

How to Enhance Cultural Teaching in High School English Class-- Under the National College Entrance Examination System

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Abstract:

As every knows, the New Curriculum Standards lay special emphasis on cultural background and cultural teaching during English learning. According to the New Curriculum Standards, English teachers should invite students to share the cultural background knowledge what they know patiently and actively. At the same time, for the sake of arousing and raising students' interest of English learning, teachers should make sure that students can successfully experience a lot of English for pleasure when they begin to learn English, and they should try their best to create an intercultural communicative surrounding for students. However, most of teachers have entirely forgotten the inconvenient significance of cultural teaching and cultural background when they teach English.

Key words: language; culture; English; the teaching of culture; English teaching; the latest national college entrance examination system

1. Introduction

Hundreds years ago, English teaching began in China. And human beings are exploring the methodology of English teaching which is best for Chinese students continuously. And the scholars have made lots of great contributions to English education, such as: Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Teaching Method, Direct Method, Task-based Language Teaching Method, and so on. Obviously, the above-mentioned practical and systematic teaching methods can help teachers with systematic methods in English teaching. They have also struggled to emphasize that culture teaching is a very significant and meaningful part in language education. However, it is said that traditional thoughts in English education prefer to focus on the teaching of lexical, grammar and language skills rather than highly value the critical part of English Teaching-the cultural teaching. It means that culture teaching still cannot get enough consideration during the teaching of languages, especially teachers always neglect helping students to learn about the culture background and enhance their culture literacy in English Class under pressure to prepare their students better for university. It is quite difficult for teachers to believe that the majorities of students are interested in English cultural background and they have realized cultural teaching is an essential part of English teaching. Unbelievably, students have less and less time to learning English, whereas they have more and more homework than they can bear gradually. And their English teachers have the pressure in helping them getting the admission notices of their ideal universities, they know nothing about the conventions and knowledge of English culture at all. For English learners, the lack of fundamental concepts about English cultural conventions and knowledge finally influence students' abilities of culture awareness, reading comprehension and intercultural communication. According to the research survey, the true reasons of the above-mentioned situation can be divided into two parts. Firstly, English teaching focuses on linguistic knowledge in a very long time, and language use has not been given enough necessity and significance. For English teachers, the viewpoint that cultural learning is quite equal to language learning has been one to forget. Secondly, although English educators have realized the necessity and significance of cultural custom and cultural teaching, they cannot teach culture well because of the lack of systematic guidance. Shortly, men have to find effective approaches that can help teachers to bring culture teaching into force under the heavy pressure of helping students receiving their admission notices and entering their desired colleges.

1.1 The Importance of Cultural Conventions and Cultural Teaching

In a word, culture is the totally equivalent of language. That is to say, language and culture have quite close and natural relationship in social surroundings. Beyond all doubt, different countries maybe have the different cultural conventions and cultural knowledge. Students who come from those countries have totally different first impressions and

understanding of the learning contents. Obviously, the learning of oral English, vocabulary, sentence structure and language skills have a particularly close connection to cultural learning. Absorbing and mastering cultural knowledge in the textbook is meaningful and useful for English learners to correct the mistakes what they have made and find the solution to the extremely difficult situation when they are learning English.

1.2 The Detailed Situation of Cultural Teaching in High School Teaching

With the development of global economy, the progressively close links between countries and formation of globalization, international exchanges has becoming expanding and more frequent exchanges with other countries came into being. This phenomenon points that cross-cultural communication has become more and more simply. Therefore, simple linguistic form in English language no longer adapt to the rapid development of the country and community any more. As a matter of fact, finding out the most effective way to cultivate teachers' cross-cultural awareness and promote students' intercultural communicative competences has become the main task for a large number of educators. On one hand, the thoughts that the purpose of learning English in school is just for passing the college entrance examination and entering ideal colleges is highly popular. On the other hand, there are less and less students learn English because of their interest in English. And so there are quite a few English learners insist that English is boring and useless, they even want to give up learning English forever. Maybe you want to ask one question: why do students insist on studying English since they think it is boring and useless? If you want to know why, the main reason why English students choose to keep learning English since they think it is boring and useless is that English is one of the subjects which will be test when the high school students in china graduate. What's more, the result of the admission test will decide whether they can enter into their desired universities or not directly. The result of the entrance examination is the fundamental reason for students' decision.

2. Literature Review

According to the development history of cultural teaching both at home and abroad, educators and learners can understand the cultural teaching' importance properly. Depending on those previous and significant studies, we can give a crisp and clear account of cultural teaching in English teaching. Fortunately, the serious cultural teaching problems what exist in English class will emerge from the study of those former cultural teaching theories and they are useful for schools to solve those problems successfully. With the help of the above-mentioned systematic teaching methods and specific guidance, English educators will be able to finish cultural teaching successfully and smoothly.

2.1 The Basic Concepts of Language and Culture

Linguistics can be successfully defined as the scientific and systematic research of language. According to the latest research, the analysis of language origin can be divided into two ideas. From a particular point of view, some thinkers hold the view that emotions are language's fountainhead. However, other thinkers think that language's fountainhead is rational and logical thought. ^[5] Because culture is an evasive concept and different scholars from different fields perceive culture differently, many scholars have extremely struggled to make full use of an acceptable and satisfactory manner to explain what language actually is. Instead, every definition cannot satisfy the other persons' definitions. According to the contents of anthropology literature, scholars like Clyde Kluckhohn had listed 164 cultural definitions since 1952. ^[4] The British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor offered the first anthropological definition of culture in a practical and systematic manner in his *Primitive Culture* in 1920. In *Primitive Culture*, culture is considered as an entirely complex whole. Language is also made up of eight elements, which can be divided into eight parts, including belief, art, knowledge, custom and persons' habits and so on. ^[3] Afterwards, there are lots of different definitions of language and culture.

2.2 A Brief Account of the Relationships between Language and Culture

Culture and language have close relationships and are entirely connected to each other. Language is the archives of culture. Without language, it will be impossible for English learners to learn about and master culture without the help of language's competences of communication and transmission. Lack of the systemic and specific knowledge of language, one step further, people even cannot understand the fundamental meaning of culture. Obviously, they cannot communicate with others smoothly and successfully. What is the typical equivalent of a nation's culture? The answer is language. English teacher's fundamental task is to link language teaching to culture teaching together as a bridge when they teach English. In a word, culture and language are inextricably linked.

2.3 The Development of Culture Teaching

According to historical records, ancient educators had begun to emphasize the truth that cultural teaching was one of the critical parts in language teaching more than one hundred years ago. It was not long before in Britain a working report named "Modern Studies" issued by a national committee appointed by the Prime Minister. It stressed the significance of culture teaching by suggesting "the placing of languages into a cultural context". ^[1] In Britain and America, culture teaching focused on history, life, customs, health and education as well as on the contributions of a foreign country to human civilization. Since 1970, the communicative method of English teaching had got broad permission by educational scholars and scientists. Further, it had been widely spread under the help of educators who come from

different academic fields. Language researchers are just about to witness another addition to the list of objectives of language teaching: that is, the ability to relate to differences between the learners' target and native cultures and hence strengthen the quality of communication. ^[2] Up to now, we have talked about the history of the cultural benefits in language teaching.

3. Importance of Cultural Teaching in High School English Class

It is well known that culture teaching can satisfy students' curiosity about other countries which are in completely different language surroundings. English learners want to learn about not only the English language skills, such as: oral English, vocabularies, language structures and grammar, but also the cultural significance of the contents in the textbook. In order to be successful English teachers, teachers should try their best to master the importance of cultural conventions and cultural teaching so that they can teach their students the contents about culture in an appropriate and acceptable way.

3.1 Culture and Words

Why do Chinese students always easily create misinterpretations and bring Chinese cultural knowledge into English words when they are studying English? Obviously, the appropriate answer to this question is the differences between Chinese and western cultures. According to the situation, it is easy for Chinese students to fall into the cultural trap and make more or less mistakes in English class. In reality, Chinese students have to solve the chief trouble that it is really difficult for them to try their best to learn about the differences between "a" and "the". Because most of Chinese students feel that the problem is very simple and ignore the differences between "a" and "the", they generally make mistakes while are confronted with the two words frequently. When they have to use the two words in the article: "a" and "the", however, learners who regard English as their first language rarely make mistakes. For instance, the word "conversate". It is possible for Chinese students to insist that the meaning of the word "conversate" is to have a talk with someone, whereas the real meaning of "conversate" is nothing because it actually doesn't exist. In reality, the word "conversate" is neither the noun "conversation", nor the verb "converse". Therefore, the real Chinese meaning of "converse" is to carry on a conversation. I would like to give another example: take the word "bemused". Possibly, the word "bemused" is usually seen as the word "amused" by a large number of Chinese students and they maybe insist that "bemused" means a sense of amused at first impression, whereas the word "bemused" really means a sense of confused. However, for the students who live in English-spoken country, although the word "bemused" is similar to the word "amused", they rarely make mistakes while they are confronted with the word "amused" and "bemused". And the phenomenon that some words with special cultural meanings cannot find equivalents in another is very common for Chinese students. Even if there are some seemingly similar equivalents, it is impossible for

them to have totally same meanings.

3.2 Culture and Reading Comprehension

As a matter of fact, reading comprehension is a significant part in English class. With the help of the improvement of reading comprehension, English learners can communicate in English accurately and fluently. They also can understand different things in various ways. In order to improve reading comprehension competences, it is not enough for English learners to improve their vocabularies and master complex English sentence patterns, they also need to understand and master the cultural conventions and knowledge in the article. The key to improve English learners' reading comprehension competences is enhancing cultural teaching, and the cultural teaching will influence the advancement of reading comprehension competences. In traditional education, teachers have been paying high attention to lexicon, oral English, language structures and grammar teaching during English teaching. But on the contrary, English teachers implicitly ignore the importance of culture teaching in English education. The process of reading training of foreign language is a kind of fixed pattern. Therefore, students should combine the cultural conventions and cultural knowledge with the analysis of sentences closely when they are doing reading comprehension. Although this kind of training model has its positive side, the learning of English is still at its preliminary level. Meanwhile, there being appropriate quantities of new words and moderate complexity of the sentence structure in language materials, students usually can neither understand and master the real meaning of the sentence, nor improve their language competences. The foreign research on reading comprehension has experienced three periods, and one of the most important theories is Scheme Theory. The Schema Theory emphasizes the important of cultural background when students are reading poets and books.

3.3 Culture and Communication

The primary reason why scholars from different educational fields cannot define culture successfully is that culture is full of cultural connotations. However, scholars never give up on making the most appropriate definition of culture. In conclusion, there are at least more than 150 definitions to it. Most important of all, there are lots of functions of culture, such as: culture serves the identity meaning function, group inclusion function, intergroup boundary regulation function, ecological adaptation function. Culture can serve the culture communication function. In addition, communication is the critical human connection. All in all, language is the carrier of the culture. Everyone needs to do sincere communication with others unreservedly. Communication is controlled by culture. That is to say, it is essential for teachers to help students to enhance culture learning and cultivate communicating competences with foreign English.

4. Ways to Enhance Culture Teaching under the Latest National College Entrance Examination

Because the English teachers have the pressure in helping their students to get higher scores and enter their ideal colleges under the latest national college entrance examination system. English learners and educators entirely ignore the meaning and importance of culture teaching. For a long time, educators always choose to fix attention on the teaching of lexicon, oral English, grammar and sentence structures during English teaching while cultural teaching obtain less and less space in English education. Therefore, the Government Educational Sectors are trying their best to change the current phenomenon and appeal to all the English teachers ask students to pay attention to the usages of English. According to the new schemes of entrance examination, English is one of the tests that everyone to take during the national entrance examination for Colleges and Universities except Chinese and mathematics. Each subject is marked out of 150 the same as before. Because scholars believe that National Educational Departments emphasize the significance of English test scores, the specific situation aroused a heated discussion among people. It is quite easy for you to find that the Government Educational Departments are struggling to make some special efforts to change the current situation successfully.

4.1 Arouse Students' Awareness of Cultural Background

It is well known that intercultural awareness in English language learning is usually talked about as though it were a fifth skill. The other four skills are the abilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Meanwhile, it is extremely impossible for English learners to learn English well without an awareness of that culture and how that culture relates to their own first culture or first language. As we all know, traditional English teaching always lays too much emphasis on the teaching of language skills and ignore the importance of cultural teaching. You must want to ask a question: why cannot Chinese students have a talk with native English speakers successfully? The reason is that Chinese learners are short of cultural background and cultural learning. In order to enhance Chinese students' competences of reading comprehension, communication and language skills, teachings should take every effective ways to help students to raise their awareness of culture learning.

4.2 Raise Teachers' Culture Cultivation

Teachers' culture cultivation is a basic quality to be an outstanding teacher, since it is directly related to the teacher's cultural deposits, teaching faculty, professional ethics, manner, language appeal and the quality of students' education. Pushed forward by the tide of renewing the curriculum, there is a great achievement has been made by the English teaching reform. The problem that finds an approach to enhance teachers' culture cultivation has not been solved and it has become the issue of educators. The only way to let the role of teachers

have a historical change is raising the culture cultivation of teachers. First of all, teachers should try their best to regularize their own professional ethics so as to be qualified and excellent teachers. After that, teachers should constantly enrich their human spirit and improve their teaching abilities, especially they should continuously enrich their humanistic knowledge and enrich their human spirit. Thirdly, teachers should promote their teaching abilities. When the unexpected happens, teachers should ask students to calm down and have a certain ability to get the whole thing under control as soon as possible. In addition, teachers should respect their students and keep close to them. Especially, teachers should deal fairly with their students and love them. In short, a qualified and excellent teacher must have certain self-discipline. Teachers should teach students to combine the new contents with what they have learned closely. In exactly the same way, they should pay highly attention to build closely relationship between cultural teaching with English teaching. Above all, teachers must struggle to study hard and improve their culture cultivation during the process of daily teaching activities.

4.3 Create an Intercultural Communicative Surrounding

In order to achieve effective intercultural communication, communicative culture is a significant factor. In reality, one of the most difficult and serious problems for English learners is that most of them rarely have the chances to learn about the culture of British and make full use of English to have a talk with their classmates unfortunately. Obviously, students are addicted to the learning of English vocabularies, grammar and sentence structures, while rarely pay close attention to the usages of English. Maybe you want to ask a question: why do students spend so much time on enhancing the competences of language skills other than intercultural communication? Because entrance examination is one of the most essential tests in their life, and they need higher scores and the admission notices of their coveted universities eagerly. Therefore, schools and teachers should strive to create an intercultural communicative environment and the efforts they have made can promote students to talk with their classmates in English successfully and get on well with others. Communicating with others in English can also encourage students to improve the competences of language skills, intercultural communication and even can help them to get on well with others. In a word, it is useful and meaningful for schools and teachers to struggle to create an intercultural communicative surrounding.

5. Conclusion

As everyone knows, Chinese, English and mathematics are the contents of the National Entrance Examination for Colleges and Universities. In reality, students' English learning situation is highly valued by the government education company. According to the newest schemes of entrance examination, mathematics, English and Chinese occupy essential

positions in all disciplines. It is useful for students to learn about the significance of English learning and struggle to learn English well. Most important of all, the concept of teachers must be changed. The importance of cultural teaching needs more attention. English will become a basic skill under the impact of globalization. And then teachers should not only teach students the knowledge of vocabularies, grammar and language skills, but also show students the knowledge of culture and try to help them enhancing their competences of reading comprehension and intercultural communication. In reality, it is quite difficult for teachers to change their concept and put their thoughts into practice. In a word, teachers, students and parents should change their traditional ideas concerning cultural teaching, and especially teachers should put their thoughts about culture learning into practice, they should at least try to realize their ideas.

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