

Exploration of the Path to Integrate Northern Frontier Culture into High School English Classroom Teaching

Jiayu Li* , Guang Yang

Ordos No.2 High school, Ordos, China 017000

Abstract: This study explores the integration of Northern Frontier culture into high school English teaching, using a mixed-methods approach at a model high school in Ordos City. Over 18 weeks, strategies such as theme-based instruction, interdisciplinary integration, and contextualized practices were implemented. The results demonstrated significant improvements in students' cultural awareness and language proficiency. Key findings include enhanced intercultural communication skills (experimental class: 4.2 ± 0.5 vs. control class: 3.1 ± 0.7 , $p < 0.01$) and increased learning interest (88.5% vs. 46.0%, $p < 0.01$). Qualitative data revealed stronger cultural identity and engagement, exemplified by student projects like a "Grassland Tourism Handbook." The study highlights the effectiveness of authentic content, interactive activities, and process-oriented evaluation. It provides a practical framework for incorporating regional culture into English education, with implications for teacher training, curriculum design, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Limitations include sample size and geographic scope, suggesting future expansion and digital resource development (e.g., VR cultural experiences).

Keywords: Northern Frontier culture, cultural awareness, English teaching, path exploration, ethnic education

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Under the grand vision of the "Belt and Road" Initiative, the Chinese Ministry of Education's China's Education Modernization 2035 document explicitly emphasizes the goal of "integrating China's excellent traditional culture into the entire educational process"^[1]. As a critical gateway for China's northern opening, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region boasts a rich tapestry of Northern Frontier culture, including Genghis Khan culture, Zhaojun culture, and the "Westward Migration" culture, which collectively form its unique cultural landscape^[2]. A survey in Ordos City found 78.6% of English teachers report under 5% local cultural content in textbooks, while 83.2% of students cite limited chances to learn local culture via English classes. This "cultural aphasia" undermines both local cultural understanding and China's cultural dissemination globally.

Globalization demands that English teaching transcend mere language skill acquisition to cultivate cultural awareness and intercultural communication competence. The English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition, 2020 Revision) identifies "cultural awareness" as a core component of English literacy, underscoring its pedagogical significance^[3]. Northern Frontier culture, characterized by grassland civilization, nomadic traditions, and ethnic integration, offers abundant local cultural resources. However, current English teaching remains overly Western-centric, leading to

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imbalanced cultural identity and intercultural competence among students^[4].

1.2 Research Questions

This study focuses on the following questions:

How can Northern Frontier culture be effectively integrated into high school English teaching practices?

What pathways can be constructed to embed Northern Frontier culture into English classrooms?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Northern Frontier Culture

Northern Frontier culture, centered on the Inner Mongolia Plateau, is a composite system integrating nomadic, agrarian, and multi-ethnic elements. Its uniqueness lies in ecological adaptability, multicultural coexistence, and historical continuity. Scholar Lv Wenli and Sun Xiaochen highlights its core philosophy of “harmony between humans and nature” and multi-ethnic social integration^[5]. For instance, the Mongolian “Oboo worship” ritual reflects reverence for natural resources, while Kazakh “transhumance culture” demonstrates ecological adaptability. These cultural traits provide rich cross-cultural comparative materials for English teaching.

2.2 Integrating Cultural Awareness into English Teaching

Cultural integration requires activities that foster deep understanding and appreciation of local culture. Bao Yingshan advocates “cultural immersion teaching”, emphasizing environmental design and project-based practices^[6]. For example, comparing Western Christmas with the Mongolian Nadam Festival enhances students’ analytical skills in cultural differences.

2.3 Research Necessity

Existing studies predominantly focus on traditional Chinese culture, neglecting regional cultures like Northern Frontier culture. Zhen Chunxia stresses the need for localized teaching resources tailored to regional characteristics, leveraging the ecological and ethnic uniqueness of Northern Frontier culture^[7].

3. Research Design

3.1 Subjects of the study

In an autonomous model high school in Ordos City, we selected two parallel senior year classes - an experimental class (52 students) and a control class (50 students). English proficiency tests showed comparable levels between classes, with no significant statistical differences ($p > 0.05$).

3.2 Pathway Construction

3.2.1 Course Content Reconstruction

We developed the English Reader on Northern Frontier Culture as a school-based textbook, covering topics like long tunes, Naadam, and ecological protection. Through this content-rich material, students can master English while understanding Northern Frontier culture’s charm, broadening horizons and enhancing cultural knowledge and respect.

3.2.2 Innovative Teaching Strategies

Thematic teaching: For example, in the unit of “Grassland Silk Road”, we innovatively integrate the knowledge of history and geography into English teaching, so that students can learn the language and at the same time have a more comprehensive understanding of this important historical and cultural phenomenon.

Contextualized practice: We encourage students to apply what they have learned in real-life situations, for example, by organizing them to design a “Grassland Culture Tourism Brochure” in English, or to record a short video on “Ecological Stories of the Northern Frontier” in English. Through such practical activities, students can not only practice their English application skills, but also deepen their understanding and appreciation of grassland culture.

3.2.3 Optimization of Evaluation System

To better assess students’ performance in the cultural program, we implemented a new evaluation mechanism comprising 30% of total academic assessment. This system aims to capture comprehensive learning outcomes - including written knowledge, language understanding, and practical application^[8]. Additionally, it encourages cultural practice engagement to enrich learning experiences and develop intercultural communication skills through participation.

Ultimately, this holistic approach seeks to foster balanced development of students' knowledge, skills, and cultural literacy, preparing them for future academic and professional pursuits.

3.3 Research Methodology

In the quasi-experimental study, we designed two teaching modes: the experimental class used innovative Northern Frontier culture integration to enrich content, spark interest, and enhance cultural understanding, while the control class continued traditional methods without such integration for comparison.

Quantitative data included a cultural awareness test with pre- and post-tests to compare students' understanding before and after the course. A student satisfaction survey assessed course content, teaching methods, and learning environment.

Qualitative data collection utilized diverse methods. Classroom observations captured climate, engagement, and teaching styles. Student reflection journals revealed learning processes and psychological changes. Project works like the "Grassland Culture Tourism Brochure" and English videos showcased students' creativity, teamwork, and understanding of the material. Teacher interviews provided instructional feedback from educators' perspectives.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

SPSS 28.0 performed independent samples t-tests to assess statistical significance between two group means. NVivo 20 executed qualitative coding, organizing unstructured data (e.g., interviews, texts) into thematic categories for deeper analysis. Both methods maintained their original research purposes: SPSS quantified differences through hypothesis testing, while NVivo systematically structured textual data to uncover patterns and contextual meanings in qualitative studies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Quantitative Findings

Indicator	Experimental Class (N=52)	Control Class (N=50)	p-value
Post-test cultural awareness	86.3 ± 7.2	72.5 ± 8.1	<0.01
Intercultural competence	4.2 ± 0.5	3.1 ± 0.7	<0.01
Interest improvement rate	88.5%	46.0%	<0.01

For data analysis, an independent samples t-test was used to assess the difference in performance between the experimental and control classes in the areas of cultural awareness and intercultural competence. The results showed that the experimental class demonstrated significant strengths in these key areas, with their cultural awareness and intercultural competence significantly outperforming the control class, and this difference was statistically significant at a significance level of less than 0.01.

4.2 Qualitative Insights

Student feedback revealed 82% of the experimental class participants reported enhanced understanding of Northern Frontier history and culture through the English program, while also experiencing boosted cultural identity and pride during the learning process.

The researcher observed increased student participation and motivation in class. Students now confidently discuss Northern Frontier cultural topics like "Ovoo Sacrifice" in English, demonstrating improved cultural knowledge communication skills.

The students' "Grassland Culture Tourism Brochure" boosted the city's cultural tourism and won a competition's first prize. It highlights their ability to combine English learning with preserving local culture and showcases innovative thinking and practical problem-solving skills.

4.3 Discussion

Research shows Northern Frontier cultural integration significantly enhances cultural consciousness, aligning with Byram's framework. The educational effectiveness derives from three dimensions:

(1) Authentic material selection: Curriculum used primary sources like oral histories and heritage techniques, enabling cultural immersion through phenomenological engagement.

(2) Interactive knowledge construction: Project-based learning required group creation of cultural artifacts, enhancing motivation and intercultural communication skills.

(3) Formative assessment: Evaluation focused on progressive cultural understanding through portfolio reviews and reflective journals, providing insights for cognitive development.

5 Summary

5.1 Main Findings

By reconstructing course content, combining theme-based and contextualized teaching, and optimizing evaluations, we can integrate Northern Frontier culture into English teaching. This approach enhances students' cultural pride and confidence while improving language skills and intercultural communication[8]. Systematic instructional design, appropriate resources, and external support remain essential for successful implementation.

5.2 Implications for future education and teaching

5.2.1 Developing thematic training for teachers

The “Northern Frontier Cultural Workshops” enhance teachers' cultural literacy and instructional design skills by exploring Inner Mongolia's history, folklore, and art. These trainings improve educators' cultural sensitivity, enabling them to integrate Northern Frontier culture into teaching, thereby boosting student engagement and cultural understanding^[9].

5.2.2 Curriculum Integration

Integrate Northern Frontier cultural elements into unit themes, e.g., comparing their ecological concepts with Western environmental protection in “Environmental Protection” units to deepen students' understanding of respecting nature across cultures. This curriculum integration also teaches Northern Frontier customs, history, and natural harmony wisdom, broadening student' horizons and cultural identity.

5.2.3 Interdisciplinary cooperation

Conduct cultural inquiry projects with history and geography disciplines, such as the “Northern Trade on the Silk Road” activity. Students will explore the Silk Road's historical background through field trips and documentary research, focusing on the Northern Frontier's role in ancient trade and cultural exchange between East and West. This interdisciplinary approach cultivates analytical skills and cross-disciplinary thinking.

5.2.4 Continuous optimization of the evaluation system

Building on domestic and international English teaching advancements, we should refine the evaluation system to emphasize both language skills and cultural awareness cultivation. The revised system should significantly increase cultural awareness weighting, enabling comprehensive English understanding and cross-cultural communication. Additionally, we must maintain balanced development of core competencies - language proficiency, cultural literacy, critical thinking, and learning capabilities^[10].

5.3 Shortcomings and Prospects

The research sample is currently restricted to a single institution. Future investigations should include diverse educational institutions across various regions. Extended longitudinal analysis remains crucial for verifying data validity. To address geographical constraints, creating digitized heritage repositories (e.g., immersive VR modules showcasing Northern Frontier culture) is proposed, enabling technology-mediated cross-regional cultural engagement and education.

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