

# A Study on Cultivating Students' Cultural Awareness in English Reading Teaching in Junior Middle School

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**Abstract:** *This article aims to explore how to deepen students' sense of identity with the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation and their sensitivity and ability to identify the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures in English reading teaching, so as to cultivate students' international and cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills. This article first reviews the concepts of core literacy and cultural awareness, and analyzes the importance of cultivating cultural awareness among junior high school students during the English reading teaching stage in junior high schools. Then, combined with specific reading teaching, it focuses on efficient ways to cultivate cultural awareness in junior middle school English reading teaching. Finally, the full text is summarized and the research significance of this article is reiterated.*

**Keywords:** Cultural awareness, English reading teaching, Middle school.

## 1. Introduction

Cultural awareness in English teaching refers to the appreciation of the excellent culture of other countries on the basis of acknowledging the excellent culture of one's own country, which is a core competency. Cultural awareness in core competencies is the basis of communication, which includes our own cultural values, beliefs and ability to perceive the world. Cultural awareness becomes very important as students learn English and interact with people from English culture.

The English Curriculum Standards for General Middle and High Schools places cultural awareness at the core of the core competencies and values of the English subject. At the same time, relevant scholars have introduced a very important carrier: English reading teaching. In previous studies, scholars mainly explained the cultivation of cultural awareness through English reading from several aspects such as cultural comparison, English reading materials, and background information. In practical teaching, teachers should guide students to compare the connotations of Chinese and foreign cultures, strengthen students' connotation, criticism, evaluation and identification of Chinese culture, so as to learn the essence of Chinese culture.

The cultivation of cultural awareness in junior middle school English reading teaching aims to deepen students' identification with the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, their sensitivity and ability to identify the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, and then cultivate students' international and cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills, and provide some reference for students to establish correct three views and cultivate and develop cultural awareness.

The world is constantly developing and progressing, which requires us to look at relevant foreign cultures from a longer-term perspective and draw relevant references in a timely manner to help students better cultivate cultural

awareness. The cultivation of cultural awareness in junior middle school English reading teaching can guide students to innovate Chinese culture and add their own strength to the development of Chinese culture.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Concept of Key Competencies

The "Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)" states that, through English courses, students can understand different cultures, compare cultural similarities and differences, absorb cultural essence, form cross-cultural awareness, enhance patriotism, develop innovative abilities, and form good character and Correct outlook on life and values [1].

"Chinese Student Development Core Competencies (Draft for Comments)" points out that the core competencies of student development are comprehensively expressed as nine major competencies, specifically social responsibility, national identity, international understanding, humanistic heritage, scientific spirit, aesthetic taste, physical and mental health, learn to learn and practice innovation.

To sum up, the national level attaches great importance to the improvement of students' comprehensive literacy. In particular, the Ministry of Education has issued documents emphasizing the cultivation of core competencies for middle school students.

Language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability are the four core competencies that the English subject must cultivate for students [2]. Language ability includes listening, speaking, reading, writing and other language skills, and its essence can be understood as the formal specifications of cultural communication media. Cultural awareness can be understood as the understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures and the appreciation of excellent culture. It is the cross-cultural cognition, attitude and

behavioral choices displayed by students in the new era [3]. Thinking quality refers to the characteristics of individual thinking, mainly the level and characteristics displayed in aspects such as logic, criticality, and innovation. Learning ability refers to the awareness and ability to actively use and proactively adapt English learning strategies, expand English learning channels, and strive to improve English learning efficiency. It is an important core quality cultivated by English subject education. Citizens in the 21st century must have a sense of lifelong learning and the ability to learn independently. When learning English, a foreign language, it is particularly important to improve your learning ability [4].

The improvement of students' core competencies is an important driving force for effectively improving the quality of classroom teaching. Improving students' core competencies such as language proficiency, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability can effectively transform students' classroom learning mode and realize the transformation of students' knowledge learning process from passive adaptation to active knowledge seeking [5].

For students in junior high school, their cognitive abilities are beginning to gradually mature. Therefore, in the process of English teaching at this stage, teachers must pay attention to the development of students' core competencies. On the one hand, it provides dynamic support for classroom teaching activities and promotes the stable development of the subject; on the other hand, it is of great significance in helping students establish a sense of lifelong learning and cultivate their ability to learn [6].

## 2.2 The Connotation of Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness should cover cultural knowledge, cultural skills, cultural emotions and cultural behaviors [7].

### 2.2.1 Cultural knowledge: Accumulating rich Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge

Accumulating cultural knowledge is the basis of language learning and a prerequisite for the formation of cultural awareness. Only when students have sufficient cultural knowledge reserves, familiar with various cultural phenomena, and understand the historical origins behind cultural phenomena, can they form cultural judgments, make cultural choices, and internalize cultural values into culture through comparison and analysis, manifesting as cultural behavior. In addition, only by being familiar with Chinese and Western cultures can we make reasonable comparisons and judgments, scientifically identify and inherit, broaden our international horizons through criticism and reflection, understand and tolerate different cultures, strengthen cultural self-confidence, and form correct values and moral emotions.

### 2.2.2 Cultural skills: forming accurate cultural judgments

Cultural skills refer to students' ability to analyze and identify various cultural phenomena based on the accumulation of rich cultural knowledge through comparison, analysis, synthesis and other thinking methods, combined with the background of the times and social environment, so as to form correct value judgments operating capabilities. The accumulation of

cultural knowledge allows students to experience and understand the customs, social customs, festival traditions, and social systems of different ethnic groups, value pursuit and other spiritual culture. In the face of various cultural phenomena that are complex, diverse, good and bad, English subject education has the responsibility and obligation to cultivate students' cultural judgment ability and enhance students' cultural appreciation and cultural discrimination.

### 2.2.3 Cultural emotions: having noble cultural character

Cultural emotions are explicit attitude expressions in which students produce different value judgments on different cultural phenomena after analyzing cultural phenomena, identifying cultural values, and completing cultural judgments. The goal of cultivating cultural awareness in the field of cultural emotions is to gradually internalize students' correct and scientific explicit attitude expression into noble and implicit cultural character, and internalize it into individual temperament characteristics.

### 2.2.4 Cultural behavior: practicing appropriate cultural behavior

Cultural behavior is the external expression of cultural character and behavioral orientation. It is an individual's compliance with or abandonment of certain social customs, traditions, practices, beliefs and other cultural explicit activities in a specific social environment. Practicing appropriate cultural behavior is the ultimate goal and destination of cultural awareness education, and it is also one of the basic footholds for cultivating moral character and cultivating people.

As a core competency, cultural awareness should be based on cultural knowledge, using contrast, analysis, synthesis and other thinking methods to form cultural judgments as skills, establish correct cultural attitudes and emotions, and internalize them into cultural character, ultimately manifesting as appropriate cultural behavior orientation. Cultivating students' cultural awareness is a multi-dimensional, multi-angle, and three-dimensional process. It is a process of comprehensive improvement of cognition, thinking, attitude, quality, and behavior.

## 2.3 The Related Studies on Cultural Awareness in English Teaching

In previous studies, domestic scholars mainly explained the cultivation of cultural awareness through English reading from several aspects, such as cultural comparison, English reading materials, and background information. Yu Houlin placed cultural contrast at the center of English reading teaching. He believes that teachers should guide students to compare the connotations of Chinese and foreign cultures, strengthen students' connotation, criticism, evaluation and identification of Chinese culture, so as to learn the essence of Chinese culture [8]. Relevant research shows that English teaching needs to drive cultural input from the text input of reading, and process and internalize students' logical thinking, critical thinking and innovative thinking, so that their understanding of culture can be integrated, deepened and diversified. , and use the output of discourse to enhance

students' cultural cognition, expand their international horizons, enhance their intercultural communication skills, cultivate their cultural awareness, and ultimately develop their subject core competencies [9].

Foreign scholars hold a highly recognized attitude towards the core competencies and cultural awareness. They claim that it is difficult to integrate cultural awareness into the language discipline. The cultivation of cultural awareness needs the support of context. Maria Luz Garcia points out that language is endowed with a special and irreplaceable position in understanding culture and other aspects [10]. Moreover, cultural awareness can be promoted and developed in continuous social practice. Deng believes that the integration and development of language and culture can be traced back to the evolutionary history of millions of years, and cultural awareness is deeply rooted in the survival and development strategies of human society [11]. All cultures of different periods are absorbed and adapted in the linguistic meaning system to promote development and unification, but the culture and many other cultural behavioral intentions contained in the linguistic system are difficult to leave traces, and only when they are constantly integrated into the practice can they constantly change the group's life and thoughts.

### **3. The Significance of Cultivating Students' Cultural Awareness in Middle School English Reading Teaching**

#### **3.1 Expanding Cultural Knowledge**

Although quality education has been popularized in our country, some junior high school English teachers still cannot fully get rid of the shadow of traditional educational concepts in their thinking. They pay more attention to the improvement of students' performance in the English learning process, and their work focuses on cultivating students' subject abilities. As an important part of students' comprehensive ability in English subjects, cultural awareness can continuously broaden students' cultural knowledge horizons and ensure that students can develop a comprehensive understanding of the connotation and charm of Western culture in the process of English learning and article reading. Compared with English in primary school, the difficulty and depth of English knowledge learning in junior high school have been expanded to a certain extent. The quality of English knowledge learning in junior high school will also affect English learning and practice in high school. Therefore, teachers can help students master basic knowledge through English reading teaching, and at the same time explore the differences between Chinese and Western cultures in an all-round way, help students realize the differences in cultural traditions, and help broaden students' knowledge.

For example, Jiangsu Yilin's Oxford junior high school English textbook adopts a unit teaching arrangement, with each unit focusing on a theme organization structure and content arrangement, including traditional customs, literature and art, customs, history and geography, behavioral norms, values, etc. In English teaching, teachers should guide students to focus on the established unit themes to explore cultural factors, and they can also expand cultural nutrition around the generated learning topics, thereby expanding their

cultural knowledge.

#### **3.2 Promoting Cultural Exchange between China and the West**

The second significance of cultivating students' cultural awareness is to achieve friendly and comprehensive exchanges between Chinese and Western cultures, seek common ground while reserving differences, and achieve common progress. Chinese and English are both language courses. The national compulsory education curriculum standards use three and five dimensions respectively to set curriculum goals for native Chinese and foreign English. As an English teacher, you must understand the editor's intention. The core purpose of learning English, Italian, Korean, Thai and other national languages is to accept the nourishment of the advanced culture of all mankind and enhance the ability of cross-cultural communication. However, "all mankind" does not mean full acceptance, and "cross-culture" does not mean being assimilated or even alienated. This requires English teachers to guide primary and secondary school students to grasp the differences between Chinese and foreign languages, strengthen the comparison of Chinese and foreign cultures, and always maintain sensitivity and discernment of the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures.

The representational meanings in Chinese and English may be similar, but the symbolic meanings may be quite different. For example, the English "moon" and the Chinese "moon" have similar or even identical meanings, which mainly include the symbolic meaning of the moon as women and beauty, harvest and perfection, love and marriage, etc. "The Moon is the queen sitting on her throne", "He shot some boars in the hunting moon" and other sentences. The meanings vary greatly, mainly due to different perspectives and viewpoints such as eternity and change, romance and fear. Chinese people often swear by "The moon represents my heart" to express emotional loyalty; while British and American friends often use "Don't swear by the Moon" to express their stance and oppose the tendency of emotional change.

Under the profound influence of the development of world economic integration, cultural exchanges between China and the West are also constantly deepening, and they learn from each other's advantages to maintain a state of common development. In the teaching of English reading in junior middle schools, the cultivation of students' cultural awareness is also the ideological basis for promoting cultural exchanges between China and the West, and helps to improve the quality of students' English learning.

#### **3.3 Developing Cross-cultural Critical Thinking**

Cross-cultural communication awareness is an educational concept that has become increasingly popular in recent years. It is a product of globalization and the result of the diversity of the world. However, for a long time, there was no theoretical basis for cross-cultural communication awareness. In 1992, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization first proposed the concept of "intercultural communication" at the International Education Conference. From the perspective of teaching Chinese as a foreign

language, cross-cultural communication can be defined as: in a specific communication situation, communicators with different cultural backgrounds use the same language (native language or target language) for oral communication.

The new curriculum standards clearly point out that the cultivation of cultural awareness is conducive to enhancing cultural self-confidence and cultivating talents with Chinese feelings, international vision and cross-cultural communication thinking skills. Classroom teaching is no longer a single grammar teaching, and the teaching content has been further expanded, especially in the teaching of Western cultural background knowledge. Although this has played a positive role in broadening the horizons of junior high school students, there are still some problems in teaching Western culture in junior high school English classes. Only by understanding the social culture in the language can we master the language. Only when English teachers face up to the cultural differences between East and West can they pay attention to cultivating students' cross-cultural thinking ability and understanding.

Cross-cultural education also has important practical significance in junior middle school English teaching. Cross-cultural education can help junior high school students realize the objective fact that there are differences between

different cultures at the beginning of their studies, help junior high school students build a prototype of the world culture system, and lay the foundation for cultivating them to form a correct understanding. For example: the word "red", in Chinese culture, red represents auspiciousness, joy, enthusiasm, unrestrainedness, passion, fighting spirit, revolution and other meanings, while in Western culture it symbolizes blood, violence, deficit and other meanings. It can be seen that the same expression in different cultures will have different meanings. Cross-cultural communication and critical thinking skills can help junior high school students recognize the differences in cultural connotations as early as possible, thereby correctly constructing their own outlook on life and world view, and improving their comprehensive literacy in understanding the world [12].

#### 4. Efficient Ways to Cultivate Students' Cultural Awareness in Middle School English Reading Teaching

In this chapter, a reading text from Unit5 "Let's celebrate" for seventh-grade junior high school students will be taken an example to illustrate in detail how to cultivate students' cultural awareness in reading teaching.

##### 4.1 Teaching Design

<b>Teaching content</b>	Unit5 "Let's celebrate!" Reading section
<b>Teaching method</b>	Situational Teaching Method, Task-based Language Teaching Method
<b>Teaching objectives</b>	<p><b>Language ability:</b> Students are able to understand articles introducing Chinese and foreign festivals; they are able to talk about related topics, use modal verbs appropriately to express speculation and express their views on certain festival phenomena.</p> <p><b>Cultural awareness:</b> Students are able to understand the different festival cultures in different countries and actively spread the excellent Chinese culture, so as to enhance their sense of national identity and social responsibility by understanding the fact that Chinese traditional festivals have gone global.</p> <p><b>Thinking ability:</b> Students are able to distinguish the connotations of different festivals; deeply understand the theme of the text; realize the transfer and expansion of knowledge, and use creative thinking to create a new festival.</p> <p><b>Learning ability:</b> Students can develop their interest in English learning by understanding the festivals of various countries; they are able to obtain English learning resources from multiple channels and choose diverse forms to show their learning results, such as making festival posters, introducing a favorite literary work in group presentations, focusing on controversial topics conducting class debates on topics, etc.</p>
<b>Teaching key points</b>	Students can grasp the features of different festivals, master some cultural skills and introduce some traditional Chinese festivals so as to subtly improve their cultural awareness.
<b>Teaching procedures</b>	<p>Pre-reading:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The teacher shows a variety of pictures of different festivals in different countries and ask students to guess what festival they are and name one or two characteristics of these festivals.</li> <li>2) The teacher asks students some guiding questions to promote students to have a further discussion about the topic related to the text.</li> </ol> <p>While-reading:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <b>Shallowing reading:</b> The teacher asks students some questions and assign a blank-filling task to guide students to explore the cultural theme of the text.</li> <li>2) <b>In-depth reading:</b> The teacher asks students to work in groups to seek answers for some in-depth questions, so as to guide students to explore the cultural connotations of the theme.</li> </ol> <p>Post-reading:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The teacher asks students to create an important holiday that can show the cultural connotation of their country.</li> <li>2) The teacher recommends a movie <i>Coco</i> for students to watch after class to help students know more about the festival of Halloween.</li> </ol>

##### 4.2 Pre-reading: Activating Students' Cultural Knowledge

In the lead-in part, teachers can incorporate cultural background knowledge, but they must ensure that the cultural background knowledge is relevant to the text content, effectively enhance students' enthusiasm for learning, demonstrate the scientific nature of students' knowledge learning, humanistic nature, and also laid the foundation for the development of subsequent teaching activities [13].

When teaching the reading text entitled "Let's celebrate", the

teacher leads students into the topic by showing a variety of pictures of different festivals in different countries and asks students to guess what festivals they are and name one or two characteristics of these festivals. In this part, the teacher integrates cultural background in advance and activates students' cultural knowledge through such activities.

Then, the teacher can divide the students into several groups and ask them to work in groups to have a further discussion about the topic related to the text. Some guiding questions can be asked, such as "How do people celebrate the festival?" "What's your favorite festival? Try to list some features of it."

Under the guidance of teachers, students can participate in activities in pre-reading stage, promoting an initial exploration of the cultural information. The integration of pictures and guiding questions can create a good English language environment for students to engage into further reading in next part, thereby effectively activating their cultural knowledge.

#### 4.3 While-reading: Deepening Students' Cultural Understanding

In the process of teaching English reading in junior high schools, in order to effectively deepen students' cultural understanding and trigger students' in-depth thinking about the cultural connotation of the text, teachers should not only provide students with culturally themed English reading materials, but also further guide students to explore the cultural theme in the text. In order to effectively dig out the cultural theme in the text, students' reading should basically be divided into two levels:

The first level should be shallow reading. In the shallow-level reading process, students only need to extract the information they need from the information of the text, and further understand, process, describe and interpret this information. By completing shallow-level English reading, students have a basic understanding of issues related to "what" and "how" in the text. At the same time, students can also grasp the main idea of the text through shallow-level English reading. Then, on the basis of completing shallow-level English reading, teachers should also guide students to explore the cultural theme in the text from a deeper perspective. This requires teachers to combine relevant content in the texts, dig out some deep cultural information in the texts, and provide students with some relevant inspiring questions to lead students to certain cultural situations.

Take the reading text from above as an example. When reading the text for the first time, students need to think about two questions: "When is Halloween?" and "What games do they play on that day?" and complete a table of fill-in-the-blanks to clarify the sequence of events and the timeline.

Date:	31 _____
Activities:	_____ up
	Wear _____ or paint their _____
	Make _____
	Play _____
Order:	Have a _____ in the evening
	Visit _____
	Play a game with _____
	Knock on _____
	Shout: _____
	Give us _____ as a treat

In order to effectively deepen students' understanding of the reading text, teachers should guide students to carry out in-depth interpretation of the text. Here, in-depth interpretation of the text means that students should employ their thinking ability to interpret and understand the information in the text during the reading process. The thinking methods that students need to use can include

predictive thinking, inferential thinking, judgmental thinking, guessing thinking, evaluation thinking, critical thinking, appreciative thinking, etc.

In light of this, after understanding the text for the first time, students can be divided to groups to seek the answers for "What regional customs and characteristics does the West have in your impression?" and "How are they reflected in their festival atmosphere?" These in-depth questions guide students to explore the cultural connotations of the theme so as to deepen their cultural understanding.

#### 4.4 Post-reading: Strengthening Students' Cultural Awareness

To enhance the effectiveness of English reading teaching activities, teachers can some use external factors to promote internal absorption, thereby forming a cognitive closed loop. Carrying out diversified activities in English is an important way. When teachers implement activities, they need to pay attention to the design of these activities, which can be associated with students' real life. Activities such as English drama performances, English-themed activities, and English storytelling help students improve their appreciation of Western culture in the process of learning English knowledge. Of course, the importance of China's excellent traditional culture cannot be ignored, and teachers need to incorporate some Chinese cultural content into the activities, enhancing students' English knowledge reserves, deepening students' understanding of Chinese and Western cultures to promote the development of their cultural awareness.

Taking the previous reading text as an example, the task of the unit display part is very creative. It requires students to create an important holiday that can show the cultural connotation of their country based on the inspiration of three special holidays (World Smile Day, World Book Day, and World Health Day), setting the time, celebration reasons and specific activities of the festival. This activity can well stimulate students' creative and logical thinking, and consolidate the cultural knowledge they have learned. When inviting students to demonstrate the holiday they have created, the teacher should encourage students to boldly express their opinions in class. Besides, the teacher can also ask students to further design holiday posters for their newly created holidays, and display them in class. In addition, after class, the teacher can recommend a movie called Coco to allow students to experience the Halloween atmosphere and understand the meaning of life. All of these activities play an active role in strengthening students' cultural awareness.

## 5. Conclusion

In this thesis, the connotation and importance of cultural awareness are analyzed, and combined with a specific teaching case of English reading teaching, a more detailed analysis is given on how to better integrate cultural awareness in the classroom.

Culture is the soul of a country and a nation. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping has attached great importance to cultural construction. He claims that "To strengthen confidence in the

path, theory, and system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, we must strengthen cultural confidence. Cultural confidence is a more basic, deeper, and more lasting force." Putting on a "horse-faced skirt", lighting up a bamboo table lamp, and buying some time-honored Chinese products... Traditional cultural elements that once had nothing to do with fashion are now becoming a new national style trend that is highly sought after by young people. Based on this social background, cultivating the cultural awareness of contemporary students has become a top priority in the education field.

By constantly laying a solid foundation for cultural self-confidence and consolidating cultural subjectivity, Chinese people are becoming more confident, self-reliant, full of pride, and marching high on the great journey of building a strong country and rejuvenating the nation.

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