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A Study on Enhancing University Students' Ability to Promote China's Fine Traditional Culture in College English Courses

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Abstract

With the growth of intercultural communication around the world and the increase of Chinese engagement in it, college English teaching has been called upon more than ever before to prepare learners for sharing the richness of traditional Chinese culture in English, although cultural content in many classes remains unbalanced. Guided by Byram's framework for intercultural communicative competence and the Ministry of Education of China's College English Teaching Guidelines (2020), this study uses a combined quantitative and qualitative analysis in a quasi-experimental design with a sample size of 132 non-English-major undergraduates at a comprehensive university in southwest China assigned to an experimental group (N = 66) and a control group (N = 66). Throughout one 16-week semester, the experimental group received a weekly 10 - 12-minute embedded intervention comprising multi-modal materials, progressive task-driven activities, guided comparative reflection, and adjusted formative assessment, while the control group followed the standard instruction. Questionnaire data and interview findings indicate that the experimental group reported significantly greater self-reported gains than the control group in cultural cognition, expressive performance, and interpretive awareness ($p < 0.01$). Qualitative results also reveal challenges such as the lack of local teaching materials and students' fear about output. Based on those insights, this work proposes lightweight multi-modal resource building, low-stress progressive task sequences, and refined formative assessments that all are suited to real classroom constraints.

Keywords

College English, Cultural Communication Competence, China's Fine Traditional Culture, Intercultural Teaching, Embedded Intervention, Mixed-Method Research

1. Introduction

In this age of ever-increasing worldwide communications, university graduates should be able to demonstrate not only good foreign-language proficiency, but also a capacity for reciprocal cultural exchanges as well. In light of China's growing international role—in the world commerce, in the field of education, culture, international relations—all of these areas have led to a great need for students' ability to present China's philosophy, arts, and social practices to an overseas audience in correct and idiomatic English. In response, China's Ministry of Education published College English Teaching Guidelines (2020)[1], requiring universities' English teaching aims at cultivating students' intercultural communication capability, so they can tell Chinese stories well in other language(s). As one of the prerequisite courses for non-English major students, college English is expected to cultivate their intercultural competence through two complementary objectives.

In English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) contexts, intercultural communicative competence consists of two equally important objectives: knowing the culture of those who speak the foreign language you learn, as well as being able to promote your own culture with those who do not know it well (Byram, 1997). Today, in contemporary college English classrooms, however, much class time has been spent on Western literature and culture, social conventions, and cultural values embodied in teaching contents, while systematic training on how to introduce local traditional culture in English is sporadic and ad hoc. Prior empirical studies reveal the well-known phenomenon of "Chinese culture aphasia": students can read and talk about foreign cultures in English, but find it difficult to correctly promote Chinese festivals, folk art, philosophy and intangible cultural relics in the target language and such a competence gap limits the balanced intercultural communication and might even cause one-way cultural assimilation which undermines students' cultural confidence and nationhood (Yu & Kuang, 2022).

Previous research has not only pointed out that it is important to introduce traditional Chinese culture in the English course at universities, but only offered detailed theoretical analysis and general suggestions about curriculum design (Luo, 2025; Sun, 2016). However, there is still a lack of concrete, classroom-based empirical evidence for how to translate the above assumptions into actually feasible and low-burden teaching procedures in practice. Existing publications mostly discuss theory or analyze documents, while quasi-experimental intervention researches based on the questionnaire and interview data of ordinary non-English-major classes are rare. Further, many of these suggested measures are idealistic and ignore the heavy burden on front-line University English instructors, which is a research gap this article attempts to bridge.

In real teaching scenarios, college English teachers face tight teaching sched-

[1]Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2020). College English Teaching Guidelines (2020 Edition). Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press. (In Chinese)

ules, fixed textbook frameworks, and divergent student language proficiency. Large-scale overall curriculum reconstruction is hardly feasible for most front-line educators, and few institutions can afford specially designed cultural courses for all non-English majors. Hence, exploring embedded and incremental teaching reform carries strong practical significance. This study addresses three research questions:

RQ1. After a semester-long, focused instructional program being integrated into regular course units, will students majoring in the fields other than English show measurable improvement in their ability to promote the richness of traditional Chinese culture in English?

RQ2. Based on the students' linguistic knowledge, the availability of learning resources, and their psychological readiness, what are the real difficulties that learners face in performing culture-communication activities?

RQ3. Under existing constraints of curriculum design, class hours, and textbook systems, what actionable teaching strategies can college English teachers adopt to cultivate such competence?

This research does not intend to redesign the whole college English syllabus. Instead, it investigates incremental reforms implanted into regular teaching units and evaluates the effects through a rigorous quasi-experimental mixed-method design. Its conclusions can be applied by ordinary university teachers without special curriculum funds or large-scale institutional support, thereby bridging the gap between macro-level curriculum ideals and micro-level classroom realities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Intercultural Communicative Competence in EFL Education

This paper is based on the notion of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The latter originates from Hymes' (1972) notion of communicative competence, which has been further elaborated upon within foreign language pedagogy. A multi-dimensional model of ICC consisting of attitudes, knowledge, interpretative and relational competencies, and critical-cultural consciousness works as a reminder of the fact that intercultural competence goes much further than correct use of language. In addition to Byram's model, Bennett (1986) proposed a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, according to which students move from seeing their culture at the center, from stages such as denial and defensiveness to acknowledgment of cultural difference and accommodation to it, implying that well-structured learning experiences may promote such capacity. According to Deardorff (2006), IC is not only more than just the possession of information on foreign cultures, but also involves learners' ability to think about their own culture, with interior results like flexibility and compassion at the heart of the construct.

Kramsch (1993) highlighted the deep symbolic bond between language and culture, viewing language classrooms as spaces where cultural meanings are negotiated, not simply settings for practicing grammar and vocabulary. Chen and

Starosta (1996) brought together affective, cognitive, and behavioral elements in a three-part framework that has been widely used in empirical studies. Within the Chinese EFL context, Hu (2013) clarified the positioning of ICC in foreign language teaching, stressing that culture teaching should be an integral rather than decorative component of language curricula. In her 2007 systematic study of intercultural language pedagogy, Zhang maintained that students should learn to present their own cultural traditions to people from other backgrounds, while language instruction should foster mutual cultural exchange rather than merely transmit knowledge of foreign cultures. More recently, Zhang and Yao (2020) constructed an integrated developmental model of Chinese students' intercultural competence, and Zhang and Wu (2022) developed a teaching reference framework covering cognitive understanding, affective attitude, and behavioral skills, in which knowledge of Chinese culture, national identity, and intercultural dialogue are explicitly listed as essential elements. These context-specific frameworks offer a solid theoretical basis for enhancing students' ability to convey traditional Chinese culture in English.

2.2. Local-Culture Integration within College English Teaching

Domestic researchers have long noticed the imbalance of cultural input in public college English courses. In 2000, Cong highlighted "Chinese culture aphasia" in Guangming Daily, noting that despite studying English for years, many Chinese students were unable to describe even familiar cultural topics—such as the Spring Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival, and Chinese food—in basic English. Zhang and Zhu (2002) early argued that college English teaching should attach importance to incorporating Chinese-culture-related content to achieve two-way cultural understanding. Yang and Zhuang (2007) developed a model of intercultural communicative competence for foreign-language education in China, positioning a global outlook and proficiency in one's native culture as equally important elements. In recent years, as higher education has paid more attention to undergraduates' cross-cultural exchange capacity, scholars have continuously explored teaching-material selection, activity modes, and curriculum design for cultural-theme instruction (Luo, 2025).

Nevertheless, there are several practical obstacles to its wide application: short duration of classes; absence of textbooks with English explanations of traditional Chinese culture ready for use; uneven student language levels, and heavy fundamental-skill teaching assignments making it hard in the real world for front-line teachers to do their job well (Chen, 2023). Gu (2017), in reviewing existing theoretical and practical models of ICC cultivation, argued that most models are on a level of goal description without any operable classroom procedures. Further, Sun (2016) warned that proposals requiring much more additional classes hours, and/or special teaching teams are unlikely to be adopted in ordinary universities, where college English is a high-enrollment, public course and credits are tight. What

these observations suggest for our field is not another call at the macro level, but evidenced-based, low-cost, and replicable in-classroom procedures, precisely the research gap that this paper attempts to address.

2.3. Operational Definition of Students' Communication Competence of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture

In this paper, we concretize our target competence in three measurable dimensions that can be used to formulate questionnaires as well as to assess students' learning outcomes in class, which echoes the affective-cognitive-behavioral structure popularly adopted in the ICC literature (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Zhang & Wu, 2022). Note that here we do not mean that undergraduates are expected to attain the level of a professional translator. Its main goal being efficient general intercultural communication is based on correct information and expression, and reflective awareness.

(1). Cognitive dimension: Students master the core connotations and corresponding standard English expressions of representative traditional cultural items, including traditional festivals, handicrafts, philosophical wisdom, folk customs, and traditional visual and performing arts.

(2). Expressive-performance dimension: The student organizes oral and written English expression for the introduction of a theme in culture, logically and appropriately, avoiding the strict word-for-word translation which might cause misunderstanding to overseas readers.

(3). Interpretive-awareness dimension: Students possess basic comparative awareness. They can equip audiences from other countries with essential cultural context and examine shared and differing cultural traits in simulated intercultural exchanges.

Together, these three dimensions form the assessment structure used in the present study. Unlike Byram's (1997) four-part model of intercultural communicative competence, the definition here gives greater weight to knowledge of one's own culture and the ability to communicate that knowledge. In contrast to the broad conceptual framework offered by Zhang and Wu (2022), it is more tightly scoped, enabling every dimension to be evaluated through practical classroom activities over one semester.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

A quasi-experimental mixed-method design was employed, combining quantitative questionnaire survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews. Quasi-experimental rather than fully experimental design was adopted because intact classes had to be used for administrative reasons, which is common and acceptable when random assignment at the individual level is impractical (Byram, 1997). The independent variable refers to the culture-oriented teaching intervention embedded in regular teaching units; dependent variables cover the three dimensions de-

fined in Section 2.3. The experimental and control groups were assessed at the beginning and end of the entire 16-week semester. Questionnaire data reflect overall group changes and permit statistical inference, while interviews dig deep into individual learning experiences and inner psychological conditions that numbers alone cannot reveal (Deardorff, 2006).

3.2. Participants

There were 132 participants, the first-year non-English-major undergraduates taking compulsory college English courses at a comprehensive university in southwest China. The four intact classes were allocated to the two conditions through administrative scheduling: two classes formed the intervention group (N = 66) and the other two formed the comparison group (N = 66). To reduce teacher-related confounding, all four classes were taught by the same instructor, and the two groups were matched as closely as possible on college-entrance English score distribution and gender ratio. They were also comparable in age range (17 - 19 years old). An independent-samples t-test on pre-test scores found no significant baseline difference between the groups (see Section 4.1). However, it should be noted that because intact classes rather than individual learners were assigned, selection bias cannot be fully excluded, and with only two classes per condition, the comparability of the two groups is limited because of the unmeasured differences between them, whose risks are acknowledged in Section 6.2. Their majors covered management, law, and social sciences. None of the participants had previously taken systematic elective courses on intercultural communication, reducing the threat of prior-training confounds.

The experimental group received conventional college English instruction plus embedded weekly intervention activities targeting cultural communication competence. The control group followed standard teaching arrangements using the same official textbook and the same syllabus, without additional specially designed cultural-expression tasks. Ethical protocols were upheld: students participated in the study of their own accord and gave informed consent, while the control group received the intervention as shared resource packages after data collection had concluded.

3.3. Teaching Intervention for the Experimental Group

Intervention segments were implanted into the existing textbook units without reducing scheduled language-skill training modules. Each 45-minute weekly class contained a 10 - 12-minute cultural-theme segment, which did not occupy class hours allocated for listening, reading, and writing required by syllabus requirements. The intervention was grounded in the affective-cognitive-behavioral sequence suggested by Bennett (1986) and Chen and Starosta (1996): materials and tasks progressed from knowledge input to guided reflection and finally to independent output. Four major intervention measures were implemented:

(1) Multi-modal supplementary teaching materials. Teachers provided short

English reading passages, clipped documentary excerpts, and illustrated vocabulary sheets on traditional Chinese culture, including traditional festivals, tea culture, paper-cutting, Confucian moderate thoughts, traditional Chinese painting, and dragon-boat sports. All supplementary materials were adapted to match the vocabulary difficulty of non-English majors, in line with the difficulty-control principle emphasized by Zhang (2007).

(2) Progressive task-driven classroom activities. Small-group chain-type tasks were arranged following the sequence of reading input → group discussion → draft writing → peer revision → mini oral presentation. Micro-project assignments required students in groups to produce three-minute English scripts introducing selected cultural heritage items. Progressive task design lowers perceived difficulty and builds output confidence step by step, particularly for learners with limited proficiency and high communication apprehension.

(3) Guided comparative reflection. During class discussions, teachers guided students to compare cultural phenomena objectively without simplistic value judgment, helping learners consider appropriate ways of transmitting native-culture information to audiences from different cultural backgrounds. This practice reflects the critical cultural awareness component of Byram's (1997) ICC model.

(4) Adjusted formative assessment. Ten percent of regular performance scores came from oral or written assignments with cultural themes. Evaluation prioritized communicative effectiveness instead of demanding absolute grammatical perfection, so as to create a low-anxiety output environment and encourage willingness to communicate.

The control group completed regular textbook learning, listening-speaking exercises, and unit assessments, without the above-mentioned cultural-communication-oriented extra tasks. All other conditions, including teaching hours, teaching content coverage, and the final examination, were held constant across the two groups.

3.4. Research Instruments

3.4.1. Questionnaire

The scale developed for this study initially comprised 28 statements rated on a five-point agreement scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), distributed across cultural cognition (10 statements), expressive performance (10), and interpretive awareness (8). Two college-English teaching researchers implemented expert validity inspection before formal distribution. To refine the item set, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the pilot responses; two items with weak factor loadings were excluded, leaving a final scale of 26 items. This exploratory analysis served only to select items and did not establish the construct validity of the instrument by itself, which remains to be verified through confirmatory factor analysis in future work (see Section 6.2). Cronbach's α for the full scale was 0.81, and the subscale coefficients ranged from 0.74 to 0.79, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency reliability. Pre-test was administered in the first week and post-test was

carried out in the 16th week by using parallel forms to reduce practice effects. The two parallel forms were developed from the same item pool, with items paired across the three dimensions and matched on content and difficulty, and a pilot administration indicated that the two forms were comparable.

3.4.2. Semi-Structured Interview

After the post-test, 12 students from the experimental group were selected through purposeful sampling: four high-score respondents, four medium-score respondents, and four low-score respondents according to post-questionnaire results. Purposeful sampling helps capture diversified learning experiences and improves the credibility of thematic saturation judgments. Each interview lasted for 12 - 18 minutes and was conducted in Chinese to reduce participants' linguistic pressure. Interview content was transcribed verbatim. The main interview questions addressed: (1) challenges involving vocabulary, communication styles, or psychological pressure when presenting China's outstanding traditional culture in English; (2) classroom activities that supported or impeded cultural-expression tasks, illustrated with specific examples; (3) the teaching materials and task formats students would like to see in future lessons; and (4) students' perceived development in their own ability to communicate across cultures.

3.5. Data Analysis

All quantitative data were analysed in SPSS 26.0. To estimate the intervention effect, the change (post-test minus pre-test) was compared between the two groups through independent-samples t-tests, and the post-test comparison was additionally adjusted for pre-test scores using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA); independent-samples and paired-samples t-tests were used for between-group and within-group comparisons, respectively, with alpha = 0.05. Because participants were nested within intact classes and only two classes were available per condition, class-level clustering could not be modeled explicitly; this limitation is discussed in Section 6.2. Questionnaires containing redundant or missing responses were removed prior to analysis, leaving 64 valid questionnaires from the experimental group and 65 from the control group. The interview transcripts were analyzed with a thematic approach, moving from immersion in the data to preliminary coding, theme development, and then review. Two researchers cross-checked coded themes separately and discussed disagreements to improve research trustworthiness.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Questionnaire Outcomes

At baseline, the experimental group and the control group scored closely on the total scale (experimental: M = 3.31, SD = 0.42; control: M = 3.28, SD = 0.44) and on each of the three subscales, and no comparison reached significance ($p > 0.05$). Nevertheless, a non-significant baseline test does not establish equivalence, be-

cause only two intact classes were assigned to each condition, the groups may still differ on unmeasured variables. The principal comparison therefore focuses on the change from pre-test to post-test and on the between-group difference in that change.

At post-test, the experimental group reported higher mean scores than at pre-test on the total scale (pre-test: M = 3.31, SD = 0.42; post-test: M = 3.80, SD = 0.39) and on all three subscales, whereas the control group's mean scores remained close to their pre-test levels (pre-test: M = 3.28, SD = 0.44; post-test: M = 3.37, SD = 0.41). Paired-samples t-tests confirmed statistically significant increases across all three dimensions for the experimental group. To estimate the intervention effect, the change (post-test minus pre-test) was compared between the two groups. The experimental group showed a significantly larger total-scale gain than the control group (mean difference = 0.40, t = 4.27, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.21, 0.58]); significant between-group differences in change were also found for the cultural-cognition dimension (t = 3.16, $p < 0.01$), the expressive-performance dimension (t = 4.02, $p < 0.001$), and the interpretive-awareness dimension (t = 3.44, $p < 0.01$). Of these three dimensions, expressive performance showed the greatest improvement, implying that structured output practice was especially useful in translating cultural knowledge into communicative use. The effect size for the principal between-group comparison on the total-scale change score was Cohen's d = 0.62, which corresponds to a medium, rather than a large, effect by conventional benchmarks (Cohen, 1988). Conversely, the control group did not show a significant increase, suggesting that the observed gains are unlikely to be attributable to maturation or normal instruction alone. As shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for the total scale and sub-scales at pre-test and post-test.

Measure	Experimental group (N = 64)	Experimental group (N = 64)	Control group (N = 65)	Control group (N = 65)
	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)
Total scale	3.31 (0.42)	3.80 (0.39)	3.28 (0.44)	3.37 (0.41)
Cultural cognition	3.35 (0.47)	3.82 (0.41)	3.32 (0.49)	3.46 (0.46)
Expressive-performance	3.12 (0.51)	3.71 (0.44)	3.09 (0.48)	3.18 (0.47)
Interpretive-awareness	3.46 (0.45)	3.87 (0.38)	3.43 (0.43)	3.47 (0.42)

Note. Experimental group n = 64; control group n = 65. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

These statistical outputs provide an affirmative answer to RQ1: semester-long embedded teaching intervention generated measurable positive effects on students' capacity to communicate fine traditional Chinese culture in English, and such competence improvement can be realized without large-scale curriculum reconstruction.

4.2. Qualitative Thematic Findings from Student Interviews

Four major themes emerged from interview transcript coding, which jointly an-

swer RQ2 and complement the quantitative findings with explanatory depth.

Theme 1: Lack of exposure to natural and suitable English culture expressions. Most participants recognized the culture expression meanings in Chinese but were unable to seek out equivalent idiom expressions, some preferring mechanical word-for-word translation. Several interviewees reported the lack of ready-to-go English descriptions for Chinese culture and history from mainstream textbooks. Excerpt (P3): "I know what paper-cutting is in Chinese, but I do not know exactly which words are more natural if I want to introduce that to foreigners. The direct one might be odd". This theme affirms that the resource barrier found in prior research (Chen, 2023) exists also in regular classes and directly limits students' output quality.

Theme 2: Lack of self-confidence in cross-cultural output practice. Even equipped with relevant vocabulary knowledge, quite a few students remained reluctant to deliver oral presentations, fearing grammatical mistakes in cultural-theme speech, and several worried that inappropriate wording would trigger cross-cultural misunderstanding. This finding echoes Bennett's (1986) observation that learners at defense-oriented stages may experience anxiety when forced to mediate between cultures, and it highlights the necessity of low-anxiety task design.

Theme 3: Positive learning gains brought by progressive micro-project assignments. Most interviewees held favorable attitudes toward small-group micro-presentation tasks. Group cooperation reduced individual psychological pressure, preparing short cultural scripts pushed students to collect materials and reflect on expression logic from the audience's perspective. Excerpt (Participant 7): "Searching materials and making our short group script pushed me to think how to explain our traditional customs clearly for outsiders, instead of only memorizing isolated words." This theme provides process evidence for the significant gains in the expressive-performance dimension reported in Section 4.1.

Theme 4: Learners' demand for supplementary learning materials with moderate difficulty. Students expected teachers to supply condensed reading and audio-video resources with matched difficulty, pointing out that overly complex academic texts would increase learning burden under limited class hours. This theme directly informs the resource-construction strategy proposed in Section 5.

Taken together, the qualitative findings both corroborate and extend the quantitative results: the intervention was associated with self-reported gains, and resource availability and learners' psychological readiness emerged as possible explanations for those gains, pointing to the targeted strategies discussed below.

5. Discussion

The quantitative results confirm that implanting cultural-communication-oriented training into regular college English classrooms can effectively enhance undergraduates' self-reported multi-dimensional competence in communicating excellent traditional Chinese culture in English. The empirical evidence supports the

theoretical standpoints raised by Zhang and Zhu (2002), Zhang (2007), and Sun (2016), and supplements quasi-experimental data collected from authentic university classrooms, thereby answering RQ1 with both statistical and practical significance.

Theoretically speaking, our study contributes to the discussion about reciprocity as an aspect of intercultural pedagogy. In particular, for students learning English as foreign language (EFL), the ability to tell about one's own local culture is a key part of equitable intercultural communication in both directions (Byram, 1997; Zhang & Wu, 2022). The fact that the experimental group outperformed the control group after only 10 - 12 minutes of embedded intervention per week shows that such a skill can be cultivated without redesigning the whole curriculum, supporting Bennett's (1986) view that intercultural sensitivity is developed by way of an accumulated, carefully ordered set of intercultural experiences. Further, the highest score obtained on the expressive-performance axis indicates that practice oriented to production is the best immediate tool of translating culture knowledge into communicative skills, a finding in line with Kramsch's (1993) claim of negotiating meanings via actual usage of language.

Practically, the qualitative interview outcomes expose key bottlenecks: the shortage of localized teaching resources, students' psychological anxiety over language output, and the trade-off between learning burden and teaching objectives. Teachers cannot simply add massive cultural content to courses, because college English must guarantee fundamental language-skill training. Therefore, material screening, difficulty control, and progressive-task design deserve high priority, echoing Gu's (2017) conclusion that operability, rather than conceptual sophistication, determines whether ICC cultivation models can be adopted by front-line teachers.

From the above results, we present here three pedagogical recommendations to faculty teaching in college-level English courses that together address RQ3:

(1). Construct light-weighted multi-modal supplementary resources. Teachers may select representative cultural themes such as festivals, handicrafts, folk arts, and classical philosophical ideas, adapt short English reading excerpts of 200 - 300 words, and compile glossaries for culture-loaded terms matching non-English majors' vocabulary level. Lengthy academic materials are unnecessary and short reading fragments, pictures, and documentary clips work well within limited class time. Departments are encouraged to build shared resource banks so that individual teachers' preparation burden can be reduced.

(2). Implement low-anxiety progressive task-driven activity chains. Teachers can design step-by-step micro-tasks following the sequence of reading input → group discussion → draft writing → peer revision → short oral presentation. Small-group collaboration relieves individual pressure and encourages broader participation in cultural-theme output practice, while the chain structure ensures that every student experiences successful output before being asked to perform individually.

(3). Optimize the orientation of formative assessment. Appropriate weight can be assigned to cultural-themed oral and written homework in regular-performance evaluation. Assessment should prioritize communicative effectiveness instead of pursuing perfect grammar, so as to tolerate reasonable trial-and-error in cross-cultural expression. Rubrics may explicitly reward accurate cultural information, audience awareness, and appropriate compensation strategies, which directs students' attention to communication rather than error avoidance.

It is worth emphasizing that all three strategies are compatible with existing curriculum frameworks and require no additional credits or specialized courses. This incremental-reform orientation responds to the reality that most universities cannot afford large-scale curricular innovation, and it offers a realistic pathway for scaling cultural-communication training across ordinary college English classrooms.

6. Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

6.1. Conclusion

The mixed-method quasi-experimental study investigates possible ways of nurturing undergraduates' capability in communicating excellent traditional Chinese culture in the college English classroom. The results show that an embedded semester-long intervention consisting of multi-modal resources, task-driven micro-projects, and adjusted formative assessment was associated with significant self-reported gains on the cultural-cognition, expressive-performance, and interpretive-awareness dimensions. Of these, expressive performance was reported to show the greatest improvement, a finding that awaits confirmation by the comparative analysis of measured performance. Student interviews also revealed some practical issues such as learners' low confidence in performing culture-themed output and their need for suitable supplementary materials. Based on these findings, three concrete measures that teachers can implement directly in their own classes—light-weighted resource construction, progressive task chains, and communication-oriented formative assessment—are recommended to the front-line college English teachers. In general, this study shows that equitable two-way intercultural instruction is achievable through step-by-step changes within the existing college English curriculum, providing evidence-based support for the cultural-communication goals set out in the College English Teaching Guidelines (2020).

6.2. Limitations

This study has several constraints that warrant recognition. To begin with, all participants came from a single comprehensive university in southwestern China; therefore, its findings should be applied cautiously to vocational schools, institutions specializing in science and engineering, and other forms of higher education. Second, the teaching intervention lasted merely for one semester; long-term retention effects of competence improvement remain untracked. Third, the ques-

tionnaire scale is self-developed and relies on self-reported perceptions; its construct validity requires further verification through confirmatory factor analysis. Fourth, outcome measures were limited to questionnaires and interviews; performance-based assessments such as rating of actual speech samples were not included. Fifth, with only two intact classes per condition, class-level clustering could not be modeled, so effects attributable to class rather than to the intervention cannot be fully separated.

6.3. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could extend the sample scope to vocational colleges, comprehensive universities, and science-and-engineering-oriented universities to test the robustness of the findings in different contexts; longitudinal tracing may investigate whether students' cultural-communication competence is sustained after the course ends and how post-course opportunities, such as exchange programs, affect retention. Methodologically, future researchers should use a combination of self-report and performance-based measures, such as ratings of oral presentations or written products, and, when possible, conduct multiple group comparisons under randomization. Furthermore, future researchers could explore how newly developed AI-aided writing technologies help or hinder the learners in expressing themselves in English about topics related to their own cultural contexts (Chinese) and what tasks and evaluation standards educators should revise in the age of generative AI.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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