

# Cultivating Cross-Cultural Awareness in English Class of High Schools

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**Abstract:** Due to globalization, exchanges and communications between different countries have become more frequent and important in recent years. How to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness is an essential question that needs to be addressed urgently. The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 edition, 2020 revision) puts forward requirements for developing students' cross-cultural awareness within this context accordingly. But the situation of cross-cultural awareness cultivation in English teaching in senior high schools is still unsatisfactory nowadays. Therefore, the study aims to find measures to better integrate cross-cultural awareness into English teaching in senior high school by means of questionnaires and interviews. 70 students and 5 English teachers in grade two at H Senior High School in L City joined in the research. The questionnaires were administered to 70 students and 5 English teachers were interviewed. The main findings show that both students and teachers show a positive attitude toward cross-cultural teaching and learning, but students still have poor knowledge of foreign cultures. And the current situation where cross-cultural awareness integrates into English is not ideal. In order to change the current situation and cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness wisely, some useful strategies are given.

**Keywords:** Cross Cultural Awareness, Senior High School, English Classes.

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## 1. Introduction

Exchanges and communications between different countries have become more frequent and important with the development of globalization in recent years. Facing this trend, President Xi not only puts forward cultural confidence but also strengthens its significance. China pays more and more attention to cross-cultural education and has issued relevant policies under such circumstances. In order to comprehensively carry out the country's education policy, develop the core literacy of the English discipline, and foster students with an international perspective, the Ministry of Education formally released in May 2020 the English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 edition, 2020 revision), of which cultural awareness is one of the four aspects that should be developed in students. On the basis of developing students with cultural awareness, how to further cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills is a crucial problem that needs to be addressed.

Besides, China's rapid and high-quality development requires the participation of talented people with cross-cultural awareness. Cross-cultural competence is a basic ability of modern youth and is the basis for dialogue of civilizations. Because only with understanding can there be empathy, mutual appreciation, and mutual respect; consciously oppose cultural hegemony or cultural tribalism, and truly build up a sense of global awareness and a sense of a community of human destiny. Those who can take up the responsibility of rejuvenating the Chinese nation and promoting the peaceful development of the world in the future will not be narrow-minded, closed-minded, and arrogant, but will have a high degree of "international understanding." Through cross-cultural cultivation, young students will be guided to correctly understand the commonalities and differences between themselves and others, between their own and other countries, and between their own and other cultures, and to enhance their international understanding and

cross-cultural competence so that they will be able to walk among different cultures with ease and engage in international exchanges and dialogues of civilizations, which are essential to China's development.

In order to better carry out relevant education policies and to change the current situation that cross-cultural awareness is absent from English class, doing research and giving useful strategies for English teachers on how to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness in English teaching is urgent and essential.

The research aims to give useful measures on how to better cultivate cross-cultural awareness in English class. In this research, to begin with, the author intends to summarize the learning level of cross-cultural awareness of students and the current situation of cross-cultural teaching through questionnaires and interviews in order to find out the obstacles to cross-cultural teaching in English class and then to make suggestions to solve them. The conclusion of this paper can firstly promote the implementation of the new curriculum standards; secondly, promote the improvement of students' cross-cultural competence and establishing a culturally inclusive attitude; thirdly, give English teachers some effective suggestions on how to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness; and finally, enrich the research on cross-cultural awareness cultivation.

## 2. Literature Review

According to Anderson (1983), the cross-cultural awareness is divided into three levels: (1) the recognition of cultural phenomenon; (2) the recognition of cultural differences; (3) the understanding of other cultures from their perspective. In his opinion, the formation of cross-cultural awareness is a step-by-step process, from surface awareness to understanding, and the ultimate goal of the process is a better understanding of other cultures which is similar with Hanvy's idea.

Baker (2011) defined cross-cultural awareness as "a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms,

practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication” (p. 202). He regarded cross-cultural awareness as a distinct notion that is closely related to cross-cultural communication competence.

All the above scholars tend to consider cross-cultural awareness as an ability. However, Hanvey and Anderson believe it is an ability to have a deep understanding of other’s culture from their standpoint, which is also the final level of cross-cultural awareness, while Baker thinks it is an ability that is relevant to cross-cultural communication competence.

The starting point of cross-cultural communication research in China begins with Xu Guozhang’s essay (1980) “Culturally Loaded Words and English Language Teaching”. More than 30 years later, cross-culture is still the focus and hot topic of many scholars’ research. Among them, the interpretation of cross-cultural awareness has given rise to a lot of discussion.

According to Liu (2020, p. 7), “Cross-cultural awareness means that people not only comprehend another culture but also make some comparisons between their own culture and another culture”. She believes having a comparison is the core of cross-cultural awareness, which is different from others.

Unlike Liu, Guan (2020) holds that cross-cultural awareness means that in the case of seeking common ground, people have their own understanding of different cultures, and they also have consciousness to understand and learn. She further divides cross-cultural awareness into four levels. The first is to be able to recognize and understand cultures that are considered strange or even rejected; the second is to be able to recognize cultural characteristics that are different from one’s own native language and that are considered to be impossible, without any theoretical support, or even absurd; the third is to be able to arrive at a certain perception of cultural characteristics through one’s own analysis of cultural factors; The fourth is to treat yourself as a different cultural owner to know a different culture.

Zhang (2022) considers cross-cultural awareness as an individual’s sensitivity to the similarities and differences between a foreign culture and his or her own, which requires the individual to be able to combine his or her own linguistic and cultural knowledge with his or her own when applying a foreign language to strengthen his or her understanding of the foreign language and to make the output of the language more dynamic, flexible, and conscious. It is similar to Chen’s idea. Chen (2019) thinks cross-cultural awareness is students’ sensitive understanding of culture in the process of cross-cultural communication, that is, the appropriate degree of sensitivity to common and different cultures, and the ability to adjust and standardize their own language according to the degree of cultural sensitivity and self-awareness in the process of carrying out language output. The above two researchers hold the same point: cross-cultural awareness is a kind of sensitivity to foreign cultures.

### 3. Methodology

Five English teachers and seventy students from two classes of grade two at H Senior High school in L City, Zhejiang Province participate in the research. The school is famous for its good English teaching, so the results of the English teaching research at this school will be more typical. The two classes are general classes in the grade, with similar learning backgrounds to avoid any bias in the results of the

research.

The students of grade two are chosen as research subjects because the students of grade one had just experienced the midterm examination and had not yet fully adapted to the teaching mode of senior high school in terms of learning pace and difficulty. And students in grade three are facing the college entrance examination, so there are difficulties such as a lack of energy and time in implementing the research. However, students in grade two have fully adapted to the teaching mode of high school and have enough time and energy. Therefore, it is more reasonable to choose the students in grade two as the research object.

Moreover, there are five English teachers from general classes participating in this research. It is more informative to choose a teacher from a general class than an advanced class as the subject of the study. There are twelve English teachers in grade two, of whom eight are from the general classes. Three of the eight teachers have not worked for more than three years and do not have enough teaching experience. All of the other five teachers have taught for over five years and accumulated certain experience in English teaching, which makes the results of the research more convincing. So these five English teachers are selected.

As to the instruments, the students’ questionnaire was mostly based on the questionnaire applied by Su Lei (2022) in her research on A Study of the Cultivation of Cross-Cultural Awareness in English Teaching in Senior High School in the Context of Key Competencies and Liu Ying (2019) in her research on A Study of the Cultivation of Cross-Cultural Awareness in Senior-High School English Teaching. And interviews for teachers were designed. Five teachers need to answer four subjective questions in detail. The teachers’ interviews aim to understand teachers’ comprehensions (Question 1) and attitudes (Question 2) toward cross-cultural awareness teaching, daily ways of cross-cultural awareness teaching (Question 3) and also their suggestions on how to cultivate student’s cross-cultural awareness in English teaching (Question 4).

The research was carried out in the following procedure. Firstly, 70 students’ questionnaires were distributed in the schools concerned in early December 2023. Once the students had completed them in the allotted time, the questionnaires were collected and given to the corresponding English teacher in the class. Secondly, interviews with teachers were conducted at the end of December 2023, which took place in the teachers’ spare time after class, during which the researcher took detailed notes of the teachers’ discourse for the ensuing analyses.

After the questionnaires are collected, the data is put into the software SPSSAU to be analyze. In addition to being straightforward to use and accurate in data analysis, SPSSAU also offers a range of graphics, including bar charts, to help visualize the results. When compared to other analytical tools, SPSSAU has the drawback of offering fewer analytical models. Even though SPSSAU only offers the more popular analytical models, it is still capable of meeting all of the requirements for data analysis in this thesis. According to the SPSSAU analysis, there are no outliers in the current data, and thus the descriptive analysis can be performed directly on the mean values.

### 4. Results and Analysis

The number of valid questionnaires was 70, with an efficiency rate of 100 percent. The analysis results show that

the value of Cronbach  $\alpha$  is 0.867 as Table 1 presented which means the high reliability of research data according to the requirement of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and the value of KMO is 0.804 as Table 2 presented which means the research data is ideal for extracting information according to the requirement of KMO. So the data collected by this questionnaire is of reference value and significance.

**Table 1.** The reliability of students' questionnaire

Item	Sample Size	Cronbach $\alpha$
25	70	0.867

**Table 2.** The validity of student' questionnaire

Item	Sample Size	KMO
25	70	0.804

## 4.1. Current Situation of Students on Cross-cultural Awareness

### 4.1.1. Attitude

The first part of this questionnaire is from question 1 to question 7, which mainly focuses on students' attitude toward cross-cultural awareness, with five options for the 1-5 questions: extremely important, important, not sure, unimportant, and extremely unimportant, 6-7 question: completely agree, comparatively agree, not sure, generally disagree, completely disagree. The ratio of students' choices of the five options is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Students' attitude toward cross-cultural awareness

Question	The ratio of students' choices (%)				
	A	B	C	D	E
Question 1	27.14	28.57	27.14	10	7.14
Question 2	41.42	27.14	24.28	5.71	1.42
Question 3	37.14	28.57	18.57	10	5.71
Question 4	51.42	21.42	11.42	8.57	7.14
Question 5	31.42	17.14	24.28	18.57	8.57
Question 6	34.28	27.14	24.28	10	4.28
Question 7	42.85	21.42	21.42	8.57	5.71

From Table 3, it can be seen that more than half of the students are learning the importance of gaining more knowledge about the cultures of English-speaking countries in English learning. The data also tells us that most students have a positive attitude towards it, but there are still 27.14% of students who are not sure, and 17.14% of students think that it is unimportant or extremely unimportant. The percentages of choosing A and B in questions 2, 3 and 4 are 68.56, 65.7, and 72.84, respectively, which proves that it is more essential in the eyes of the students to engage in cultural knowledge in order to achieve mutual understanding between people of different cultures than to understand the culture of the English-speaking country and deepen their understanding of Chinese culture. It is delightful that students recognize cross-cultural communication as vital. And what we need to pay attention to is that 48.56% of students think it's important or extremely important to introduce cultural knowledge in English learning in order to pass all kinds of examinations. Exams are not the entirety of the learning process, nor should passing them be a prerequisite for a student's knowledge of

Chinese and foreign cultures which students need to keep in mind. For question 6 and 7, more than one-third of students choose B, C and D which means that a small part of students' shows their uncertainty or disagreement with teachers' practices for integrating cross-cultural knowledge into the class. In general, students are optimistic about learning cross-cultural awareness, but teachers still need to make students understand that incorporating cross-cultural awareness in English class is an excellent time to develop their cross-cultural awareness.

### 4.1.2. Cognition

The second part of this questionnaire is from question 8 to question 13 which mainly focuses on students' cognition toward cross-cultural awareness, with five options for each question: completely understand, comparatively understand, generally understand, a little understand, and barely understand. The ratio of students' choices of the five options is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Students' cognition of cross-cultural awareness

Question	The ratio of students' choices (%)				
	A	B	C	D	E
Question 8	2.85	15.71	30	38.57	12.85
Question 9	1.42	14.28	25.71	44.28	14.28
Question 10	1.42	10	12.85	54.28	21.42
Question 11	1.42	4.28	15.71	45.71	32.85
Question 12	2.85	10	22.85	45.71	18.57
Question 13	2.85	14.28	17.14	47.14	18.57

According to question 8, the proportion of those who choose C, D, and E is as high as 81.42%. Obviously, students have a weak understanding of the knowledge about Western culture in the textbook. So urgently, the teacher needs to explain and lead the students through it in depth. The results for questions 9-13 show that less than 20 percent of students

in each of these five questions have certain knowledge of Western culture, which is very dismal, with the percentages of those who choose option A all below 3. This reflects a serious lack of cognition in Western culture, especially with regard to Western countries' politics, economies and mass media. Economy and politics reflect the future development

trend and stability of a country, so it is indispensable for a person with an international outlook to understand the politics and economies of other countries. In addition, the mass media play a crucial role in international relations. It serves as a bridge between countries, transmitting information about their own countries outwardly and gathering information about developments in other countries inwardly. So being unfamiliar with the mass media of other countries also cuts off the way to understand and communicate with them, which is obviously unfavorable for us. That is why it is pressing for

teachers to popularize knowledge about Western countries in the English class.

#### 4.1.3. Value Orientation

The third part of this questionnaire is from question 14 to question 17, which mainly focuses on students' value orientation toward cross-cultural awareness, with five options for each question: completely agree, comparatively agree, not sure, generally disagree, and completely disagree. The ratio of students' choices of the five options is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Students' value orientation to cross-cultural awareness

Question	The ratio of students' choices (%)				
	A	B	C	D	E
Question 14	38.57	34.28	27.14	0	0
Question 15	65.71	24.28	10	0	0
Question 16	52.85	30	17.14	0	0
Question 17	45.71	31.42	22.85	0	0

Table 5 shows that the number of students who choose C and D is 0, which means that all students have an active and positive value orientation towards Chinese and foreign cultures. For question 14, 72.82% of students believe that studying Chinese and foreign cultures is conducive to the development of healthy aesthetic and moral sentiments, and they are confident that they can do so, while 27.14% of them are not. For teachers, it is especially vital to lead all students to recognize the best part of cultures and to strengthen the guidance for students to establish correct cultural values and value orientation so as to achieve the purpose of cultivating healthy aesthetic and moral sentiments. According to question 15 and 16, with the ratio of choices A and B all higher than 80%, students show their standpoint that it is as essential to understand Chinese culture as it is to learn a foreign culture and to be able to think about Western culture in a dialectical way. Because every culture has its essence and dregs, what we have to do is gain the essence and discard the dregs. According to the results of question 17, 77.13% of students

realize their sense of responsibility to the people of the country while 22.85% of them hold uncertainty. Realizing and shouldering responsibility for the people and country, is also one of the requirements of the new curriculum standards for senior high school students. So in this dimension, generally, students have shown their great value orientation, but teachers still should not give up on guiding them in it.

## 4.2. Current Situation of English Teaching on Cross-cultural Awareness

The last part of this questionnaire is from question 18 to question 25, which mainly focuses on the current situation that cross-cultural awareness integrates into English teaching, with five options for each question: completely agree, comparatively agree, not sure, generally disagree, and completely disagree. The ratio of students' choices of the five options is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Current situation that cross-cultural awareness integrates into English teaching

Question	The ratio of students' choices (%)				
	A	B	C	D	E
Question 18	15.71	30	32.85	15.71	5.71
Question 19	12.85	18.57	38.57	21.42	8.57
Question 20	20	28.57	34.28	15.71	1.42
Question 21	22.85	41.42	27.14	7.14	1.42
Question 22	17.14	34.28	37.14	7.14	4.28
Question 23	34.28	37.14	20	7.14	1.42
Question 24	17.14	32.85	35.71	10	4.28
Question 25	10	24.28	37.14	17.14	11.42

For question 18, 21.41% of the students can't learn more cultural knowledge in English class while 32.85% of students are unsure about whether they are able to learn more about culture in their current English classes. The data shows that teachers still have room for improvement in cultural knowledge teaching. And we need pay attention to question 19 and question 25 with more than half of the students choose C, D and E. This is a reflection of the fact that teachers are still lacking in integrating cross-cultural awareness in English class. Class activities are an excellent way to incorporate cross-cultural content, as they provide enjoyment to the content of a flat lesson, focus students' attention, and improve learning efficiency. Besides, as an extension of class content, teachers should make rational and efficient use of after-class

homework, assigning relevant cross-cultural assignments to cultivate students' independent inquiry ability while improving their cross-cultural awareness. In addition to the above two ways, teachers should also disseminate their thinking to provide students with opportunities of cross-cultural learning. However, in using multimedia to supplement cultural knowledge the teacher does a better job, with 71.42% of students choose A and B for question 23. Finally, question 20, 21, 22, and 24 with the percentages of students choosing C, D and E are around 50%. We can see that teacher still need to attach great importance to teach English culture by introducing relevant knowledge before text teaching, integrating into the text and make a comparison with Chinese culture and the culture of English-speaking countries.

Above all, the current situation that cross-cultural awareness integrate into English is not ideal and still has room for improvement.

### 4.3. Current Situation of Teachers on Cross-cultural Awareness

Five English teachers (named A, B, C, D and E) are interviewed with four questions, and the detailed answers of each teacher are shown in Appendix II.

#### 4.3.1. Understanding

From the first question in the interview, none of the five teachers has a good understanding of cultural awareness and cultural awareness objectives. In terms of the understanding of cultural awareness, Teacher A clearly states that he doesn't know. Teacher B, C, D, and E are incomplete in their understanding of it, all ignoring the fact that cultural awareness is also a cross-cultural cognition, cross-cultural attitude, and cross-cultural behavioral orientation exhibited by students in the context of globalization. In addition, Teacher B and Teacher C neglect the fact that the prerequisite for developing a sense of identity with a culture is to understand the culture, so understanding the culture as the foundation is indispensable. On the contrary, Teacher C believes that cultural awareness is only about understanding Chinese and foreign cultures, ignoring identification with the best part of cultures. In terms of the understanding of the objectives of cultural awareness, Teacher A clearly states that he doesn't know, and Teachers B, C, D, and E are not entirely correct in their understanding. Teacher C thinks that it is only to develop students' understanding of foreign cultures, which is improper. Teachers B and D ignore the fact that the objectives of cultural awareness also include the formation of correct values and good character, as well as the ability to communicate cross-culturally and disseminate Chinese culture. Teachers B, D, and E ignore that the prerequisite for learning from Chinese and foreign cultures is to compare the similarities and differences between them.

#### 4.3.2. Attitude

From the second question in the interview, all five teachers hold the attitude that it is vital and necessary, and they give their reasons from different aspects. Teachers A, B, and C think that it is beneficial for students to comprehend English texts and improve their English grades. Teacher C also provides a real-life teaching incident as an example to demonstrate its importance. Teacher D believes that it is a great way to make up for students' lack of daily cultural learning. According to Teacher E, he considers it able to cultivate students' cultural literacy and improve their cross-cultural communicative competence.

#### 4.3.3. Teaching Measure

From the third question in the interview, Teachers A, B, C, D and E are relatively single-minded in the measures that they take to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness in the daily English class. They all focus on the teacher's explanations in class, playing English videos or films, and encouraging students to read foreign journals and magazines. Besides, Teacher C also lets students do relevant reading comprehension. Teacher E, in addition, chooses to organize cultural activities as well as letting them search online on their own.

#### 4.3.4. Obstacle and Recommendation

From the fourth question in the interview, they have different opinions. According to Teacher A, there are heavy

daily teaching tasks and insufficient time for teachers to teach relevant cross-cultural content. For Teacher B, he believes teachers' own lack of cross-cultural knowledge is the biggest obstacle. And both Teacher C and Teacher D think students have heightened levels of stress due to exams, leading them to excessively prioritize their efforts towards learning in order to enhance their grades. Besides, Teacher E, on the other hand, offers a different perspective. In his opinion, the lack of courses dedicated to the teaching of foreign cultures, as well as the lack of relevant teaching materials, is the reason for this situation. Also, they give their advice on the current situation. Firstly, teachers should pay more attention to improving their knowledge of foreign cultures. Secondly, not only do schools need to organize various activities to raise student's interests in learning and increase their appreciation of cross-cultural knowledge, but also they need to create a cross-cultural educational environment for students. Thirdly, both schools and students should allocate adequate and reasonable time for English teaching and learning.

## 5. Conclusion

From the previous parts, the research on cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness in senior high school is supported by students' questionnaires and teachers' interviews.

Firstly, according to students' questionnaires, students have a positive attitude toward cross-cultural awareness and willing to accept cross-cultural knowledge. However, in terms of cross-cultural cognition, students are unfamiliar with the related information and knowledge of foreign countries or cultures. And in terms of value orientation, students can realize their responsibility and have great orientation, but teachers still should not give up on guiding them in it. Above all, the cross-cultural proficiency of the students is not satisfactory.

Secondly, the current situation that cross-cultural awareness integrates into English is not ideal and still has room for improvement based on students' questionnaires and teachers' interviews. A teacher should attach importance to cross-cultural teaching in English class.

Thirdly, according to teachers' interviews, teachers' absence of cross-cultural knowledge and the heavy emphasis on grades are the main obstacles to cross-cultural cultivation. Therefore, in order to improve the situation, both the school and the English teacher have to take actions.

The research has some limitations because of time constraints and personal capacity. To begin with, the sample of the research is inadequate. The sample size should be increased, as there are not enough teachers or pupils. Furthermore, the research is only for grade two students in one high school, which is not representative, and the area of the research sample should be enlarged. Secondly, there is room for improvement in the comprehensiveness and scientific rigor of the questionnaire and interview question designs. Thirdly, the breadth and depth of the research need to be strengthened. For example, there should be more details and depth in the study of measures to integrate cross-cultural awareness into English teaching.

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