different cultures. The overall goal is to develop the language cognitive ability and level, enhance the cultural awareness, improve the comprehensive application ability of English, mobilize the enthusiasm of English learning.

###### ***4.2.2. The Reform of Teaching Content***

Hofstede investigated, analyzed and compared the cultures of more than fifty countries around the world, and studied different cultures and values. Cross-cultural teaching cannot be simply understood

as the introduction of Western culture, but should grasp the characteristics and principles of integrating foreign cultural knowledge into teaching, and its highest level is to help students correctly treat the cultures of different nations in the world. It is easier to help students overcome cultural barriers by introducing the cultural connotations of native English speakers. When teachers guide and impart the awareness of cultural education, students' cultural nerve will be triggered. Unconsciously, students' cultural awareness will be enhanced and their intercultural communication ability will be developed. Students not only learn language knowledge but also master the corresponding cultural background. They should also cultivate their native language literacy and, most importantly, their sensitivity to cultural differences between English and their native language.

#### ***4.2.3. The Innovation of Teaching Methods***

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory on the one hand shows the important position of the culture teaching in middle school English teaching, and on the other hand plays a guiding role in the reform of middle school English teaching. The requirements on cultural teaching should not only take into account the rich cultural contents, but also must pay attention to systematic summary of the teaching method. The previous rigid and single teaching mode should be diversified. The traditional teacher-centered mode of classroom teaching should be changed, and students' learning enthusiasm and subjective initiative should be fully mobilized. Therefore, cultural teaching should take students as the main body and cultivate students' ability of observation, ability of critical thinking, ability of imagination, ability of communication and cooperation.

#### ***4.3. The Cultivation of Cultural Confidence***

##### ***4.3.1. Designation of Syllabus and Teaching Objectives with Cultural Confidence***

Most English syllabus summarizes the previous English practice and draws lessons from the second language teaching experience, and proposes to offer cross-cultural communication courses, but it does not make specific explanations and requirements for the cultivation of Chinese cultural knowledge. Hofstede's theory of cultural dimension affirms the important position of cultural teaching in middle school English teaching on the one hand, and plays a guiding role in our practical English teaching reform on the other hand. Realizing the confidence of Chinese culture and adding the contents of Chinese culture in English curriculum teaching goal, task and requirements, will be as a part of the integration of Chinese culture into English teaching plan, so that we can increase the students' knowledge of Chinese culture by adding the relevant component of Chinese culture in middle school English teaching, to emphasize the importance of Chinese culture in middle school English teaching.

##### ***4.3.2. Integration of teaching materials and cultural confidence***

Through Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, we can clearly find that the cultural difference between China and the West is obvious. With the introduction of advanced teaching concepts, the researches on foreign language teaching are getting more and more. To improve college students' intercultural consciousness, it is necessary to realize the integration of middle school English teaching and cultural confidence, and increase a certain proportion of Chinese cultural content in textbooks, so as to combine Chinese and Western cultures. Add materials such as lectures and debates related to Chinese culture in the audio-visual section; add traditional folk customs, loyalty to the country, natural health, piano, chess, calligraphy and painting and other aspects of content to the English teaching material to exercise students' oral English and improve their deeper understanding of Chinese culture at the same time; The teaching material can be based on Chinese classical literature, traditional Chinese medicine, religious philosophy and regional culture.

##### ***4.3.3. Integration of curriculum and classroom instruction with cultural confidence***

To realize the integration of middle school English teaching and cultural confidence, we should adjust the contents of the syllabus. In the current English teaching syllabus in middle school, more attention is paid to the improvement of students' cultural awareness and the imparting of international cultural knowledge into middle school English teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to adjust the current English teaching syllabus in middle school to include "the high integration of Chinese culture and English teaching", so as to improve students' intercultural communication ability and local cultural transmission ability.

## 5. Conclusion

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is an important theory for analyzing cultural differences. It provides a strong theoretical basis and support for people's analysis and interpretation of cultural differences in the context of cross-cultural communication, and is one of the most cited theories in social science literature. In today's globalization of English, we should fully realize the role and status of English as an international lingua franca. In teaching, different cultural teaching materials should be reasonably allocated, and cultural teaching methods of comparison, reflection and integration should be adopted to cultivate students' awareness and understanding of cultural differences, so that they can finally acquire perfect personality, cultural identity and appropriate cross-cultural communication skills.

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