

# A Survey on Cultural Awareness Cultivation in Senior High School

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## Abstract

*The National English Curriculum Standard for Senior High School (2017 edition 2020 revised)* points out the cultural awareness, as one of the key competence, can help students form international vision and cross-cultural communication ability, and foster a sense of human community with a shared future. But in the actual teaching process, English teachers often ignore the cultivation of student's cultural awareness and the level of students' cultural awareness is not qualified. This essay aims to find out the current situation of high school students' cultural awareness. The research question is what is the current situation of students' cultural awareness in senior high school. In order to answer this question, the researcher did a survey in a senior high school in Chengdu, Sichuan Province in China. Based on the discussion of the survey result, the researcher gives some suggestions to English teachers.

## Keywords

Cultural Awareness; High School English Teaching; Survey Research.

## 1. Introduction

Under the background of economic and cultural globalization, the connection between China and other countries becomes closer and closer. The need for intercultural communication is more pressing. In order to have a better communication with people from other countries, we need to learn to accept the difference between cultures and use a comprehensive mind to see other cultures. This requires us to possess good culture literacy and intercultural capacity. English, as the most popular language used by wide area, plays an critical role. But during the process of learning to use English, the problems are common because of lacking the understanding of cultural background knowledge. According to *National English Curriculum Standard (2017 edition 2020 revised)*, the subject key competence includes language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. The significance of cultural awareness is emphasized by many scholars. The cultivation of cultural awareness is conducive to enhancing students' feelings of their own country and becoming people with a sense of social responsibility. The proposal of cultural awareness in the curriculum standard is mainly to let students learn more Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge and help them establish correct values, so as to complement the ability of cultural communication and convey Chinese culture.

## 2. Organization of the Text

Chapter one is the introduction of this text and chapter two is about the organization of the text. Chapter three is the literature review, which includes the foreign researches and domestic researches about cultural awareness. In chapter four, the researcher introduces the research instruments. Chapter five talks about the research results and the last chapter, chapter five, which is the conclusion.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1. Foreign Researches About Cultural Awareness

American linguist E. Spair pointed out in his work *Language*: there is something behind language and language can not exist without culture. If we do not know about the culture of the target language, then we are not able to learn this language well [1]. In the middle of 20th century, Fries first put forward the necessity of culture teaching in English teaching [2]. In the 1970s, the significance of the culture teaching was gradually proved and formed a complete culture teaching theory. He contended that the critical way to cultivate cultural awareness is to deeply understand the language use and the cultural context. Lado proposed in his work--*Linguistic across Cultures* that the language teaching should contain the teaching of cultural knowledge. He also put forward the fundamental structure of cultural comparison which indicated that the comparison and analysis of different cultures should be carried out from three aspects, which are form, meaning and distribution. According to him, when an English teacher plans a class, he or she should compare the native culture to the culture of the target language in order to identify the difficult points and find ways to work around them. This way also helps students enhance their confidence in their native culture by helping them recognize its accomplishments [3]. In 1960s, more and more Americans were calling for cultural instruction in foreign language teaching, because they hoped to communicate with foreigners. It is necessary for these people to take certain courses on cross-cultural communication courses so that some training programs appeared. Brooks elaborate English culture teaching from three aspects: connotation, content and methods, making great contribution to culture teaching. He pointed out that culture teaching should exist throughout the whole teaching process [4]. Hall, as one of the most significant researchers in the field of cross-cultural communication, made essential contributions to the teaching of foreign language through his investigation of the interaction between language and culture. His works, including *The silent Language*, *The Hidden Dimensions*, and *The Beyond Culture*, emphasize the importance of cultural learning from many angles and offer a wealth of resources and invaluable references for the teaching strategies that are used. Breen contended that the cultivation of cultural awareness should pay more attention to these two aspects, which are the teaching of language knowledge and the ability of language use. When students are conducting cross-cultural communication, they should be familiar with the language rules and customs of the target language. In this way, the language competence of students and cultural awareness can be cultivated [5]. Byram pointed out that it is inappropriate to simply transfer the culture of native language and target language. In order to eliminate the negative effect brought by the native language, students are supposed to construct the thinking mode of the target language. He also emphasized the necessity of cultivating cultural awareness critically. The critical reflection of culture strengthens the students' understanding. Elena assumed that students need to have contact with the real learning materials and contexts. The principal tasks of teachers are to select culture materials and real materials so that to provide wide culture information to students[6].

#### 3.2. Domestic Researches About Cultural Awareness

The first Chinese scholar who studied about the relationship between language teaching and culture is Luo Changpei. In 1950, he further explained the relationship between language and culture in his book *Language and Culture* [7]. Since that, the cultural instruction in English teaching has been paid more and more attention. Xu Guozhang discussed the cultural connotation of vocabulary in *Modern Foreign Languages*, clarifying that the words express different cultural connotation in different contexts [8]. He Daokuan published the book *A Newly Arisen Course-- Cross-cultural Communication*, which was widely regarded as a significant work on studying culture and language. It enlarged on the attitude, requirements and advantages of

cross-cultural learning as well as introducing the new discipline of cross-cultural communication [9]. In the 1980s, Hu Wenzhong, one of the leaders of intercultural communication research, wrote a large number of books and papers on intercultural teaching and foreign language teaching, such as *Intercultural Communication: Implications for English Learners in China*, *Cultural Teaching and Cultural Reading in Intercultural Communication*, *Cultural Teaching and Cultural Studies*, and *Intercultural Communication in The United States* etc. These books regarded cultural teaching as the foundation of foreign language and profoundly clarified the critical role played by the cultural knowledge. In *Language and Cultural-Comparison between English and Chinese Languages and Cultures* written by Deng Yanchang and Liu Runqing in 1989 discussed the cultural connotation of the words and nonverbal communications. In this book, the author made comparisons between English and Chinese from the aspects of the use of color, allusions, taboo, respectful words, modest words and body language etc [10]. Wen Qiufang put forward that the cross-cultural communication competence is composed of communicative competence and cross-cultural competence. And the content of oral communication competence should include language forms, language content and communication rules [11]. Hu Wenzhong and Gao Yihong held that it was necessary to improve learners' cultural sensitivity and ability to handle out the problems which result from cultural differences so that to improve the scientific and cultural quality of the whole country [12]. The Ministry of Education first put "Cultural awareness" into the National English Curriculum for High School in 2001. It requires teachers to cultivate students' cultural awareness in the process of language teaching. From then on, cultural awareness was listed as one of the five teaching objectives. It made it clear that cultural awareness should include cultural knowledge, cultural comprehension, cross-cultural awareness and cross-cultural communicative competence.

In 21st century, the research about cultivating in cultural awareness gets abundant achievements. Cheng Xiaotang pointed out that culture can be taught and the key teaching point is to find out reasonable explanations for different cultural believes by means of thinking about the information that they have got, therefore, it can complement and enrich students' knowledge and belief systems [13]. Xu Xiuxia indicated the problems that existed in the current English teaching class. Teachers emphasize teaching language knowledge while they seldom involve cultural knowledge in their teaching process, which ignores the cultivation of cultural awareness and hinders students' cross-cultural communication [14].

#### 4. Research Instrument

Based on the research question, this paper uses a test. Through the test, the researcher finds out the current situation of cultivation of cultural awareness in senior high school, which lays a foundation for the later discussion. The researcher uses a test paper of cultural awareness based on Ren Gaoping's test which refers to the test content of Chen Zhian's *Intercultural Communication from Theory to Practice*. The test content is designed from five dimensions which are listed in [Table 1](#). Through these aspects in the test, it is helpful to find out the situation of students' cultural awareness.

**Table 1.** Dimensions of the Cultural Awareness Test

Items	Dimensions
1-10	Knowledge of cultural background
11-15	Social values
16-19	Concept of time and behavior orientation
20-24	Expressions with cultural connotation
25-32	Social convention and daily communication

## 5. Research Results

This chapter discusses about the results of the test. The researcher uses EXCEL to analyze the test results and find out the strong and weak points of students' cultural awareness.

**Table 2.** Test for Students' knowledge of Cultural background

Items	Number	Accuracy (%)
1	144	46.7%
2	126	40.9%
3	280	90.9%
4	246	79.8%
5	160	51.9%
6	187	60.7%
7	159	51.6%
8	190	63.3%
9	286	95.3%
10	173	56.1%

The accuracy of question nine and question three is higher than 90%. The other accuracy is very low. We can get the result that these students are inadequate in English cultural background knowledge, especially about the religion and political system.

**Table 3.** Test about Social Values (1)

Items	A		B		C	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
11	186	60.3%	41	13.3%	81	26.3%
12	233	75.6%	30	9.7%	45	14.6%
13	207	67.2%	35	11.3%	66	21.4%

From these questions, it is easy to find out that students have strong recognition to our Chinese culture. However, they seem to lack understanding to other countries' culture.

**Table 4.** Test about Social Values (2)

Items	Number	Accuracy(%)
14	101	32.7%
15	170	55.1%

Question 14 is about "American dream". The accuracy rate is just 32.7%. 51.3% of the students think American dream is to build a strong nation. But building a strong nation, actually, is the connotation of Chinese dream. Question 15 is about the thoughts that Americans advocate. 55.1% of the students choose the right option, which is individualism. 30.2% of the students choose collectivism. In different countries, the values of people are different. About half of the students cannot understand western cultures because different values.

Based on this table, it is clear to see that students have good understanding about the time and behavior of English countries. According to the results, we can see that students understand the living habits of western people well, especially in time and behavior aspects.

**Table 5.** Test for Students’ Concept of Time and Behavior Orientation

Items	A		B		C	
	Number	percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
16	20	6.4%	267	86.6%	21	6.8%
17	40	12.9%	255	82.7%	13	4.2%
18	26	8.4%	64	20.7%	218	70.7%
19	283	91.8%	20	6.4%	5	1.6%

**Table 6.** Test for The Understanding of Expressions with Cultural Connotation

Questions	Number	Accuracy(%)
20	95	30.8%
21	73	23.7%
22	64	20.7%
23	58	18.8%
24	89	28.8%

The average accuracy rate is only 24.56%. Students are severely deficient in the cultural connotative meaning of words.

**Table 7.** Tests for Social Conventions And Daily Communication

Questions	Number	Accuracy(%)
25	285	92.5%
26	183	59.4%
27	251	81.4%
28	138	44.8%
29	206	66.8%
30	298	96.7%
31	177	57.4%
32	248	80.5%

Among these questions, the one which has highest accuracy is question 30. 96.7% of the students know how to turn down others politely. The second highest accuracy is 92.5%, which is about the topic in conversations in English countries.

In general, students are familiar with the social conventions, daily communication and other basic knowledge about western countries such as the capital of America, the location of some famous architectures etc. While students know little about the expressions with cultural connotation and social values.

## 6. Conclusion

Through the test of the cultural awareness, it can be seen that students know some basic cultural background knowledge such as the capital of America, the location of some famous architectures and the simple communication rules which are often involved in their textbooks such as greeting others, turning down invitation etc. Compared with this knowledge, students are short of the deep culture such as social values, ways of thinking, histories, cultural connotative meanings of words and phrases etc. They usually think about cultural phenomena

or culture information in their native ways and make mistakes in their reading tasks and intercultural communication.

For English teachers, they need to stress the importance of culture and cultivate students' culture awareness both during class and after class. During class, teachers can introduce the background knowledge about the topic that they will teach today. Also, teachers can organize activities to motivate students to learn more different culture. When learning something different with our own culture, teachers can compare Chinese culture and other cultures, so that students can understand more comprehensively. But one thing we should be aware of is that there is no high or low culture. Different cultures consist of the beautiful and various world. Every culture should be respected.

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