A Survey of Culture Teaching in College English

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Abstract

This study introduces the condition of culture teaching in college English in China by using the quantitative research method. Through analyzing the quantitative data by means of various inferential statistical procedures, and investigating how the students' recognition, favorite approach, ideas, and attitudes on culture teaching interact and students' sex-, major-and place-related differences in culture teaching, the results show that culture learning plays a positive part in learning language. The results also indicate that the degree of the satisfaction on cultural learning of the students is varied by sex, major, grade and place. This phenomenon urges that all the language teachers should find suitable and reliable teaching resource in directing and implementing the language-and-culture teaching. Teacher should adjust and develop the existed content-based instruction into a more feasible way and also take on more responsibilities on the students in the process of learning. This calls for further study in the field of culture teaching.

Key words: Cultural teaching; Quantitative method; College English

INTRODUCTION

The teaching on foreign language culture education has become a heated topic because of the increased enthusiasm toward cultural study and cross-cultural communication in international society. Both some scholars and English teachers have a common understanding that culture teaching is indispensable for improving students' cultural awareness and enlarge their cultural background knowledge. Students learn and use language as we do because of our cultural background. However, most English teachers mainly focus on the language teaching, whereas the target culture is ignored to some degree in the present situation. It leads to the students' unfamiliarity with target culture and inability to express their actual meaning in English; finally, this brings up some barriers in the real study or communication. Thus the purpose of this study is to reveal the problems underlying the current situation of culture teaching.

In the current study, the author surveyed the degree of the students' satisfaction on culture teaching in College English by administering a questionnaire to 108 undergraduates in the same college. The author applied various statistic techniques to analyze how the students' recognition, favorite approach, ideas, and attitudes on culture teaching interaction and to investigate students' sex-, major-and place-related differences in culture teaching. And the author hope that the present study will offer some insights into the problem by investigating language students' actual beliefs on culture teaching and make language teacher adjust their teaching strategies to guide and improve students with the practical knowledge in target cultural learning.

1. METHOD

1.1 Participants

This study investigated 108 students from the same College (see Table 1). In this research, the author used criterion-sampling. All the students were studying English (including optional courses and some on compulsory

courses which consisted of a part of their study programs), whose English levels are on the average in the college, thus assuring successful sampling. Because it is the time that they have just finished one-year English study (the author administered the questionnaire at the end of the second term) and are still acquiring knowledge in the English classes. So, it is the right time to explore the actual state of culture teaching in different groups of students which guarantee diverse attitudes that towards the cultural teaching are collected and analyzed.

Table 1
College Students Information (*N*=108)

Items	Source		Major		Grade		
Sex	**City**	**Other places**	**English**	**Soft engineering**	**Grade 1**	**Grade 2**	**Grade 3**
Male	19	23	10	32	20	13	9
Female	39	27	57	9	14	27	25
Total	58	50	67	41	34	40	34

1.2 Instrument

Conducting a questionnaire is the most common and effective one in empirical study, and its effectiveness has long been recognized. The questionnaire used in the survey consisted of 25 Likert-scale items, assessing various students' degree of satisfaction on cultural teaching. And each of the latent variables in the questionnaire was measured by several 6-point Likert-type questionnaire items. The main variable groups in the questionnaire were as follows (with the total number of items given in brackets):

a) Recognition—Recognition on the importance of culture teaching in College English (7 items).

b) Favorite approach—Favorite approach of acquiring knowledge on English culture (4 items).

c) Ideas—Ideas on improving the status of education on culture teaching (4 items).

d) Attitudes—Attitudes towards the teaching methods (10 items).

1.3 Procedures

With the help of colleagues, the author sent out the questionnaire to the college students they taught. Following Gardner's (1985) recommendation, in order to form unitary group from heterogeneous sources, the author sent out the questionnaire to the students from different major, places and different grades. The 120 students answered the questionnaire forms in class under the guide of their teacher and the response rate is ninety percent (due to many reasons, the questionnaires of 12 students cannot be used). Answering the questions took the students approximately 10 minutes on average.

2. DATA ANALYSIS

2.1 Preliminary Analysis

2.1.1 Screening and Cleaning the Data

The data obtained were computer-coded. Before the author started to analyze the data, it is essential to check the data set for errors first. By checking the Minimum and Maximum values, the number of Valid and Missing cases through frequency analysis, the author knows where the error may exist.

In order to avoid the cases that some scores are quite different from others, either much higher or much lower, checking the outlier is necessity. By looking at the Histogram and Boxplot, the author found there are outliers appear as littler circles with a number attached (this is the ID number of the case), then the author went back and find if there is something wrong with the student's answer. The outliners in the data are deleted or corrected.

In order to prevent response bias, it is necessary to reverse particular item. In this questionnaire, only item 11 contains the word which has the negative meaning, so the author recode the value of this item.

2.1.2 Data Reduction and Reliability Analysis

In order to make the dataset more manageable, the data were submitted to a number of initial statistical analyses. The 25 items were grouped into 4 scales based on their content similarities as the author mentioned above. The internal consistency of these scales was tested by means of a reliability analysis to determine whether the theoretical scales were borne out in practice.

As for the Cronbach's Alpha value which shown in the Reliability Statistics table, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for all the final scales I used is listed as follows:

a) The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the Recognition scale is .616, suggesting not good internal consistency reliability for the scale with its questions. Then the author deleted item 8 and then 13 for the value of each item is higher than the final alpha value. The final alpha value I got is 0.702 and it is acceptable for the research. Item 8 and 13 are deleted because that the two items just state a phenomenon, but not the recognition on the culture education. The content is not related with others.

b) The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the Favorite approach scale is .532. The final alpha value the author got is .701 after the author deleted item 11. And it is also because the content problem.

c) The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the Ideas scale is .678. The author could not delete any items for the values of any items are lower than .678. The mean inter-item correlation value of the Ideas scale is .345. Briggs and Cheek (1986) recommended an optimal range for the inter-item correlations of .2 to .4 which suggest that there exists a relationship among the items. So the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of this scale is acceptable for the research.

d) The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the Attitude scale is .752 which is enough for the research.

2.2 Analysis

After the preliminary analysis, the number of the items in each scale has changed. And this author started to analyze the data by means of various inferential statistical procedures.

2.2.1 Independent Samples *T*-Test Analysis

In this research, the author wanted to explore to what extent the students' opinions differ toward the culture teaching owing to the difference in sex, major and place. In order to compare the mean scores of two different groups of students, this author has carried out an independent-samples t-test for three times. The first one is to respectively compare the Recognition, Favorite approach, Ideas and Attitudes scores for male and female. The second one is to compare the four variable's scores for the students major in English and Software Engineering. The third one is to compare the four scores for the students from city and other places.

In the Group statistics box which is shown in the output from independent-samples t-test, by checking the mean and standard deviation for each of the groups (male/ female, English/Software Engineering, city/other places), this author got the basic information about the groups.

In the first section of the independent samples t-test output, the author found out the results of Lenene's test for equality of variances and checked whether the variance of scores in the two groups is the same. Then the author decided to choose equal variance or unequal variance according to the figure in the column labeled sig. (2-tailed), then the author found out whether there is a significant difference between the two groups.

In order to check the magnitude of the differences between the groups, the author had to check whether the effect size is small effect or moderate effect, or large effect by calculating the "Eta squared" which is the most common effect size indicator for independent-samples *t*-test.

2.2.2 One Way Between-Groups ANOVA of Post-Hoc Tests Analysis

The participants in this research are from three grades. It's interesting to know that whether the attitudes of the student towards the situation of culture teaching varied due to the different grades. The author took the four variables (Recognition, Favorite approaches, Ideas and Attitudes) as the dependent variables, and Grade 1, 2, 3 as three groups.

By using the one way between-groups ANOVA with post-hoc tests, the author knows whether there are significant differences in the mean scores on the dependent variable across the three groups. And post- hoc tests can be used to find out where these difference lies. In this research, by checking the table "descriptive" in the output, the author found the number of students in each group is correct. Through Levene's test for homogeneity of variances and ANOVA which are shown in the output of one way between-groups ANOVA with post-hoc tests, the author checked if there existed the significance value. By noticing the asterisks which may appear in the column labeled Mean Difference, the author found out which two groups being compared are significantly different from one another. The last thing to do is to calculate Eta squared by which the author can calculate the effect size.

2.3 Correlation

In this research, the author interested in exploring the relationship among a group of variables (the student's recognition towards culture teaching, the student's favorite approach to get the knowledge, the attitudes towards teaching methods, and ideas on improving cultural teaching).

2.3.1 Generating a Scatterplot

Before performing a correlation analysis, the author decided to generate a scatter plotfirst for it is useful to produce a visual representation of the data distribution and also the author could check the scatterplot for outliners.

2.3.2 Determining the Direction and the Strength of the Relationship

By noticing the positive or negative sign in front of the correlation coefficient value, the author found out whether the correlation between each pair is negative or positive. And the author also knew the strength of the relationship through checking the size of the value of the correlation coefficient.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Independent Samples *T*-Test Analysis

As the author mentioned before, the author has carried out independent-samples t-test for three times (see Appendix I).

As for the second one (see Table 2), there was a significant difference in scores of Attitudes for students major in English and students major in Software Engineering and the magnitude of the difference in the means was moderate (Eta squared=.06). The score of Attitudes for the students major in Software Engineering is higher than the students major in English.

Table 2
_T_-Tests of the Scores of Students Major in English and Software Engineering on Attitudes

Items	*M*	*SD*	*D*	*T*	Effect size[a]
Attitudes			106	-2.62*	.06
English	4.15	.78			
Software engineering	4.95	.55			

Note. *: $P<.05$; a: Eta squared

The result of this analysis is out of the author's expectation for that there is only one has a significant difference within all the tests. The reason for this difference may be due to major difference. Different major has different level of acquiring English knowledge and the learning environment that the students situated in is distinctly varied. In my college, the students major in Software Engineering have English lessons for only about 4 hours per week which cannot meet the needs of the students. So they do not have the chance to get in touch with too much knowledge about culture and culture input in language teaching may become a new thing for them. And also because of the curiosity which is the characteristic of young person, they have a strong desire to learn more things that they are not familiar with. They have strong contentment with the method of culture teaching. While for the students major in English, cultural learning is a compulsory course. After systematically study, the students may raise more hypercritical requirement to the teaching method and expect more effective teaching method to enhance their ability. With this kind of critical attitude, the degree of satisfaction on teaching methods which are not higher than the students major in Software Engineering is not easy to guess.

The most unexpected result is that there is no difference between the students from city and other places like town, village or countryside toward any four variables. The author thinks the reason may be lies in amelioration of the situation of English education in these places. And also the input of the knowledge on English culture not only has been put in force in the schools in city, but also in town, village or countryside.

3.2 One Way Between-Groups ANOVA of Post-Hoc Tests Analysis

In the course of ANOVA analysis, the author did four comparisons. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to explore whether there exists difference in Recognition, Favorite approach, Ideas and Attitudes among students on the level of Grade. After checking the figures shown in Appendix 2, the author found out that A one way analysis of variance indicated that there was a significant difference in Ideas among Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3 (see Table 3). The effect size was moderate (Eta squared= .10). Post-hoc comparison using the Turkey HSD test indicated that only Grade 2 and Grade 3 were statistically significantly different from one another.

Another one way analysis of variance also indicated that there was a significant difference in Recognition among the three Grades. The effect size was also moderate (Eta squared= .06). Post-hoc comparison using the Turkey HSD test also indicated that only Grade 2 and Grade 3 were significantly different from one another.

The results reveal that the degrees of the students' recognition on importance of cultural teaching and ideas on improving the status on culture education in Grade

3 are higher than that in Grade 2. This phenomenon is reasonable in China. With the focus of study being directed toward College Grade 2, students may have little desire to improve language proficiency in a certain and unchanged level model such as CET-4 or CET-6, and they consider more heavily on how to pass the exam than on how to enrich their knowledge because of the limited time and energy. And the degree of their recognition on cultural education will go down naturally. However, without heavy burden of study, the students in Grade 3 take some real and reasonable advantages to get in touch with the information about culture. And also they all clearly know the importance to be a versatile person in the society that they are going to face with. Acquiring more knowledge of foreign culture may become a contributing factor to be a strong competitor. Therefore, they pay more attention on cultural education and make claims on the improvement of the status of cultural teaching. I think that is the main reason why there exists a significant difference between Grade 2 and Grade 3.

Table 3
Comparison of 4 Variables Across 3 Grades

Items	M(*SD*)			*F*(2,108)	Effect size[a]
	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3		
	(*n*=34)	(*n*=40)	(*n*=34)		
Recognition	4.98(.58)	4.63(.95)	5.09(.59)	3.98*	.07
Ideas	4.71(.65)	4.54(.87)	5.10(.53)	5.72*	.12

Note. *: *P*<.05; a: Eta squared.

3.3 Correlation

The relationship of the group of variables can be seen in Table 4. From Table 4, we can conclude that the four variables all have significant relationship with others. And the relationship between the students' recognition and attitudes has the strongest relationship than others according to the guidelines of Cohen (1988). The relationship between the students' favorite approaches and ideas is the lowest compared with others. The results show that all the four variables are all closely related with each other, especially for the relationship between the students' recognition on cultural teaching and their attitudes towards teaching methods and also the relationship between the students' recognition on cultural teaching and their ideas on improving the status of education on cultural teaching. This author thinks these are all the key points on cultural teaching. With the rapid development of international cooperation, persons with intercultural communicative competence are greatly demanded nowadays. And the importance of cultural teaching has been raised up to a new level. Most students pay attention to the target culture as they come to realize the ultimate aim of cultural teaching. And the students with the desire to enrich themselves and to be a strong competitor in the future will pay more attention to the teaching methods and also have their own ideas for improving the status of education on culture teaching.

Table 4
Correlations Between 4 Pairs of Variables

Scale	1	2	3	4
1. Recognition	—	.32**	.54**	.58**
2. Favorite approach		—	.24*	.46**
3. Ideas			—	.47**
4. Attitudes				—

Note. **: *P*<.01 (2-tailed); *: *P*<.05 (2-tailed)

CONCLUSION

Based on the investigation above, it is clear that most of the students are interested in acculturation as the average scores are all above four. And they agree that culture learning plays a positive part in learning language and hopes they can get more knowledge about foreign culture. We also find out that the degree of the satisfaction on cultural learning of the students is varied by sex, major, grade and place. Due to these reasons, English teaching should be altered according to the characteristics of the students. And also the current examination-oriented education system should be consummated to accommodate the needs of the students. Teacher should adjust and develop the existed content-based instruction into a more feasible way and also take on more responsibilities on the students in the process of learning.

Undoubtedly this research has its limitations and remains to be improved. Due to practical restraints, sample cannot be very large and thus may not present the whole situation. And also there are some results in this research in contrast with the author's consumptions which will keep the author working on it.

For the problems is how to find suitable and reliable teaching resource, it is a great question for all the language teachers in directing and implementing the language-and-culture teaching. This calls for further study in the field of culture teaching.

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APPENDIX I

T-Tests of the Scores of Students From City and Other Places on Recognition, Favorite Approach, Ideas and Attitudes (*N*=108)

Items	M	SD	D	T	Effect size[a]
Recognition			86.0	-1.10	.01
City	4.81	0.95			
Other places	4.97	0.46			
Favorite approach			106	.13	.00
City	4.51	1.00			
Other places	4.49	0.91			
Ideas			105	-.61	.00
City	4.72	0.57			
Other places	4.80	0.83			
Attitudes			94.1	-1.23	.01
City	4.25	0.81			
Other places	4.40	0.47			

Note. *: *P*<.05; a: Eta squared.

T-Tests of the Scores of Students on Recognition, Favorite approach, Ideas and Attitudes (*N*=108)

Items	M	SD	D	T	Effect size[a]
Recognition			106	-.82	.00
Male	4.81	.67			
Female	4.93	.82			
Favorite approach			106	-.82	.00

To be continued

					Continued
Items	M	SD	D	T	Effect size[a]
Male	4.40	.94			
Female	4.56	.97			
Ideas			106	-.57	.00
Male	4.72	.57			
Female	4.80	.83			
Attitudes			105	.89	.00
Male	4.39	.53			
Female	4.28	.75			

Note. *: *P*<.05; a: Eta squared

T-Tests of the Scores of Students Major in English and Software Engineering on Recognition, Favorite Approach, Ideas and Attitudes (*N*=108)

Items	M	SD	D	T	Effect size[a]
Recognition			101	-.36	.00
English	4.87	.84			
Software Engineering	4.92	.63			
Favorite approach			106	1.14	.01
English	4.58	.96			
Software Engineering	4.37	.96			
Ideas			106	1.14	.01
English	4.58	.96			
Software Engineering	4.37	.96			
Attitudes			106	-2.62*	.06
English	4.15	.78			
Software Engineering	4.95	.55			

Note. *: *P*<.05; a: Eta squared.

APPENDIX II

Comparison of 4 Variables Across 3 Grades (*N*=108)

Items	M(SD)			F(2,108)	Effect Size[a]
	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3		
	(*n*=34)	(*n*=40)	(*n*=34)		
Recognition	4.98(.58)	4.63(.95)	5.09(.59)	3.98*	.07
Favorite approach	4.5.(.89)	4.60(1.05)	4.38(.92)	.47	.00
Ideas	4.71(.65)	4.54(.87)	5.10(.53)	5.72*	.12
Attitudes	4.44(.58)	4.25(.82)	4.28(.56)	.82	.05

Note. *: *P*<.05; a: Eta squared.