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# CONTENTS

- 1      **On the Role of Cognitive Environment of Translation for English-Chinese Translation**  
Huanrong Xu
- 6      **A Review of the Studies on Ideological and Political Elements in Translation**  
Junjun Sheng
- 10     **Factors Impacting Teacher Stress and Mitigation of This Stress in UK School System**  
Jiayu Zhou   Yajing Xue
- 16     **Inclusive Methods in Art Classroom for Students with Autism in China**  
Shiyun Liu
- 33     **Ideology and Identity--A Brief Analysis of Anzaldua's Book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza***  
Zhouna Shao
- 37     **The Enlightenment of Cooper's Learning Circle Theory to the Construction of College Student Team**  
Xi Wang
- 40     **The Application of WeChat in College English Teaching in Yunnan**  
Fanghua Li
- 45     **A Study on the Mechanism of Cohort Effect on the Formation of National Identity among College Students**  
Kai Yang
- 50     **The Evaluation of the Cultural Contents in the English Textbook for Non-English Major Students: A Case Study at Independent College in China**  
Jing Zhao



# On the Role of Cognitive Environment of Translation for English-Chinese Translation

Huanrong Xu\*

Shanghai Ocean University, Shanghai, 201306, China

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## ABSTRACT

This paper put forward the concept of cognitive environment of translation based on the concept of cognitive context and proposed world knowledge, language knowledge and translation knowledge as its three constituents. World knowledge can also be referred to as encyclopedic knowledge, including all the knowledge acquired about diverse aspects of internal and external life through direct and indirect experience. Language knowledge refers to all the knowledge about the phonetics, phonology, lexicology, syntax, pragmatics, stylistics, etc. of the two languages involved and the comparative and contrastive features between the two languages. Translation knowledge concerns all the knowledge about the strategies and techniques for translation in general and specific solutions applicable for the translation between the two languages in question. The three types of knowledge get involved at different stages of translation: world knowledge and language knowledge about the source text facilitate accurate understanding of the source text, knowledge about the target language and knowledge about the comparative and contrastive features between the source and the target language, in combination with translation knowledge help with the translation process. All the knowledge can be activated more than once in case any uncertainty occurred at understanding or translation stages. As regards English-Chinese translation, translators are expected to use Chinese words, syntactic and textual structures most acceptable to the Chinese readers to replace the original English text, rendering them as close as possible in content, style and receptor effect. Efforts must be made to cater to the Chinese conventions of language use. Three major suggestions, among others, can be summarized in the paper. The first one is to use suitable words or expressions to match the Chinese ways of expression in various cases. The second one is to break the chains off the long and sophisticated English sentences, using shorter Chinese ones with a subject or theme, converting the nouns in English back to the verb or adjective they are derived from, etc. The third is to re-organize the textual structure of the target text according to the temporal, spatial and logical ways of expression in Chinese.

## 1. Introduction

As cognitive context is crucial to language understanding and interpretation, so is cognitive environment of

translation to translation. Cognitive context is a structured and cognized environment for language use, while cognitive environment of translation can be said as a structured and cognized environment for translation. Translation

\*Corresponding Author:

Huanrong Xu,

Shanghai Ocean University, Shanghai, 201306, China;

Email: [hrxu@shou.edu.cn](mailto:hrxu@shou.edu.cn)



involves a proper understanding of the source text and the proper conversion from the source text to the target text. The first “proper” is inseparable from the conventional cognitive context, and the second “proper” involves the language knowledge about the target language, bilingual contrastive knowledge, translation knowledge and related world knowledge. These bodies of knowledge constitute a cognitive environment of translation and play a significant role at the relevant stages of bilingual translation.

## 2. Cognitive Environment of Translation and Its Composition

Cognitive environment of translation is a concept put forward by the writer of this paper upon the inspiration of cognitive context. As is well known, context is the environment in which language occurs, both linguistic and non-linguistic. According to Xiong Xueliang<sup>[1]</sup>, context mainly refers to cognitive context, i.e. structured specific situations and the language frequently used or appearing in it. In other words, the original specific contextual factors become structured as cognitively structured units and relationships. That is to say, cognitive context mainly refers to the prototypical cognitive relationship between a language expression and the related context that can be mutually activated. According to Xiong<sup>[1]</sup>, cognitive context involves three pragmatic categories: situational knowledge (specific occasions), knowledge about the linguistic context (working memory) and background knowledge (relevant world knowledge). Moreover, it also includes collective consciousness shared by social groups. That is, the “methods of doing things, thinking mode or believing values” of social cultural groups. The collective consciousness is stored in the individual’s knowledge structures in the form of “social representation”, so to make the individual’s language behavior suitable for the social, cultural and political environment. What Xiong calls situational knowledge (specific occasions) refers to prototyped situational knowledge. In order to facilitate the discussion, the article put situational knowledge, background knowledge and social representations under the term world knowledge, while knowledge about the linguistic context is put under language knowledge. Since translation is an activity of language use involving bilingual translation, i.e. language use plus translation, it is rational to say that translation depends on the cognitive contexts for both languages and knowledge about translation, while knowledge about translation can not exclude the comparative and contrastive features of the two languages and translation knowledge. Till now, it is clear that translation depends on three kinds of knowledge, i.e. world knowledge, language knowledge and translation knowledge. The article put them under one term and named

it cognitive environment of translation. Below are further elaborations.

### 2.1 World Knowledge

World knowledge in the broad sense is also called encyclopedic knowledge. There are all kinds of existence in the world at large. Most of which are real and a few are imagined. In addition to the constituents, characteristics, events, states, relationships, social and cultural meanings, etc. subsumed by these beings, there are also connections between different beings, either real or imagined. A single, simple connection can be integrated into a more complex network of connections. The knowledge about these beings and their connections is the target and result of our cognition of the world, and constitutes our knowledge of the world. The world knowledge in this article is in a narrow sense, which specifically refers to the part of world knowledge activated by a certain language expression. It includes the prototypical situational knowledge, background knowledge, and possible social representational knowledge related to a certain language expression. Representations mainly concern cultural knowledge. As to what can be activated by a specific language expression, it depends on the principle of relevance<sup>[2]</sup>. Language communication and human cognition are governed by the principle of relevance which is not a human-made principle, but a natural attribute of communication and cognition. It is one of the guiding principles of pragmatic reasoning.

### 2.2 Language Knowledge

In addition to the knowledge about the linguistic context, language knowledge involved in translation also includes knowledge of the essential characteristics of the source language and the target language and their similarities and differences. Knowledge about a particular language is not only limited to the phonetics, phonology, lexicology, semantics, syntax and textual linguistics; instead, it also includes knowledge of stylistics and rhetoric, pragmatics, etymology, etc. Only by mastering a thorough and deep bilingual knowledge can a translator understand the source text correctly, find substituent structures from the target language easily during bilingual conversion, and tell whether he has made the right choice. An extensive comparative and contrastive study of English and Chinese language is the basis of English-Chinese translation. What count most in translation are the differences between two languages, though similarities also matter.

### 2.3 Translation Knowledge

For a qualified translator, knowledge of translation

studies is a must. Whatever the case, a translator has to solve the problems of macroscopic translation strategies and microscopic translation techniques. The essence of translation is nothing more than the proper conversion of the source language text into the target language text with an aim at equivalences in the text type of the source language text and the writing style of the original writer, so as to help the target language readers get roughly equivalent receptor effects<sup>[3]</sup> to those received by the source language readers. To put it in detail, the translator needs to deal with the relationships between form and content, between loyalty and creation, between literal translation and free translation, between foreignization and domestication<sup>[4]</sup>. Any extreme opinions, for example, poems are untranslatable, and a translator must be 100% faithful to the original text, etc.<sup>[5]</sup> are all irrational, hence unacceptable. The microscopic knowledge in translation techniques mainly involves how to achieve the appropriate conversion from the source language text to the target language text from all levels of language. A translator can adopt such strategies as adding, omitting, splitting, integrating, extracting, transliterating, noting, zero translating, and so on on the condition that most of the original meaning, style and receptor effect can be kept and carried over to the target text. Beyond that, literary brilliancy should be attempted at consciously so as to make the target text more readable. This is a piece of advice operable for the translation of all types. But for the translation between any two specific languages, some hard nuts must be hammered in terms of the languages involved.

### 3. The Role of Cognitive Environment of Translation in English-to-Chinese Translation

Cognitive environment of translation runs through the entire process of translation, but at different stages of translation, different components get involved. The stage of understanding the source language text is mainly influenced by the world knowledge and the language knowledge about the source language, esp. about the source language text, while the stage of translation from English to Chinese mainly by the language knowledge of the target language, knowledge about the contrastive features between the two languages and translation knowledge. At the stage of proofreading and reviewing before the final draft, all components of the cognitive environment of translation may be activated again. Since the last stage just repeats what may happen at the first two stages, discussions are directed only to the first two stages. Due to it being impossible to cover all the aspects of English-to-Chinese translation, examples given below can only deal with some typical issues.

#### 3.1 The Role of Cognitive Environment of Translation at the Stage of Source Text Understanding

An accurate understanding of the source language text is the first step of translation, without which all translation strategies and techniques are in vain. At this stage, world knowledge and language knowledge about the source language play the pivotal role. The world knowledge behind the source language text and the language knowledge about the source language help with disambiguation and meaning choice.

Example 1: If you really want to be slim, don't eat. *Fast!*<sup>[5]</sup>

Comments: The word "fast" can be an adjective, an adverb and a verb. Besides the world knowledge about the relationship between being slim and the amount of food to be eaten, the sentence pattern of the imperative mood helps with choosing it as a verb, meaning "eat nothing/little".

Example 2: ...it makes me realize to the bone, to the marrow, how poor I am—how poor I am, and how miserable, how defeated, *routed*, annihilated!<sup>[5]</sup>

Comments: The word "routed" is an adjective derived from the noun "route". It is very likely for it to mean "having a route/wayout"; however, the negative nature of the surrounding words, i.e. *poor*, *miserable*, *defeated*, *annihilated*, directs to its antonym, "having no route/wayout", in Chinese, ZOU TOU WU LU. This is a very special case for a word to mean its opposite depending on the linguistic context and relevant world knowledge.

Example 3: The cook was *knifing* the fish carcass into thin slices.

Comments: The word *knife* is a verb derived from the noun *knife* as a tool for cutting, hence the meaning "use a knife to cut". Nouns used as a verb without suffixation is quite common in English. World knowledge about the nature of the referent of a noun in the real world helps with the understanding of such verbs. The meaning is always closely connected with the ways human beings are related to the referent. For example, to *doctor* means to *serve as/like a doctor*; to *weed a garden* is to *remove the weed*; to *Christmas* somewhere is to *spend the festival somewhere*; to *rain off a game* is to *cancel a game because of the rain*; to *fold the sheep* is to *put the sheep in the fold*, etc. However, to *bottle wine* is to *put wine in the bottle*, but to *bottle a bad guy* is to *beat a bad guy with a bottle*. So the collocation in language will also help with activating the relevant world knowledge which in turn helps with the choice of meaning of a verb derived from its cognate noun.

Example 4: With Asia's economic meltdown rattling

the Beijing leadership, Zhu and his colleagues now have a powerful argument that China must *get its own house in order* to prevent meddling by the International Monetary Fund or other outsiders. (China: Zhu is Taking a Broom to the Bureaucrats) <sup>[5]</sup>

Comments: “Get one’s house in order” is an analogy based on a very famous Chinese saying “If one can not get his own house in order, how can he be expected to win and reign a whole empire?” With this knowledge, it will be much easy for one to put “get its own house in order” within one meaning unit rather than putting “in order to” within one meaning unit. World knowledge and language knowledge, esp. Knowledge about rhetorical devices in language help one quite much in identifying and understanding rhetorical devices such as metaphor, metonymy, pun, hyperbole, etc.

### 3.2 The Role of Cognitive Environment of Translation at the Stage of Converting the Source Text to the Target Text

Example 5: It was a day as fresh as grass growing up and clouds going over and butterflies coming down can make it <sup>[5]</sup>.

Translation for reference: IVCAO QIQI, BAIYUN RANRAN, CAIDIE PIANPIAN, ZHE RIZI SHI RUCI QINGXIN KE’AI.

Comments: The original sentence is a rather long and complex sentence with a comparative structure embedded; however, Chinese tends to use short and simple sentences. Consequently, the English sentence can be broken down into four short clauses:

*Grass grew up, clouds went over, butterflies came down, and such a day was so fresh.*

To put it clearer, when translating longer English sentences into Chinese, normally the sentences will be broken down into shorter ones, and when necessary, a deictic structure will be used to repeat an element to make the whole sentence cohesive and coherent. Sometimes, a subject or a theme inferrable in the context can be added to make short clauses. Refer to Example 6 for this.

Example 6: Dawn breaking over the islands, very beautiful in a soft grey light with many clouds.

Translation for reference: TIAN GANG POXIAO, ROUHE DE HUISE TIANGUANG TOUGUO YUNCENG ZHAOZAI DAOSHANG, MEI JI LE.

Comment: In Chinese, “tian” is indispensable to make “TIAN POXIAO”, customary to Chinese speakers, meaning “dawn breaking”.

Example 7: I should have liked to be asked to say what I knew <sup>[5]</sup>.

Translation for reference: WO DANGGRAN XIHUAN

KAO WO DONG DE NEIRONG.

Comments: In English, people tend to use passive voices much more often than in Chinese. So when acceptable, passive voices are often converted into active ones in Chinese.

Example 8: Rebecca’s wit, cleverness, and flippancy made her speedily the vogue in London among a certain class <sup>[5]</sup>.

Translation for reference: LIBEIJIA JIZHI, CONGHUI, NENGSHUOHUIDAO, HENKUAI CHENGWEI LUNDUN MOUGE QUANZI DE HONGREN.

Comments: English tends to use much more nouns than Chinese due to the flexibility of word class derivations. So when doing translation, it is highly advisable to change nouns in English to verbs, adjectives, or adverbs whenever feasible.

Example 9: You never realize how fortunate you are to have good health until it is suddenly brought home to you by the sight of suffering.

Translation for reference: CHUFEI QINYAN MUDU BIEREN DE BINGTONG, NI SHI BUHUI DUNWO YONGYOU JIANKANG SHI DUOMO XINGYUN.

Comments: Many times, a translator is supposed to do addition, cutting, re-ordering, integration, splitting, extraction, repeating, etc. to make the translated version customary to the target language. In this sentence, BIEREN DE (other people’s) should be inserted before “suffering” to make it explicit.

Example 10: “You should have killed yourself last week,” he said to the deaf man.

Translation for reference: NI SHANGZHOU ZISHA, YAOSHI SIDIAO JIU HAO LE.

Comments: This sentence is chosen from Hemingway’s short story “A Clean, Well-lighted Place”. The story was unfolded in a café among two waiters and a deaf old man who attempted to kill himself but failed. The quotation is the utterance by the younger waiter who was in a hurry to go home for his wife. Simple as it is, it is not equally simple to translate it. Since the attempt of suicide is a fact, only the result can be put under the subjunctive mood, hence the suggested version.

## 4. Conclusions

English-to-Chinese translation depends heavily on the translator’s world knowledge, knowledge about the two languages and their differences, and knowledge about translation strategies and techniques, the three together making the cognitive environment of translation. Such knowledge can be accumulated consciously and put to use consciously in translation. It makes an essential part of the qualities for a good translator.



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# A Review of the Studies on Ideological and Political Elements in Translation

**Junjun Sheng\***

School of Foreign Language, Xizang Minzu University, Xianyang, Shaanxi, 712082, China

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, in order to implement the educational concept of fostering virtue and nurturing students' quality comprehensively, ideological and political research has sprung up. The research on ideological and political elements in translation has also made new progress, and many academic results have been achieved one after another. These achievements reflect the appearance of integrating ideological and political elements in translation. Through the inventory of relevant papers, the paper analyzes the research status and existing problems of ideological and political elements in translation, and forecasts the research trend, to provide some references for subsequent related research.

## 1. Introduction

Under the background of the new era, "curriculum ideological and political education" is an indispensable part of steadily promoting the reform of ideological and political education to form a system of "ideological and political education". Since 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed to insist on "permeating ideological and political work through the whole process of education and teaching, realizing the whole process of educating people and all-round education", ideological and political research has sprung up, and the research on ideological and political elements in translation has also made new progress<sup>[1]</sup>. And many academic results have been achieved one after another. These achievements reflect the appearance of integrating ideological and political elements in translation. Through the inventory of relevant papers, the paper analyzes the research status and existing problems of ideological and political elements in translation, and

forecasts the research trend. Searching the literature related to "ideological and political elements + translation" through CNKI, the integration of ideological and political elements into translation has become a current research hotspot.

## 2. Research Overview

Although the research on Ideological and political elements in translation has just started, the research results are relatively rich, with a total of 74 articles. Since its rise in 2019, it has been increasing year by year, mainly distributed in 5 articles in 2019, 21 articles in 2020 and 48 articles in 2021. According to the visual analysis of CNKI, as the fundamental mission of education, fostering virtue and nurturing students in Ideological and political elements is also a hot topic in the research of Ideological and political elements of translation. There is no targeted research in translation major and translation teaching, and

*\*Corresponding Author:*

*Junjun Sheng,*

*School of Foreign Language, Xizang Minzu University, Xianyang, Shaanxi, 712082, China;*

*Email: Otis666888@163.com*

its research still has a lot of development space. We can see the clue from its research content, research team and achievement quality.

## 2.1 Research Content

The study of ideological and political elements in translation involves not only the research on translation teaching level based on specific courses, but also the research based on translation profession. Among them, translation teaching occupies a large proportion of the research on ideological and political elements of translation, and according to different focuses, it can be divided into research on ideological and political elements based on a specific translation course and path countermeasures.

### 2.1.1 Research on Translation Teaching

“Curriculum ideological and political education” lies in that both teaching and learning in the classroom should have the function of educating people. All courses should become the main channel of Ideological and political education, and curriculum ideological and political education should run through the whole process of talent training. College English, business English, Chinese translation and translation, Arab Chinese translation and general English are the basic compulsory courses set up in colleges and universities in China, and they are one of the important links of “curriculum thinking and politics”. Translation is essential in the teaching of college translation courses. Teachers not only need to teach students the ability to use language, but also need to implant “ideological and political elements” in the teaching process to enhance students’ cultural self-confidence, so many research results have been produced.

Among them, there are the largest number of studies based on College English and business English, which involve translation teaching, and most of them start from teaching practice and use specific examples to explore how to integrate “Ideological and political” elements into translation teaching, such as Dai Zhengli’s paper *Add a Moral Color to the Course of Translation* and Li Xi’s paper *An analysis of the role of translation appreciation of classics in the ideological and political teaching of College English courses*, Feng Wenxiong’s paper *Exploration and practice of “curriculum ideological and political” teaching of business English translation in applied universities*, and Lu Danyang’s paper *Application of Inquiry Curriculum Ideological and Political Teaching in the Classroom Teaching of Business Russian Translation*. Among them, Li Xi has a unique style, exploring the role of the appreciation of translation of Chinese classics in the

ideological and political education of college English, and concludes this method not only promotes college students’ interest and motivation in English learning, but also improves their ability to express Chinese culture in English, as well as their cultural consciousness and confidence; Lu Danyang, starting from the example of business Russian translation course, discusses how to translate ideological and political elements into business Russian from the aspects of teaching methods, teaching modes and teachers’ quality Organic integration of translation classroom teaching<sup>[2]</sup>.

The research based on path countermeasures includes Zhou Shan’s research *Countermeasures of Chinese Cultural Aphasia in Translation Classroom Under the Context of “Great Ideology and Politics”*, Li Zhiying’s research *On Implicit Ideological and Political Education in College Translation Courses from the Perspective of Affective Learning* and so on. It is not difficult to see that these achievements have discussed the ways and methods of Integrating Ideological and political elements into translation courses from a macro perspective.

### 2.1.2 Research Based on Translation Major

The ideological and political construction of translation professional courses is the key link to realize the fundamental task of Building Morality and cultivating people in colleges and universities. The unity of Ideological and political education of translation professional education courses and professional ideological and political education is to implement the task of Building Morality and cultivating people and achieve the goal of peer-to-peer and collaborative education. At present, most of the studies on Ideological and political elements based on translation major are comprehensive studies, with a total of 17 articles. Important research achievements include Yang Zhengjun and Li Yongzhong’s research *On the Construction of Translation Courses with Ideological-Political Elements*, Zhu Chaowei’s research “Tao” and “art” of *Ideological and political education of translation majors*, Dang Zhengsheng’s research *winning exploration on the supply side reform of master’s teaching of translation Majors under the concept of “fostering virtue and nurturing students”*, and Qin he’s research *understanding concept, practice path and development prospect of Ideological and political education of translation courses*. Yang Zhengjun and Li Yongzhong’s research shows that the content of translation courses should be seamlessly connected with the excavation of Ideological and political materials; The implementation of translation curriculum should take classroom teaching as the main channel to root in ideals and beliefs, and extend it to the life world. In

addition, we should also establish a curriculum management system, strengthen multi-party linkage, and establish a multi-directional guarantee system such as curriculum ideological and political teachers.

## 2.2 Research Team

The existing 74 research results have been completed by 101 scholars. According to the professional titles of researchers, only 14% of the total number of scholars have the title of associate professor or above, including only 2 scholars with doctoral degrees and 1 doctoral student. According to the academic structure, the researchers of this topic are composed of scholars majoring in English, French, Japanese, Russian and Thai. Among the researchers majoring in English, there are scholars specializing in translation studies, such as Zhu Chaowei from Sichuan Foreign Studies University; There are also scholars engaged in English teaching research, such as Chen Yuanyuan from Liaoning University of science and technology. The most valuable thing is that four graduate students have participated in the research of this subject. There are few researchers in other languages, including scholars of French teaching and research, such as Du Wen and Li Juan of Xi'an Translation College; There are also scholars engaged in Japanese linguistics, such as Sun Ying of Heilongjiang University; In addition, there are scholars engaged in Russian language and literature, such as Lu Danyang of Xinjiang Agricultural Vocational and technical college; Finally, there are also scholars engaged in the study of Thai language and culture, such as Shi Renchun of Lijiang College of Guangxi Normal University.

In general, given the prevalence of English courses in college, There are far more scholars majoring in English than those majoring in non-English languages, but those scholars have pointed out a direction for future research, that is, to strengthen the study of ideological and political elements in non-English foreign language courses.

## 2.3 Achievements Quality

74 journal papers related to ideological and political elements in translation are published in 50 different journals. These journals can be divided into three levels: foreign language journals, translation journals and other journals. Among them, foreign language journals refer to journals that study foreign language problems, and translation journals refer to journals that only study translation problems. Journals that do not belong to the above two levels are uniformly classified into other categories.

First, foreign language journals include *Overseas English*, *Foreign Languages and Cultures*, *Technology*

*Enhanced Foreign Language Education*, *Modern English*, *English on Campus*, *English Square*, *English Teachers*, *Language and Culture Research*, and *Foreign Languages in China*, with a total of 24 articles, accounting for 32% of the total number of papers. Among these journals, the core journals are only *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education* and *Foreign Languages in China*, with a total of 3 articles; Others are general foreign language journals. Although these journals have made some contributions to the research of this subject, in terms of the quality of their achievements, they are general.

Second, there are two translation journals, *Chinese Translators Journal* and *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, which contain 3 articles and 1 article respectively, a total of 4 articles, accounting for 5.4% of the total number of papers; It is noteworthy that these translation journals are core journals, which shows that the quality of the four articles included is very high, which is worthy of follow-up scholars to learn from.

Third, other journals include *Journal of Heilongjiang University of Technology (Comprehensive Edition)* and other 39 journals, including 23 journals with 46 articles, accounting for 62.4% of the total number of papers. These journals provide strong support for the research of this subject.

## 3. Existing Problems

The study of Ideological and political elements in translation has begun to rise in recent three years and is still in its infancy. Both the research content, research team and the quality of results need to be improved.

First, the research content needs to be expanded. Although scholars have carried out research on this subject from both macro and micro perspectives, they have not yet formed corresponding research results with synchronicity and universality.

Second, the research team is not perfect. At present, scholars who study ideological and political elements in the translation are mainly divided into two categories: one is college teachers, the other is graduate students, and there are few researchers above associate professor; At the cultural level, there are only three researchers at the doctoral level, less than 3% of the total. The research subject is relatively single and lacks diversity and high-level talents.

Third, the current research depth is not enough and the quality of results needs to be improved. From the published journals, the main forces of publishing these achievements of Ideological and political elements in translation are the college journals and other journals, followed by foreign language journals. Ethnic and transla-

tion journals make little contribution to this subject, which makes it difficult for their research results to be shared in ethnic areas, and then affects the process of Integrating Ideological and political elements into translation majors and their courses in ethnic areas. Overall, only 7 of the 101 achievements were published in core journals, less than 7% of the total achievements.

#### 4. Future Research Trends

Incorporating ideological and political elements into translation-related courses is not only an inevitable requirement for the implementation of the ideological and political teaching tasks, but also an effective measure to improve the teaching level and quality. It is also an important means to improve students' comprehensive quality, which is of great significance to promote the education and teaching reform of translation major in colleges and universities and cultivate high-quality foreign language talents. From the view of its research content, future research needs to focus on non-English foreign language courses, and the number of research results will gradually increase. Based on the current research team, the research subjects will tend to be diverse. In terms of the quality of the results, scholars should strengthen the continuity of research, learn from the relevant experience of other disciplines integrated into ideological and political elements, improve the quality of the articles by expanding the depth and breadth; meantime, we should gain the research

results with synchronicity and universality as soon as possible, and find the integration path of ideological and political elements in the translation process. Therefore, we should strengthen the cultivation of high-quality talents, actively explore novel and efficient teaching methods, learn the successful experience from other disciplines, and combine our own characteristics to create a set of scientific curriculum ideological and political teaching mode<sup>[3]</sup>.

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# Factors Impacting Teacher Stress and Mitigation of This Stress in UK School System

**Jiayu Zhou Yajing Xue**

Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 210024, China

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## ABSTRACT

Teacher plays an essential role in the lives of children. In addition to promoting their learning and improving academic performance, teachers have a major character in developing student's creative potential and growing into responsible citizens. However, in recent years, a report by National Foundation for Educational (2019) claimed that the teacher has faced many challenges than other occupations. Stress is one of the most challenges for the teacher to overcome. The main sources of teacher stress generally come from personal, interpersonal as well as organization. This essay explores and discusses the factors that impact or affect teacher stress, exploring the theories and concepts associated with teacher stress and mitigation practices for teacher stress in the United Kingdom school system- from primary and secondary school.

## 1. Introduction

The essay explores and discusses the factors that impact or affect teacher stress, exploring the theories and concepts associated with teacher stress and mitigation practices for teacher stress in the United Kingdom school system- from primary and secondary school. The goal and aim of this essay is driven by the fact that teachers may experience stress in the teaching-instructional environment, driven by a range of factors from their perception of demands of teaching, their lack of access to social and educational resources, as well as regulatory and social forces imposed on the teacher. It is noted that understanding the factors affecting teacher stress cannot be discussed without applying theories and concepts of stress provided by psychology. These that will be analysed and used in the essay will include the sympathetic-parasympathetic imbalance, chronic exposure to stress, exploring stress appraisal, decreased stress activation threshold. The essay will also discuss teacher stress based on chronic stress-neuroendocrinology theory, exploring monoamine neurotransmitters, norepinephrine, and cortisol. The essay will discuss teacher stress by starting by defining stress from language definitions and based on psychological theories defining stress. The paper then explores the theories

and concepts of stress, exploring how these theories try to explain teacher stress. The third section entails an exploration and discussion of the factors causing teacher stress based on evidence from literature in the UK, the globe, and by applying theories of stress to explain teacher stress and factors that cause this stress. The fourth part discusses the possible solutions and mitigation strategies to reduce teacher stress.

## 2. Central Focus

### 2.1 Definition of Teacher Stress

Stress is simply defined as the tension or pressure exerted on a person or individual, which is also a state or emotional strain or mental tension resulting from demanding or adverse circumstances the individual experiences. From the biological perspective, Fink (2016) noted that stress is the bodily reaction to changes which demand adjustment or responses, where these reactions entail changes in mental, physical, and emotional responses<sup>[10]</sup>. The bodily reactions to stress or inability to adjust to responses can arise from the environment, the thoughts and body of the individual. Psychologists associate stress with increased anxiety, mental anguish, and physical strain as noted by Cotton (1990)<sup>[6]</sup>. Sager and Wilson (1995) de-

defined stress as the physiological, emotional, and mental response to stimulus or stressor in the environment, which causes a lack of fit between the perceived demands of the stressors and the perceived ability of the individual to cope with the demands <sup>[14]</sup>. Generally based on these definitions, it is evident that stress can be defined as the hypothetical construct consisting of equilibrium between the individual's response to the environmental demands and the actual conditions or factors of the environment, where disequilibrium from actual causes or perceived causes cause stress. The individual's inability to respond effectively to the environmental factors and forces, causes a disequilibrium between their coping response ability and the actual source of stress.

According to Aldwin (2007), stress can be external or internal, where internal stress affects the emotions, psychology, and mental stability of the individual, creating inability for the individual to mentally and emotionally cope with forces <sup>[3]</sup>. The external stress is the actual physical inability for the individual to cope with forces, often evident in physical or bodily tension and strain. Stress can be active or passive, where active stress as defined as 'to stress', where the individual perceives the tension and adjustment problems to external forces, and experiences largely internal stress. Passive stress or 'to be stressed' can entail the external forces and pressure on the individual causing stress pressure, but not necessarily causing internal stress.

## 2.2 Theories and Concepts of Stress

A number of theories exist to explain stress and the symptoms of stress as drawn from the fields of biology and psychology. These include the sympathetic-parasympathetic imbalance or reciprocally inhibitory of stress. This theory is noted by Won and Kim (2016) to explain how stress affects the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), by directing rapid involuntary responses to stressful or dangerous situations, causing flash of hormones and blood in the body's system, increasing heart rate and alertness, and sending more blood to the body's muscles <sup>[16]</sup>. The theory postulates that when the body and the individual experience tense situations or forces, their perception of the lack of imbalance between their stressors and their ability to respond can cause physical reactions in the nervous system, rapid blood and hormonal flow, alertness and increased heart rate, creating the flight stress response. This means that individuals tend to depict the flight response to stressors when they have too much sympathetic arousal. Secondly, under this theory, Sonnentag et al. (2009) noted that the individual may experience not enough parasympathetic activation, where they tend to

rest or relax, repair their body with normal cellular maintenance, as the heart rate remains normal, blood flow and hormones remain normal <sup>[15]</sup>.

This is unlike the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) response, where the individual under the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) experiences calming and relaxation feeling in the body and mind. This theory is critical for explaining stress for it explores both dimensions of stress response, explaining why some individuals tend to flight under stress while others remain calm and indifferent under stress. Secondly, the theory is noted by Hellhammer and Hellhammer (2008) as useful in explaining the causes and effects of stress, because it explores automatic mental and bodily responses to responses <sup>[11]</sup>. The theory is application in occupational and workplace wellbeing as it is used to explain the physical response of workers to worker stress, and hence makes it ideal in explaining teacher stress. The second concept critical in understanding stress, stress sources, and impact of stress on teachers is the chronic exposure to stress concept, which identifies stress appraisal on thought patterns of the teacher, decreased stress activation threshold where not much is required to activate stress response in an individual as noted by Field et al. (2013) <sup>[9]</sup>.

## 2.3 Factors Impacting Teacher Stress

According Ferguson (2019), teacher stress levels in the UK school system are very high, indicated by Charity's teacher wellbeing index, which shows that in the last three years, teacher stress levels among primary and secondary school teachers and leaders has been very high compared to other years <sup>[8]</sup>. The research study reported that nearly three-quarters of teachers in the UK and 84% of the school leaders described themselves as being stressed, with more than a third of the professionals in the education sector have reported mental health issues in 2018-2019 academic year (Ferguson 2019) <sup>[8]</sup>. One of the reported causes of stress for these teachers and education professionals is noted as the workplace environment, with 49% of the teachers and school leaders noting that the greater source of mental wellbeing and stress being the school environment. Ferguson (2019) reported that in the UK, school professionals no longer feel trusted as professionals by the society, students, and parents creating mistrust in their capability and hence placing undue stress on their work performance <sup>[8]</sup>.

More than half of the teachers surveyed in the report reported that the main source of teacher stress is the huge workload entailing the creation of teaching and learning materials, the curriculum, tests, and projects for each term and year, assessment, lesson plans, making individual

follow-up for each learner, discipline and class management among other school duties as reported by Ferguson (2019) <sup>[8]</sup>. This source of stress is closely followed by the feeling of not feeling being valued enough by the society, the government, parents, and students, noted by the many negative comments towards the teaching profession, the poor pay and remuneration, the constant monitoring and control by over domineering parents. Moreover, overwork has been normalised in the education system, placing immense pressure on teachers to carry out their education duties, teacher roles, as well as realise high performance in their students and classes each academic year. The academic and educational sector has become harsh towards teacher accountability, creating a state of distress among teachers, burn-out as they attempt to meet the huge performance demands, and for school leaders the challenge arises from the demands for effective management of limited school resources or running a school on limited state funds.

As psychologist Cotton (1990) noted, stress is associated with increased anxiety, mental anguish, and physical strain <sup>[6]</sup>. This is evident in the statistics and data presented by the teachers across the UK from the teacher wellbeing index, which shows that teacher stress has been on the increase in the past three years, with teachers reporting more mental and physical strain and anguish, and anxiety in the school environment. Moreover, as psychologist Wilson (1995) noted, stress is reported and noted in the emotional, physiological, and mental responses to stressors or factors causing stress in the environment, where the individual is unable to respond positively to these stressors or cope with the demands of the stressors. The reported data shows that many teachers experiencing stress in the education and school environment in the UK, find it a challenge to cope with the demands of this environment, especially when they feel unfairly treated and undervalued by the parents, society, students, and the education ministry as reported by Ferguson (2019). Moreover, the demands of teaching are another factor reported by the teachers and noted by psychologists as sources of stress <sup>[8]</sup>. Undue demand on the mental, emotional, and physical being of the teacher has been linked to teacher stress. In the statistical data presented by teacher wellbeing index, Ferguson (2019) noted that more than a half of the UK teachers surveyed reported feeling overworked and burdened, creating immense pressure for the teachers <sup>[8]</sup>. These reported factors causing teacher stress align with the definition of stress provided by Aldwin (2007), that stress is internal and external, with internal stress entailing the emotional and emotional tension, while external as the physical tension <sup>[3]</sup>. The teachers in the UK experience

external and internal factors creating undue stress, owing to their inability to cope with the demands of teaching and the school environment, they experience mental and emotional tension from their inability to effectively respond to the tense forces from the teaching environment. The teachers experience physical tensions from high work load, overworking, lack of recognition and respect in their profession, ability to manage limited resources and manage the school environment among other forces. Therefore, the undue internal tension from perception of their inability to cope with these demands causes internal stress.

Secondly, applying the Sympathetic-parasympathetic imbalance or reciprocally inhibitory of stress theory can explain the factors causing teacher stress. The theory identifies that stress affects the (SNS) sympathetic nervous system Won and Kim (2016), where external tensions cause internal stress responses, entailing rapid involuntary response of the respiratory and circulatory systems, increasing heart rate, alertness, hormones, and blood flow, as well as adrenaline causing the sense of flight <sup>[16]</sup>. It is for this reason, the factors causing stress, like overwork, underpayment, lack of recognition and lack of feeling trusted, cause many teacher's stress response to be flight. The mental and physical reaction by the body of many of the teachers is to flee from the school and education environment causing stress, hence many are reported to resign or take breaks from teaching. Busby (2019) noted that some of the reasons driving many teachers to stress in the UK are driving them to resign and take breaks, with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) reporting that teachers are more likely to leave the teaching profession than other professionals <sup>[5]</sup>. The NFER (2019) also reported that one in five teachers are more tense over their job most of the time compared to 13% in other occupations. Busby (2019) reported that two out of five or 41% of the teachers reported being dissatisfied with the leisure time given as compared to 32% of individuals in similar professions <sup>[5]</sup>. The study found that despite the working hours for teachers being the same with other professions in the UK in one year, teachers work more intensively over few weeks of the same year causing poor work-life balance and high levels of stress as reported by Busby (2019) <sup>[5]</sup>. This implies that despite teachers having long breaks from work during the summer holidays and other school holidays, the few weeks of the school term they are at work, they over-work, work more intensively on completing the curriculum, setting and marking assessments, assessing and following up on the learning progress of each student and potentially students with learning disabilities, dealing with parents and guardians, maintaining

discipline in the school environment, and maintaining their teaching professional standards among other duties and responsibilities.

Therefore, according to the theory of stress affecting the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and causing stress flight response, this explains why Busby (2019) reported that many teachers in the UK are leaving the profession as quickly as they join the profession. Busby (2019) noted the high workloads, the testing culture of teacher's performance based on student's performance, the endless accountability for each of their actions in the school environment, underfunded and flat pay deals each year, are the main reasons why teachers in the UK are displaying the flight response to stressors and stress <sup>[4]</sup>. Education Support (2019) noted that more than three-quarters or 76% surveyed reported work-related psychological, physical, and behavioural symptoms, with more than half or 57% of the teacher surveyed reporting considering leaving the profession owing to poor health, and 47% reported experiencing anxiety, depression, and panic attacks owing to work. The most hit are senior teachers, with 80% reporting suffering from work-related stress, 63% considering leaving the profession, and 40% suffering from depression symptoms. These present the stress on parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) responses of indifference and calm or relaxation in the profession. Other physical responses noted by the Education Support (2019) survey concerning teacher stress and in correspondence to the SNS theory include 41-56% of the teachers reporting insomnia, 37-51% reporting mood swings or irritability, 31-44% reporting tearfulness, 27-41% reporting forgetfulness, and 27-40% reporting difficulty concentrating.

At the same time, the Sympathetic-Parasympathetic imbalance or reciprocally inhibitory of stress identifies the effects of stress on parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), which result to experiences calming and relaxation feeling in the body and mind as reported by Jänig (2008) <sup>[12]</sup>. This theory is used to explain why some individuals while experiencing stress may remain calm and relaxed, either by their ability to balance their perception of the stress and their responses to the stressors or from their ability to remove their emotions and mental perceptions of the stressors, being indifferent and distancing themselves from the stress. Busby (2019) noted that despite the challenges in recruiting sufficient numbers of teachers, there still are individuals interested in the teaching profession with its stressors, while others remain working in the field of education despite its working conditions to retirement <sup>[5]</sup>.

A second concept used to explain chronic exposure to stress is stress appraisal, where the individual appraises stress impacting their thought patterns. According to

Adams and Sutker (2002), an individual may perceive a stressor as very stressful on their being, creating stressful thought and mental patterns <sup>[2]</sup>. In the case of the primary and secondary school teachers in the UK surveyed by NFER (2019) one such act of stress appraisal is the perception that the teacher is not recognised, trusted, and valued. The consequence of this is mental anguish and stress for many teachers perceiving this. Additionally, the decreased stress activation threshold, holds that individuals easily stress from small stressors, an indication of underlying and existing stress. In the surveys, it was noted that owing to the unfavourable working conditions, many teachers were not only stressed but equally experienced insomnia, anxiety, depression, and high emotions to various forces including mistrust from the public towards the profession and work overload (Busby 2019) <sup>[4]</sup>. Cullen et al. (2012) equally noted that chronic stress impacts on the mind and memory, causing memory problems, insomnia, among other mental issues <sup>[7]</sup>. In the survey of the primary and secondary school teachers, it was noted that stressors caused internal stress that affected teachers, causing insomnia, forgetfulness, depression, anxiety, tearfulness, mood swings among other emotional effects.

## 2.4 Mitigating Teacher Stress

A number of proposals have been made towards mitigating teacher stress, which include the improvement of the working conditions of teachers. Busby (2019) noted that the greatest factor for reducing teacher stress and attrition entails improving working conditions including improving recruitment and retention rates for teachers to reduce workload on teachers, providing better work-life balance for teachers by reducing workload and enabling teachers enjoy both work and personal life benefits <sup>[4]</sup>. Additionally, the report by NEFR (2019) noted that by improving recruitment and simplifying the application process for teachers, it is possible for the ministry of education to reduce the workload on teachers as the teacher-student ratio will improve. Another solution suggested is the reduction in the workload for teachers in order to prevent teachers from quitting the profession. Moreover, the NEFR (2019) report noted that nurturing, valuing, and supporting teachers by the government, ministry, society, and administration is important in order to make the teaching professional rewarding, motivating, and attractive as a career choice.

Further, Education Support (2019) noted at the end of the survey that some of the recommendations made to mitigate teacher stress include the mandatory provision of mental health and wellbeing guidance for all teachers during teacher training programs, the prioritisation of the



wellbeing of the teaching staff in assessment frameworks, mandatory annual staff surveys, increase creation of signposting, knowledge, and awareness of the existing services to teachers to improve their working conditions<sup>[1]</sup>. The creation and access of employee assistance programmes and facilitated peer support programmes for all teachers to create a supporting working environment. These are to deal with teacher stress like disengagement, disruption of relationships between the teacher and students, improve job satisfaction among teachers, motivate teachers, provide effective and inclusive leadership in schools.

According to Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2016), one of the measures to deal with the mental and emotional effects of teacher stress include mindfulness and stress management programs, meant to train and assist teachers learn how to cope with stress and stressors, manage effects of stress like sense of flight, indifference and disengagement, feeling depressed and de-motivated to work and desire to leave the teaching profession<sup>[13]</sup>. Secondly, he recommends that teachers should be engaged in mentoring programs, especially for new teachers and recruits, that pair up new teachers to more experienced teachers, experiencing mentoring and coaching facilities in the real classroom situation, enabling teachers to learn how to deal with stressors and cope with stress at work. Mentoring programs are ideal in dealing with teacher stress for they equally provide the teacher a ground for sharing with fellow teachers, sharing their experiences with various stressful situations and events, stressors, and stress factors, internal and external. Thereby, mentorship programs provide the teachers an opportunity to share internal and external stressful situations, finding solutions, empathy, and motivation to work despite stressors from other teachers. This can be supported by workplace wellness programs including a cafe and restaurant for teachers, gym and wellness centre, in-house counsellor and psychologists, social programs and team building programs, all designed to create a social environment in which the teacher discusses, shares, interacts, and socialises with other teachers. Wellness programs effectively deal with mental health of the teachers in the workplace, they improve their motivation and engagement to work, ability to deal with stress, and as Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2016) noted they reduce the medical cost associated with teacher stress, depression, and absenteeism<sup>[13]</sup>. Therefore, it is essential for schools and the education ministry to consider workplace wellness programs for schools and school districts, to handle the emotional, psychological, and mental stresses teachers experience in their profession. To deal with stressors like lack of recognition, appreciation, and trust by parents, students, and society towards teachers, which

causes stress, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2016) recommends the creation of social and emotional learning programs for students<sup>[13]</sup>. These products train students on social and emotional behaviour, exhibiting appropriate classroom behaviour, responses to academic stress, and appreciation of the teacher, which equally causes parents and the society to appreciate the teacher. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2016) noted that in the UK, schools do not provide such important programs, hence measures to reduce teacher stress should start with the school administration, school district, government and ministry of education to create policies and procedures for mitigating teacher stress<sup>[13]</sup>.

### 3. Conclusions

The essay explored and discussed the factors that impact or affect teacher stress, exploring the theories and concepts associated with teacher stress and mitigation practices for teacher stress in the United Kingdom school system- from primary and secondary school. It was revealed that teacher stress arises from lack of trust and recognition of the profession and their duties, poor working conditions, especially work overload in the few weeks schools are in session, poor pay and remuneration, poor work-life balance. These stressors cause internal and external stress, which have adverse effects from depression, insomnia, anxiety and panic attacks, sense of flight leading to teachers resigning and leaving the profession, absenteeism or taking frequent breaks, mood swings, and other emotional reactions. It is recommended that schools and the government create mentorship programs, wellness programs, social and emotional learning programs for students, improve work conditions, and improve recruitment and retention practices.

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# Inclusive Methods in Art Classroom for Students with Autism in China

**Shiyun Liu \***

Boston University, Boston, 02215, U.S.

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## ABSTRACT

Cultivating professional knowledge and developing specific inclusive training has always been important for educators in China. Within the context of special art education in China, art educators are supposed to adjust the instruction effectively for students with a variety of disabilities. This qualitative study sought to gain insight of the strategies of modifying and adapting art instruction for children with autism. Data were collected and analyzed by comparative method through interviews with three art educators. During the interview, three participants addressed strategies they use when working with autistic students in art classroom and proved the ways to modify and adapt art instruction to enhance autistic children's pedagogical skills. Art teachers can also identify students' preferred art materials to engage autistic students in learning art. Beyond helping my educational practice, this study could further serve as an impetus to assist other educators in China thus expand teachers' professional knowledge in teaching children with special needs.

## 1. Introduction

### Background to the Problem

As an art educator in elementary school in China, the author has worked with many children with special needs before, however, school is hard for some of them. The author had an autistic student in my art class, whose classmates had a lot of misunderstandings of him. His peers used offensive labels like "idiot" and "moron" due to his movement delay reaction and impaired social reaction. His mother worried about him and she asked me through tears to pay more attention to him as art class was his favorite class. Kraft (2006) indicated that teaching kids with special needs should combine efforts of the art educator, special educator, and parents<sup>[19]</sup>. To improve the situation, The author tried many ways to rearrange the learning environment to help the student with autism to create and appreciate the art as well as develop other skills.

On the one side, art lessons enable students with special needs to strengthen their comprehensive ability and communication skills. Wexler (2016) pointed out the connections between special and visual arts education and advised on the necessity of critical disability studies to assure the inclusion of the disabled students' leaning and living experience<sup>[35]</sup>. Furthermore, Kellman (1999) indicated that each part of autistic kids' drawing appears to have unique approach to detail in color, line quality, space, and similar type of form. On the other side, art teachers should focus on students with special needs and ask more specific questions to guide their thinking and responses throughout the representation and demonstration in class<sup>[16,17]</sup>. As Klin (2012) stated, by helping children with autism learn and appreciate artwork, art educators can assist them to understand socio-cultural events happening around them<sup>[18]</sup>. Even though having more in-service teacher training and support from the government is effective to an inclu-

*\*Corresponding Author:*

Shiyun Liu,

Boston University, Boston, 02215, U.S.;

Email: [sherriliuart@gmail.com](mailto:sherriliuart@gmail.com)

sive art teaching, cultivating professional knowledge and developing specific inclusive training of how to support special students' learning is what we need more focus on in China.

The author has reached out to colleagues, students' parents, and searched literature for related information, resources, and services with autistic children. Because collaborative approaches and activities are limited due to the work schedule and insufficient preservice preparation and experience, gaining more information is necessary for art teachers to get a comprehensive understanding of working with children with special needs. Reflecting on my formal training and professional opportunities working with special needs students specifically with autistic kids, the author attests that it is necessary for art educators to gain more skills about their developmental needs.

### Problem Statement

Within the context of the integration of art and special education in China, Chinese art teachers are supposed to adjust the instruction effectively for students from different cultural backgrounds and a wide range of disabilities. According to Shieh, Chou, & Ersozlu (2018), in many schools in China, there are different syllabuses and curricula designed for kids with special needs that allow students to maximize their potential development in a flexible and humanized environment<sup>[31]</sup>. Existing literature also offers the insights into the lives of autistic children. Furniss (2008) indicated how art is an essential part of autistic kid's expression and addressed that pre-service art teachers are requested to know more about effective intervention techniques to teach autistic kids<sup>[9]</sup>.

In the literature, there are common views of discussion such as the definition of special education (Lauritsen, 2013; Lord, Elsabbagh, Baird, & Veenstra-Vanderweele, 2018; Furniss, 2008), the current status of autistic children (Clark & Zhou, 2005; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012; Alter-Muri, 2017; Andrus, 2006; Derby, 2012; Shore, 2003), the challenges teachers face (Bain & Hasio, 2011; Wexler, 2016; Derby, 2012; Kellman, 1999; Alter-Muri, 2017; Klin, 2012), and the suggestions in terms of teaching autistic kids in art (Bain & Hasio, 2011; Shore, 2003; Blackman, 2005; Sun & Shek, 2012; Klin, 2012; Furniss, 2008; Andrus, 2006; Kraft, 2006). Another common literature discussion focuses on contemporary issue is social inequality within the art classroom (Furniss, 2008; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012; Alter-Muri, 2017; Clark & Zhou, 2005; Derby, 2012; Wexler & Luethi-Garrecht, 2015). Most of the articles focus on sensory, verbal and physical characteristics that result in confusion and frustration in inclusion art classroom, however, the literature leaves

out the autistic kids learning environment specifically in mainland China.

Even more challenging, the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China requires all children to enroll in school for nine years of compulsory education starting at age of six, including kids with disabilities. It provides comprehensive guidelines and establishes the requirements for teachers and parents in attaining general education for kids with special needs (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China)<sup>[25]</sup>. However, there is no national agreement on guiding the implementation of services for students with special needs (Zhang & Spencer, 2015)<sup>[36]</sup>. The method of attending general schools does not meet the needs of all autistic students, and they are more possibility to be refused by general schools because they can only access to special education service in special schools (Huang, Jia & Wheeler, 2013)<sup>[15]</sup>.

Thus, the purpose of the study was to identify ways that art teachers enhance their knowledge and skills in creating adaptations for autistic students.

### Research Questions

The research was driven by the following questions:

- What strategies can art teachers use to enhance their pedagogical skills and problem-solving skills when working with autistic students in art classroom?
- How do educators working in schools for children with special needs in China modify and adapt art instruction for children with autism?
- What implications does the study hold for Chinese elementary school art educators working with autistic kids?

### Assumptions

I had some assumptions going into the study. First, the author assumed that children with autism have frustration and confusion due to the lack of verbal and physical abilities in inclusion art rooms. Second, children with autism may have different visual memory and show attention deficits from typical individuals. Third, the author assumed that all children with autism need additional help and supervision in art class and their productivity is different from other students. Lastly, teaching autistic students in an art classroom should combine efforts of the art educator, special educator, and parents, and The author assumed that there were methods and ways to create adaptations to meet the needs of all autistic children.

### Theoretical Framework

The study used the characteristics and frames inherent

in the theory of Multiple Intelligences. Howard Gardner (1991) defines intelligence as problem-solving ability and states that children are able to learn in different ways through different methodologies and activities, however, the ways to choose appropriate methods are based on teacher's criteria and critical inquiry (p. 6) <sup>[13]</sup>. Gardner (1983) also proposed that "intelligence should be defined widely, and there is no universally accepted list of human intelligences" (p. 60). Yet in his research, he identified eight multiple intelligences: interpersonal, intrapersonal, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, and naturalist (Gardner, 1983) <sup>[12]</sup>.

Each intelligence can be expressed in various ways. Spatial intelligence is often associated with visual thinking strengths in autistic children which is described as the ability of being sensitive to color, line, shape, and space. People with spatial intelligence tend to have ability to perceive the visual spatial world accurately. Spatial intelligence is related to visualization, imagination, and art perception. Thus, art educators should encourage children who have strong spatial intelligence and strengthen them in this area. Klin (2012) stated that by helping children with autism learn and appreciate artwork, art educators can assist them in understanding socio-cultural events happening around <sup>[18]</sup>.

Interpersonal intelligence addresses individual's social perception, social effectiveness, and interpersonal understanding. Children who exhibit interpersonal intelligence are less egocentric and more sensitive to their peers, and they gradually start to react to the feelings of others and learn how to adapt to other people's behavior, thus, their social sensitivity increases enormously during that period (Gardner, 1983) <sup>[12]</sup>. However, for children with autism, social communication deficits result in learning disabilities including language delay and difficulties in maintaining conversations with peers in the class. Art teachers can help them to improve the behavior and social skills (Clark & Zhou, 2005) <sup>[7]</sup>. More importantly, Gardner's (1983) key point is: "intelligence can be taught, learned, developed and enhanced" (p. 246) <sup>[12]</sup>.

Schools and educators can collect optimal resources intentionally to serve every student with distinct cultural background and personal learning style (Gardner, 1991). Even though it is challenging to carry out individualization in a classroom, the learner-centered curriculum is more willingly attained by students. Gardner (1991) addressed integrated curriculum which relates to the implementation of the curriculum. It represents the educational idea that accords with the cognitive characteristic of children to meet their needs of getting the sense of the world and integrating their own intelligences. All in all,

educators should take active methods of teaching and create relatively informal and comfortable atmosphere in the classroom (p.83) <sup>[13]</sup>.

## Significance of the Study

Conducting this study served as an impetus for my practice as an art educator by expanding my professional knowledge and developing specific inclusive training in teaching children with special needs, especially children with autism. By knowing the strategies for art teachers to use to enhance pedagogical skills and problem-solving skills of autistic students, art teachers could become aware of the methods of adjusting the learning environment and instructional activities for autistic students. At the time of the study, there were more than 80% students with learning disabilities taking regular education classroom in Hunan, China. Art teachers could help them with not only the pedagogical skills but also the behavior and social skills.

Beyond helping my practice and experience as an art teacher, this study could further assist other educators in China. According to many of my colleagues who are new to working with children with special needs, there are various challenges and difficulties. As a result of the study, preservice art teachers should gain more information and get a better understanding about working with autistic children.

## Limitations of the Study

Since the study was conducted at a time that in person instruction was suspended due to the corona virus (COVID-19), the author was not able to observe teachers working with autistic kids. Furthermore, due to the limited time, the number of teachers that the author could interview was very limited. Last but not least, the research was based in China, and the author interviewed in Mandarin Chinese, so the translation might have influenced the meaning of interview data.

## Summary

In this chapter, the author introduced the personal context for the reason why the study served as an impetus for my practice and how it expanded my professional knowledge in teaching children with special needs. It was my opinion that art teachers can create adaptation for autistic students through different methods. Further, The author contented that Chinese art educators are supposed to adjust the instruction effectively for students from different cultural backgrounds and even with special needs. This qualitative study gained insight into the challenges that art



educators are now facing in teaching children with autism and provide a comprehensive background and strategies for them to improve how kids with autism are taught in today's art classroom in China. The next chapter focuses on the literature of strategies art teachers use and the challenges art educators face to enhance knowledge and skills of children with special needs in art classroom.

### Definition of Terms

**Autism.** According to Lauritsen (2013), Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a neurodevelopmental disorder with symptoms either be diagnosed in early childhood or later <sup>[21]</sup>.

**Inclusion.** According to Wexler (2016), the term inclusion describes children with identified disabilities, spending their school days in general education classrooms with nondisabled peer students <sup>[35]</sup>.

**Relational aesthetics.** According to Bain & Hasio (2011), relational aesthetics and participatory art both influence art education in children with autism. Relational aesthetics is defined as the tendency to create art depending on social context and human interaction <sup>[5]</sup>.

**Special needs.** According to Armstrong (2003), it describes various difficulties or impairments with clinical diagnostic for individual requiring specialized services <sup>[4]</sup>.

## 2. Literature Review

### Introduction

This qualitative study explored the strategies art teachers use to enhance different skills of children with special needs in art classroom. Specifically, this study explored the challenges art educators face and identify ways that art teachers can enhance their knowledge and skills in creating adaptation for autistic students within elementary school curriculum in China.

There are five themes investigated through the literature and they provided the context for the study. First, a context of the definition of autism spectrum disorders is provided (Lauritsen, 2013; Lord, Elsabbagh, Baird & Veenstra-Vanderweele, 2018; Furniss, 2008; Huang, Jia & Wheeler, 2013; Clark & Zhou, 2005). Second theme further examines how autism influences children's learning in regards to their social communication deficits, emotional issues, and neurological differences (Furniss, 2008; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012; Alter-Muri, 2017; Clark & Zhou, 2005; Derby, 2012; Wexler & Luethi-Garrecht, 2015). Third, the importance of art to autistic children is investigated. Given the connections between art and children with autism, art emerging as an important aspect is applied to children with special needs and the ways art

educators can work with children with autism is examined in this theme (Bain & Hasio, 2011; Wexler, 2016; Furniss, 2008; Kellman, 1999; Golomb & Schmeling, 1996; Derby, 2012; Klin, 2012). In the fourth theme, physical settings of art classroom for children with autism are discussed. This theme also describes the methods for art teachers to create an effective and positive learning environment (Wexler & Luethi-Garrecht, 2015; Bain & Hasio, 2011; Sun & Shek, 2012). Lastly, the strategies of art teachers working with autistic children is addressed. Art teachers could ask more specific questions to guide children with autism to appreciate art (Klin, 2012; Furniss, 2008; Kraft, 2006).

### Definition of Autism Spectrum Disorders

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a neurodevelopmental disorder with symptoms ranging from mild to severe, which is either diagnosed in early childhood or later in childhood (Lauritsen, 2013) <sup>[21]</sup>. The main features of autism spectrum disorder are shown by social communication deficits and unusual sensory (Lord, Elsabbagh, Baird, & Veenstra-Vanderweele, 2018) <sup>[23,32]</sup>. Specifically, autism is one of autism spectrum disorders, which is described as a pervasive developmental disorder.

The criteria for diagnosis of autism most often include the impairments in interpersonal skills and communication skills (Furniss, 2008) <sup>[9]</sup>. Autism spectrum disorder diagnosis assessment includes developmental history of children, detailed interview with parents, various findings through clinical observations and complicated presentations. Commonly, ASD diagnosis takes approximately 12 months for children after their parents raised concerns for the first time (Moh & Magiati, 2012) <sup>[27]</sup>.

As far as the diagnosis process of ASD in China, it most often includes three steps. First, professional interviews of a parent are conducted to get detailed symptoms and developmental history of the child. Second, a structured observation is conducted by a doctor to assess child's cognitive abilities, motor skills, communication development, and so on. What's more, instruments including Child Autism Rating Scale have been widely used over the years. Third, aimed at making an official diagnosis, the doctor uses specific "diagnostic criteria" according to the result of observation (Huang, Jia & Wheeler, 2013) <sup>[15]</sup>.

In regard to the treatment of ASD, applied behavior analysis (ABA) combined with behavioral intervention with sensory integration strategies is used as the most effective treatment for autistic children. However, the application of behavior analysis is not a familiar practice in China (Clark & Zhou, 2005). These authors also discussed the use of traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture



(Chinese method of treating pain) to treat autistic behavior and also noted that western medicines are also used to improve autistic children's hyperactive behavior and their psychiatric and emotional symptoms (pp. 285-295) <sup>[7]</sup>.

### How Autism Influences Children's Learning

Symptoms and impairments caused by autism influence children's learning. First, social communication deficits result in learning disabilities including language delay and difficulties in maintaining conversations with peers in the class. In addition, social deficits also reflect via facial expressions or body language among children with autism.

Furthermore, it can be challenging for autistic children to identify emotions in themselves and others. These impairments result in failing attending group work and general presentation in the class (Clark & Zhou, 2005) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Second, children with autism show attention deficit due to the neurological differences, which could be a challenge for art teachers to obtain attention from students with autism in art activities (Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012) <sup>[20]</sup>. More specifically, kids with autism need some instructions on pretend play. Autistic children are not only strongly interested in particular objects or activities, but also have a strong preference in routine and sensory challenges (Alter-Muri, 2017) <sup>[1]</sup>. When they are not interested in activities, they tend to be distracted, lack concentration, and might appear absent-minded in class. Thus, this performance results in slow learning process and inefficient learning performance.

Third, children with autism may act apathetically and irritably due to emotional issues among them. These emotional issues are often shown as feelings of aloneness as well as the anxiety and fear. Consequently, art educators should be sensitive to students' emotional alterations and then unconsciously reveal their understandings without deviating from their prepared instructive objectives. Art teachers are also suggested to have clear concise directions and reasonable expectations and art activities to draw autistic children's interests and address their concerns (Derby, 2012) <sup>[8]</sup>. In this teaching framework, students with special needs can both vent their negative emotions and achieve academic performances. Otherwise, the passive emotion negatively impacts students with autism especially on their enthusiasm towards study.

Lastly, children with autism tend to have trouble with sensory stimulation. Things like humming of the fluorescent lights can be intrusive for them (Shore, 2003) <sup>[29]</sup>. It also can be a barrier for them to study in a general classroom setting. In a word, autism reduces children's focus, preferences on learning materials, motivation, and positive learning attitudes.

### The Importance of Art to Autistic Children

This theme explores how art serves as an important part for children with autism.

Autistic kids are strong in visual learning and processing focused on their particular interests (Kellman, 1999) <sup>[16]</sup>. They tend to present their thoughts and communicate visually and reduce their deficits through their strength of visual processing (Ganz, 2007). Alter-Muri (2017) also noted that autistic kids have strengths in visual thinking and processing with unique style of art perception <sup>[1]</sup>. However, autistic children require more instruction and guidance on the symbolic meaning of visual images <sup>[11]</sup>.

Bain & Hasio (2011) stated, the tendency of creating art depended on human interaction and social context which was also known as relational aesthetics. Participatory art might not change every autistic child's preference, but it is probably the most unique form of modern expression without using any modern technologies at that time. It is an exciting and novel artistic direction, especially in the period of helping children with autism to express their feelings <sup>[5]</sup>. What is more, the visual arts narrative provides autistic children an alternate way to tell their own personal stories. Thus, art teachers could use interventionist strategies to invite dialogue with them (Wexler, 2016) <sup>[35]</sup>.

According to Furniss (2008), students with autism may have different visual memory from typical individuals. Each part of autistic kids' drawing appears to be with its own approach to detail in color, line quality, space, and type of form. Art teachers are able to make connections between their artworks and performances <sup>[10]</sup>. In this way, art activities which are the mirrors of the students' creative processes could develop a reliable relationship between teachers and students with autism. Consequently, art emerging as an important aspect, cannot only be applied in the general population, but can be also used to satisfy individuals with special needs. Furthermore, art can be considered as a practice that allows people with all special needs to express their identifies, feelings, and communicate their desires. In-service and pre-service art teachers need to learn efficient intervention techniques to teach autistic children in the art room (Kellman, 1999) <sup>[16]</sup>.

Specifically, in article by Golomb and Schmeling (1996), the authors stated that many autistic individuals exhibit extraordinary performances on block designs, puzzles, and other pattern recognitions <sup>[14]</sup>. Lee and Hobson (2006) noted that autistic kids are able to create artwork of distinguishable houses but tend to draw similar pictures of humans <sup>[22]</sup>, while Derby (2012) stated that children with autism tend to draw similar things repeatedly especially

floating objects and fragmented body parts<sup>[8]</sup>. Hence, art educators should take a sole responsibility of appreciating and acknowledging the artistic abilities of kids with autism.

Alter-Muri (2017) examined several behaviors and symptoms of autistic kids from psychological and developmental perspective. She noted that the process of creating art was more crucial than the artwork. That means it is necessary for art teachers to recognize the need of children with autism to help them learn and appreciate art. For many art educators, they work as the leaders to help students in art classroom. The challenge of leadership requires the understanding and appreciation of the individual and culture diversities, especially for students with special needs<sup>[1]</sup>. In a word, the artistic education greatly helps autistic children to improve their psychological attention and comfort of emotional imbalances. By helping children with autism learn and appreciate artwork, art educators can assist them to understand socio-cultural events happening around (Klin, 2012)<sup>[18]</sup>.

### Physical Arrangement of Art Room for Children with Autism

Optimal learning experiences are important for diverse thinkers' learning experiences, especially for children with special needs. However, there are social inequality problems within the education system, particularly in the setting of an art classroom. According to Bain and Hasio (2011), "the physical arrangement of the art room can be an obstruction to collaboration, independence, empathy, and dialogue"<sup>[5]</sup>. Within this context, Wexler and Luethi-Garrecht (2015) explored effective solutions to offset inequalities within the art classroom which was meant to be inclusive but remains to be exclusive, inaccessible, and uninviting for children with autism<sup>[34]</sup>.

Wexler and Luethi-Garrecht (2015) noted that display, auditory and media presentations are issues that directly affect autistic children, so the art room setting should be flexible and satisfy students' diverse physical and cognitive needs<sup>[34]</sup>. Ganz (2007) emphasized that the physical classroom setting should be flexible for specific learning tasks. He mentioned some elements in the classroom can promote students' attention to task and prevent distractions, such as "clearing desks and tables of unnecessary materials, and covering windows" (p.252)<sup>[11]</sup>. Wexler and Luethi-Garrecht (2015) also pointed out that the arrangement of tables can be changed depending on instructors' needs. It can be formed in a U shape which opens in the front or settled in rows. Further, ergonomically designed chairs with height adjustment and the ability of swiveling and rolling are conducive to children with autism. It

makes the children's natural body movement more kinetic and enhances their concentration in class. In addition, the art room should be dark enough for Smartboard presentations to be seen clearly<sup>[34]</sup>. According to Shore (2003), as children with autism tend to have more sensory integration problems than not autistic ones, the natural illumination from outdoors is the comfortable and healthy lighting for autistic kids since the humming of the fluorescent lights can be intrusive for them<sup>[29]</sup>.

Moreover, the size and the dimension of the art room interrelate with how students receive information in class. Whether art teachers convey the message successfully depends on the room space and teachers' attention on each student. When classroom is large, one-on-one instruction with autistic student is recommended. Independent work areas set for students with autism should be visually secluded from other classmates because working with peers can be distracting for them (Webber, 2002)<sup>[33]</sup>. The set-up of the art room and the location of art teacher are required to work equally well because most of the children with autism cannot attend to hearing and vision at the same time (Blackman, 2005; Shore, 2003)<sup>[6,29]</sup>. Ganz (2007) suggested to provide children with autism more visual cues in class and visual schedules should be done to help them to engage in art classes. It was found that visual schedules can be a useful and valuable tool for autistic individuals to decrease their response latency with visual directions from art teachers<sup>[11]</sup>. Sun and Shek (2012) also mentioned, to build a harmonious environment in art classroom, art teachers can create an effective and positive environment by establishing behavior management and class rules. The rules should be simple and easy to follow, especially for special education students<sup>[30]</sup>.

To avoid distracting from peers, art teachers can also tape boundaries on the floor as a room divider to delineate work areas for autistic children. The classroom should be divided into independent activities area, workshop area, one to one instruction area, group instruction area, and leisure area. Art educators can tape the floor or shelve to clarify areas for children with autism during different tasks (Ganz, 2007)<sup>[11]</sup>. In addition to physical arrangement of the art room, teachers should provide various choices for students including diverse materials and different plans (Sun & Shek, 2012)<sup>[30]</sup>.

### The Strategies of Art Teachers Working with Autistic Children

Derby (2012) demonstrated how the contemporary art classroom had reinforced stigmatization among children with autism, especially how they are unable to learn and appreciate art because of their neurological differences<sup>[9]</sup>.

Nevertheless, other authors like Bain and Hasio (2011) and Furniss (2008) suggested how art teachers could rearrange the learning process with different emphasis to help autistic children to learn and appreciate the art as well as develop skills to assist them in creating art <sup>[5,10]</sup>.

The issue that emerges in the art room is the ability to apply children's consciousness to understand aesthetic values of art. According to Bain and Hasio (2011), children with autism tend to have a highly active intuitive knowledge of the world due to "their greater bodily and sensory ways of knowing" <sup>[5]</sup>. Art teachers should provide more participatory art that social interactions are prompted by the work to make sure children who experience art are physically engaged in it. Their behaviors become manageable through their participation in art. Furniss (2018) noted that "autistic kids do not often generalize images they have seen, but rather can retrieve specific details of an object with great accuracy" <sup>[10]</sup>. Art teachers can inspire and excavate more possibilities of autistic students in this area by conducting various participatory art activities. The limited teaching time of arts education could be enhanced, mixing theoretical ideas with practical works. It can also be achieved by joining diverse art subjects with similar themes that connect them (Nompula, 2013) <sup>[28]</sup>. Thus, it can be concluded that educators should learn different artistic ways to enlighten children with autism.

Andrus (2006) justified the necessity of art experiences in learning, clarified the definitions and distinctions of various forms of teaching with art experiences and provided the principles for teachers to follow. The benefits of effective and efficient communication are including psychological safety and mutual trust. In teaching children with special needs, art educators should provide students problem-solving suggestions by asking some guiding questions like "Could you please tell me...?", or "What will you do next?" to lead students to study step by step. Andrus offered an example taken from actual practice and provided two key concepts drawn from this instance, namely, being empathetic and educational. The therapeutic part requires the teacher to remain empathetic to students' various forms of experiences and emotions, like anger, upset, anxiety, mania, and so forth. As a result, art educators should firstly be sensitive to students' emotional alteration, and then unconsciously reveal their understanding without deviating from their prepared instructive objectives (pp.178-182) <sup>[3]</sup>. In a word, educators should concentrate on autistic children's emotional changes and try to positively change such negative emotions, like anger and anxiety, and always be empathetic to students' various experiences.

Besides, teaching kids with special needs should com-

bine efforts of the special educators, and parents. With their help, art teachers get to know more about the autistic students. In the following, art teachers should focus on students' attention and ask more specific questions to guide their thinking approaches and responses (Kraft, 2006) <sup>[19]</sup>. It can be concluded that the education on autistic children should be based on efforts from professional educators and parents to ensure the practical guidelines.

Parental stress usually caused by their children's developmental problems (Andersson, Miniscalco & Gillberg, 2014) <sup>[2]</sup>. While some autistic children's parents worry about their kids' lack of basic living skills and social skills for leading an independence life in the future, others are aware of some skills and behaviors that children with autism have and can assist them to create art that further helps them in improving social skills (Huang, Jia, & Wheeler, 2013) <sup>[15]</sup>. The partnership between parent and art teacher contributes to autistic kid's learning and they would share information and review autistic kid's representation and study process in the conference.

Either at school or at home, students with autism should have individualized education plan and learning objectives. The curriculum should be appropriate to each individual's ability level and combined with student's special interests to motivate their participation. Then, preparing a copy of the lists of learning tasks for every student, and dating the task when they achieved can be helpful for art teacher to adjust the teaching objectives (Ganz, 2007) <sup>[11]</sup>. Van, Reichle, and Schopler (2003) also noted that teachers should recommend different schedule for each student with autism. Schedules should be individualized depending on students' needs and abilities and designed by using special symbol, color, name-labeling, or students' pictures. In conclusion, the curriculum, learning objectives, and schedule should be easy to follow for every student with autism <sup>[32]</sup>.

## Summary

By understanding more about children with autism, art teachers can help them to improve the pedagogical skills and the behavior and social skills. This chapter explained the core features of autistic kids— social communication deficits, emotional issues, and unusual sensory (Furniss, 2008; Lord, Elsabbagh, Baird & Veenstra-Vanderweele, 2018) and examined how autism influences children's learning.

The importance of art to autistic children was investigated and pointed that art serves as a crucial therapeutic method to children with special needs. The ways art teachers could rearrange the classroom to help children with autism to develop skills and create art were also

addressed. Furthermore, the condition and the physical setting of the classroom and the coordinate of art teachers are required to work equally well to provide children with autism a comfortable and relaxed environment to study (Bain & Hasio, 2011; Furniss, 2008; Klin, 2012; Blackman, 2005; Shore, 2003; Ganz, 2007). Lastly, the ways art teachers could ask more specific questions and provide resources and problem-solving suggestions to guide children with autism was discussed. Art teachers should use different artistic ways to set the curriculum, learning objectives, and schedule that is appropriate to every student with autism individually (Bain & Hasio, 2011; Klin, 2012; Furniss, 2008; Andrus, 2006; Kraft, 2006; Huang, Jia & Wheeler, 2013). The next chapter focuses on the methodology of the study including the design of the study, site and participants' selection, data collection and analysis.

### 3. Methodology

#### Design of the Study

This was a qualitative study which's purpose was to research the methods art teachers use to enhance their pedagogical skills and problem-solving skills of autistic students in an art classroom. Qualitative methodology was best suited for this particular research. According to Miraglia and Smilan (2014), qualitative research is best suited for the study of human behavior. Furthermore, qualitative research is referred to as the interpretative or naturalistic research design<sup>[26]</sup>. This research technique mainly focuses on the collection of data aimed at deriving the underlying meaning and is mainly suited to the study of humans.

In this study, the research question aimed to study the challenges associated with the teaching autistic children, thus the best data collection technique involved interviewing the art teachers in special schools to get their points of view.

#### Site Selection

This study was conducted at Aimier training center in Hunan and Beijing Stars and Rain institute for Autism in Beijing. Both are non-governmental organizations based in China. Aimier training center was founded in 1999 in Hunan province in China. Its mission is to offer various courses and training for children with special needs from toddlers to age fourteen. Children attend courses and activities there on the weekends and on special events like Mid-Autumn Day, Christmas, Spring Festival, and so on. Most of the activities require that parents accompany their children, and the courses mainly focus on art making or outdoor parent-child games and sports meetings.

Beijing Stars and Rain institute for Autism was found-

ed in 1993, and the founder is a mother of an autistic child. The institute aimed at helping children with autism to integrate into society and providing counsel and family training, art training, guidance service and online classes for kids with autism. They have helped over 10,000 autistic children with comprehensive interference blending play therapy and sensory integration therapy implemented with professional teachers. They also help autistic children's parents to analyze information in detail, so as to make proper interventional plan for each kid.

For kids from three to six, Stars and Rain institute provides the training for eleven weeks through individual education plan, applied behavior analysis, and demonstration classes from Monday to Friday. In addition, the institute offers free Applied Behavior Analysis training online for teachers who desire to gain more information about teaching children with autism. **Participants of the Study**

In qualitative studies, the sample size is carefully selected by the researcher and is rather small. The selected three participants were from different organizations teaching art to children with autism, and they were willing to participate in this research.

The first participant, Kiki was working in Aimier training center. She has taught art for eight years after she graduated from a local college in Hunan. Before she joined the institution in 2018, she worked as art teacher in public elementary school. At her previous school, she was teaching grades 1 to 3.

The second participant was the dean of the Aimier training center, Lisa, and she served as art and music teacher there at the time of the study. Lisa loves to take part in social practice activities, and she enjoys baking.

Jing was the third participant, and she was working as a volunteer art teacher in Stars and Rain institute in Beijing. Prior to that, she has completed the bachelor's degree in Brandeis University in 2017, and she had various volunteer working experiences after graduating. Her major was accounting, and her minor was painting. She enjoys art very much.

#### Ethical Considerations

To protect art teachers' privacy, the interviews did not include the imagery record of the participants. Also, the author did not disclose the teacher's names and asked for their consent to conduct the interviews.

#### Data Collection

Data were collected during three separate semi-structured and open-ended individual interviews with the three participants. The author used semi-structured interviews



as they allowed me to ask more open-ended questions and provide a free, comfortable, and dialogue like interview. The questions focused on the strategies art educators working in schools for children with special needs in China use to modify and adapt art instruction for children with autism. Each interview lasted one hour. All the interviews were conducted and recorded online using Zoom and were later transcribed. The first interview with Kiki was conducted online on March 20, 2020. The second interview with Lisa was conducted online on March 21, 2020. The third interview with Jing was conducted online on March 22, 2020.

### **Data Analysis**

After conducting three interviews with art teachers, the author first translated the interviews from Chinese into English and then transcribed them. The constant comparative method was used to analyze data.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Rich, thick description was used in the research to convey the findings. The researcher has checked the transcripts and clarified the bias that she brought to the study.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the author introduced the purpose and the design of the study. Site selection of this study at two non-governmental organizations based in China was described. Further data collection conducted by interviewing three art teachers through separate semi-structured and open-ended questions was elaborated on. To protect the privacy of the art teachers, their names were not disclosed. After the interview, the comparative method was used in data analysis. Validity and reliability were also proved. The findings of the study are introduced in next chapter.

## **4. Results of the Study**

### **Introduction**

This qualitative study explored strategies of enhancing pedagogical skills and problem-solving skills for art educators who work with autistic children in art classroom. The study investigated how the art educators working in schools for children with special needs in China modify and adapt art instruction for children with autism. The constant comparative method was used to analyze data collected through interviews with three educators. This chapter describes bias and validity of the study, the data analysis process, and presents the result of the study.

### **Bias and Validity**

Rich, thick descriptions were used in the research to convey the findings. The author has checked the transcripts and clarified the bias that the author brought to the study. Researcher bias may be present in my experience of teaching art in general education school instead of special education. The author has never been to any special education training school, and the author is not familiar with the curriculum and management there. Without spending any time in special schools, the author presume the condition of curriculum and management based upon the views from the three participants and my working experience in public elementary school. Bias may also exist in three participants that they were selected based on different organizations teaching art to autistic students. There were two art teachers from Aimier training center in Hunan, and one was a former art teacher in Stars and Rain institute in Beijing. They had different working experience, so the teaching philosophy and curriculum may vary depending on the training they had.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), to ensure my validity of the study, I solicited feedback on my preliminary findings from three participants that the author interviewed. After the process of the “member check”, the author asked the participants to comment on my findings regarding their views and experiences. At last, the author asked a colleague who had experience teaching children with autism in general school to scan the data and assess if the findings are reasonable, which served as a thorough peer examination. Thus, several approaches were used to ensure trustworthiness in my study (pp. 246-249) <sup>[24]</sup>.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were collected by separate semi-structured interviews with three art teachers. After conducting three interviews with art teachers, the author analyzed data in Mandarin and then wrote about the findings in English. The author reads the interview transcripts and read through the notes and comments that the author jotted down. Next, to categorize the ideas, the author assigned codes to pieces of data and grouped the comments and notes that shared similar themes such as strategies to engage the autistic learners, modifications, and adaptations, and developing skills through art activities, while focusing on insights that related to my research question. The author comparatively analyzed data within different themes from their strategies of classroom management, teacher training, and parent involvement to lesson scaffolding and activities. Then, the author wrote about what the author have learned from each theme of relevant collection and the phenomenon.



## Results of the Study

The study revealed several strategies to enhance art teachers' pedagogical and problem-solving skills for working with autistic students. There are strategies to engage the autistic learners through art works, the methods of teacher training, and parent involvement. Modification and adaptations are crucial when engaging autistic learners and require lesson scaffolding, curriculum adjustments, and suitable art activities for autistic children. Moreover, the art activities that help develop autistic kids' skills are also discussed in this chapter.

## Strategies to Engage the Autistic Learners

This theme explored the strategies three participants use to engage students in art activities. All three art teachers thought that identifying the preferred art materials is a good strategy to engage the kids with autism. Kiki (personal communication, March 20, 2020) expressed that having autistic students' attention can be the hardest thing and the only solution is to find out their interests. Kids can be interested in sign language, while others are interested in colorful images. She expanded:

There is a kid in my class, his name is J. At the beginning, J couldn't understand any instruction words, and his parents hired many art tutors to teach him at home. Because J ignored those teachers and doodled himself, they quit in the end. The first day when J came here, I found out J was interested in sign language of hearing-impaired children, and he was mimicking them. So, later, the author tried using sign gesture to give my instruction. In the art class of the first day, we sat closely, and the author set a white paper in front of him and one in front of myself. The author drew a circle on my paper, and then pointed the white paper in front of him. Surprisingly, he also drew a circle. The author gave him a smile and thumbs up. J seemed happy with it. Then the author added eyes, nose, and mouth in the circle. This time, J drew the same thing without my instruction. In the next classes, he accepted this learning style. Even though the scale of what he draws is always large, his artwork has his own characteristics. (Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020)

Through the experience of J, Kiki expressed that to get students to participate in art lessons the teacher should use various methods, and it depends on what is the child interested in.

Lisa (personal communication, March 21, 2020) also explained that some kids in her school enjoy watching cartoons and it could be a good way to get them engaged in art making but getting to know and being familiar with autistic children can be a tough process. Lisa suggested

that teachers should get to know autistic kid's favorite snack, toy, or even favorite color as it can be very helpful to motivate a student who is reluctant to art.

Jing (personal communication, March 22, 2020) shared similar thoughts in using autistic kids' interests to engage them in art making. In her former class, different kids enjoyed using different media and art materials, so she used art media to engage her kids. Jing also felt that building the trust between the art teacher and autistic students is the first thing to do.

Three participants discussed the ways to engage the students in art making. They suggest teachers to find out autistic kids' interests and their favorite snacks, toys, and art media to motivate them in art making. Besides, the management of classroom and students' behavior are also conducive to engage them in art making.

## Classroom Management

The participants were asked about the classroom management style and to discuss what to do differently when working with autistic children than working in general art room. Kiki stated, it can be way more difficult for autistic kids to pay attention to teacher's presentation. She explained, I still remember the first day I went to Aimier training center, I was astonished to find a boy's hands "tied up" with scarf to a chair, and the teacher told me he would punch himself or other people if not done so. Teaching autistic kids is never easy. My formal teaching experiences in public schools do help me in setting the class rules, but not in solving all kinds of problems. My classroom management is flexible at the beginning because I know too many requirements and rules can really make autistic kids frustrated, and some kids can be offensive. If you don't want kids to hurt anybody, you shouldn't push them too much. (Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020)

When asked what she is struggled with in classroom management at the beginning of teaching autistic kids, and how to handle it, Kiki made a long pause, plainly overcome by the thought, then she described that not only at the beginning of teaching autistic kids but everyday art teachers in their training center face unexpected challenges. Some aggressive kids physically harm others when they feel insecure, even though it is not their original intention. Some teachers cry with grievance, and they cannot complain about it to autistic children's parents. So, the first thing art teacher should learn is to stabilize students' mood swings. The only solution is teacher's ambition, and it takes time and patience (Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020).

On the contrary, Lisa held a different view that art teachers should treat autistic kids as regular kids. In her

school, every teacher has a personal training room; it's a small room for training and rest. In her class, she set several rules which must be strictly implemented. First, no one can leave the seat without teacher's permission. Even though the window has a guard bar outside, and it is high enough for preventing kids climbing, it still can be dangerous for kids to move freely. Second, kids should be rewarded for good behavior and punished for breaking the rule. It is necessary for them to understand the connection between their behavior and subsequent punishment. Teachers should treat each child equally without any bias and exceptions. When they behave decently, teachers can show their love, but when they misbehave and are annoying, teachers can express negative emotions as well. Third, there is no criticism of ideas, and kids can offer a large number of ideas. Wild and exaggerated ideas are encouraged in art class. Lisa explained, though many inexperienced art teachers thought autistic kids are good at drawing and even have better drawing skills and imagination than non-autistic kids at the beginning, the truth is, most of the autistic kids had no art talents and teachers should encourage their art creation as much as possible (Lisa, personal communication, March 21, 2020).

Lisa has strict classroom management style compared to Kiki's management which is flexible, and she pays close attention to the child's mood. Jing did not comment of her personal experience regarding classroom management since she had less experience working with autistic kids and was not aware of how to conquer struggles that art teachers face. When asked for their thoughts about some changes about their classroom management style in the future, Lisa and Kiki said they don't have anything special to change for now.

### **Teacher Training**

This theme emerged from the discussion of three participants. They expressed that teacher training is needed to assist art teachers in gaining further knowledge about special education. However, because of lacking unified standards, the content and method of special teacher training system are not consistent in China (Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020; Lisa, personal communication, March 21, 2020).

Lisa (personal communication, March 21, 2020) is the dean of Aimier training center in Hunan, and she explained how the teachers are trained in her school. There are two branches of school in Changsha and Yueyang in Hunan province, and each school has about sixty students and six teachers. These teachers have worked here for several years and there are weekly seminars and lectures where teachers learn the latest development and teaching

methods for kids with autism. Kiki (personal communication, March 20, 2020) added that art teachers learn a lot from guest speakers every week. However, when asked further about teacher development opportunities, Lisa (personal communication, March 21, 2020) said that they do not have further teacher development opportunities provided for teachers.

Jing (personal communication, March 22, 2020) as a former art teacher in Beijing Stars and Rain institute, explained teacher training there. They have provided guidance to over 300 institutions though professional teacher training. There are two expert teachers at school who have 24 years working experience in applied behavior analysis (ABA). The teacher training that they provide is about eight weeks long. It includes the understanding of autism spectrum disorder, the diagnostic criteria of autism, the theoretical knowledge of applied behavior analysis, and essential problem-solving skills for special educators. There are also online trainings provided for teachers all over different provinces in China (Jing, personal communication, March 22, 2020).

### **Parent Involvement**

Three participants shared their common views on the importance of communicating with parents of autistic kids. Kiki (personal communication, March 20, 2020) contended that having a conversation with autistic kids' parent at least once a week is necessary but never enough. Parents should be involved and participate in their children's education as much as possible. She also described that in their training center, most of the parents are busy at work, so they offer the online classes that can guide their parents to train their kids at home in simple ways. They also offer parents chances to attend the parent-child baking class once a week. During the baking process, parents help kids with mixing butter, sugar, milk, and flour for the cake. After that, children taste the cake with their parents. Unlike other art classes, baking class is suitable for parents to participate because children need help from their parents during the process of one to two hours and that connection is necessary (Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020).

Lisa (personal communication, March 21, 2020) contended that not all the art activities are suitable for parents involving and participating. Some parents can easily worry about their kids and get mad when their kids do not follow the instructions. Thus, they only invite parents on special occasions like the baking class, sports meeting, and festival celebration. Jing (personal communication, March 22, 2020) also mentioned that attending their own child's sports games is certainly important. Parents volun-

teer to coach, referee, or to help organize sporting activities in the whole process. All in all, teaching autistic kids should combine efforts of their parents too.

Communicating with their parents is an effective way to get a comprehensive understanding of how to work with students since gaining more information is always necessary for art teachers. Furthermore, parents should spend more time bonding with their kids. Three participants stated that baking class and sports meeting are especially suitable for parents attending in school. They are great opportunities to nurture relationship for both giving support to and receiving support from their parents in baking process or sports meeting.

### **Modification and Adaptations**

As mentioned in the previous theme, students' interests can motivate them in studying art. So it is very important to design suitable art lessons in order to raise students' interests.

There are two key strategies of modifications and adaptations that emerged in the study: engaging autistic learners in art lessons and lesson scaffolding.

### **Engaging Autistic Learners in Art Lessons**

When discussing what kind of art activities are suitable for kids with autism, three participants shared similar thoughts. Lisa (personal communication, March 21, 2020) suggested to modify or make adaptations to the lessons for each kid, because every kid has different interests. Lisa's son is an autistic kid. When her son was young, he enjoyed children's books and remained quiet when he listened to the story. As Lisa read him bedtime stories every night, it soothed and relaxed him. Later, Lisa found out that her son was interested in reading children's book, and then she stimulated his interests in drawing and creating stories. Besides, some kids in her school enjoy watching cartoons. Thus, she thought it was a good way to get them engaged in character design in her art class (Lisa, personal communication, March 21, 2020). Kiki (personal communication, March 20, 2020) added that some art media can be difficult for autistic kids like oil painting and watercolor, so she suggested that teacher should not get them involved in those materials too soon.

Jing (personal communication, March 22, 2020) stated, art teachers should make adaptations for kids within all autistic group classrooms. Watercolor, collage, pastels, color pencil, acrylics, and crayon should be available for kids to choose their favorite media. In this way, students are willing to participate in art lessons. Jing also concluded that teaching autistic kids is all about repeating.

As an art teacher, she can teach a child how to draw a circle and a straight line for weeks and longer. Drawing is not the only thing in every day's training, they also have some gross motor trainings and fine motor trainings. She stated, I remember I had a very special student when I was in there (write under the pseudonym of CC). CC was five years old. Neither he has spoken language nor body language. He always peed on himself, because he had no idea how to express his thought and he was not able to understand anything we said. I have taught CC how to clap his hands for two months, it's about two hundred times repeating each day...but I failed. Two months after I left Stars and Rain institute, one of my colleague Miss Chen called me the other day, and she said CC finally learned how to clap his hands. The author cried very loudly on that day. (Jing, personal communication, March 22, 2020)

From the experience of three participants, they suggest art teachers ensure to set a realistic adaptation level for autistic kids, and that means allowing kids to experience some frustration and surprises when appropriate.

### **Lesson Scaffolding**

When asked how to plan an art lesson for children with autism, Kiki (personal communication, March 20, 2020) described that a successful lesson must follow the rule of "step by step", because kids learned art in a gradual way. Kiki suggested,

The first stage is called doodle stage. Art teacher should encourage students to doodle anything they want in a slightly freer way. Children can even doodle with eyes closed to relax and express themselves. In this stage, art teachers shouldn't tell them too much about how to draw, but observe the symbols and lines in their drawings. This is also a necessary stage to build trust between art teachers and students, so encouraging words and smile are crucial factors. The second stage is requiring students to learn more about color and basic shapes. Art teachers could require the kid to draw a straight line first, if the kid finished it well, then start drawing the shape using different colors. Later, ask the kid to compose something by using those shapes like a sun or clouds from easy to hard. Attention focusing would be the biggest problem at this stage, so do not make the pace too fast. Art teachers should pay attention to the shape that the kid interested in drawing and encourage them to create more. In the third stage, more art materials should be prepared for autistic kids to have fun with. Watercolor can be a great media played with brush or straws. They can also use fingers or palms to create art. Basically, in this stage, we want children with autism to find out the world is colorful and beautiful. They can have more possibilities while developing their imagination.

The fourth stage requires autistic kids to draw their family members and express their characteristics like long hair or short hair, big eyes or small eyes and things like that. To make the task harder, art teachers can ask kids to draw some memories when they are staying with parents or friends. Art teachers should also encourage them to draw their parents with exaggeration to promote their communication later in life. In this stage, we can also have some lessons about drawing houses, with natural environment. This is aimed at helping them connect everything together consciously. (Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020)

After Kiki explained lesson plans of the beginning four stages, she said Lisa has more experience in teaching the higher level. So, Lisa further expanded the later stages: The fifth stage demands kids with autism to have more connections with group members in class. Drawing a greeting card or a birthday card is a great choice for them to realize their social presence. They are required to draw flowers, candles, and balloons on the card with few words. Everyone is going to get his or her own card. To conclude, in the fifth stage, kids will also gain self-confidence and self-identification.

In the sixth stage, autistic kids are provided with colorful tissue papers. They can tear them, cut them into all kinds of shapes, and glue them on cardboard. Through experiencing various materials, their interests in new things will be motivated.

In the seventh stage, children create art with music on and they are encouraged to express their feelings and emotions. Children will be suggested to use cool tone to show expression and warm tone to express happiness.

The eighth stage is the last stage. In this stage, art teachers should combine children's characteristics and experience, thus help them with satisfaction. Clay will be used, and children will pay more attention to details. (Lisa, personal communication, March 21, 2020)

When asked Jing about the lesson plan, she explained that Beijing Stars and Rain institute provides one on one training class to their students depending on their abilities. They emphasize the method of customized training instead of teaching in a group of small class (Jing, personal communication, March 22, 2020).

Generally speaking, all these methods and lesson scaffolding show the principle of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. In regard to teaching art to autistic kids, most kids acquire dynamic interaction with art teachers. Teachers should have a definite objective for each student and check teaching results regularly so as to modify teaching as needed for each student's unique needs.

## Developing Skills Through Art Activities

When discussing the art activities to develop autistic kids' skills, three participants shared similar thoughts. Both Kiki and Lisa agreed that students gained appreciation of art from several art activities and gave examples of how to integrate different activities. Kiki noted the importance of finding out what textures of materials will the student be sensitive to. She further stated that if a student is good at drawing birds, then teachers should inspire the student to draw all kinds of birds in different colors or different shapes and so on. Basically, most of autistic kids enjoy drawing shapes and lines, and they are attracted by beautiful and bright colors. Reading children's book with them is also a meaningful art activity. The children's book or illustration book can help them to have more connections to human relations (Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020). Lisa noted that there are several art activities suitable for kids with autism. Paper-cut art is their favorite art media at her training school. Kids usually draw something and cut it out from colorful paper or using scissors to cut some basic shapes and glue them on a cardboard. It's suitable for kids with autism because it can develop autistic children's visual recognition skills, eye-hand coordination skills, and problem-solving skills by using scissors and glue stick. What's more, clay and plasticine making is also a great choice for them. Most of them can concentrate in the process of clay making and they prefer working alone without teacher's intervention. However, art teachers should pay attention to children's facial emotions and movements in case they have any difficulties or problems that require help from teachers (Lisa, personal communication, March 21, 2020).

Jing (personal communication, March 22, 2020) also contended that in Stars and Rain institute, they have art trainings for kids of different levels. Distinctive activities are suitable for different level students. Copying a picture on the white paper is the first step, because most of them are not willing to draw anything at the beginning. It could be difficult for low-functioning autistic students to hold a pen and they can spend a whole day practicing how to draw straight lines. Thus, art teachers shouldn't set expectations too high for them. For high-functioning autistic students, they can have more lessons in training them how to use the materials like watercolor, markers, crayons, and so on. She noted that they get different thoughts and ideas through different art activities. Even though autistic children don't usually want to express their thoughts and feelings and most of them have difficulty with verbal expression, art activities can develop their problem-solving skills and stimulate their potential (Jing, personal commu-



nication, March 22, 2020).

Talking about the skill development through art works in conjunction with other activities, and Kiki and Lisa shared broader student schedules used in their training center. Each week, autistic kids have classes like circle time, music games, fine motor trainings, sporting games, social stories reading, activity of daily life training, art classes, one on one instruction, and baking classes. All these activities are designed to keep autistic kids focus and develop their living skills. Lisa further explained,

Fine motor trainings are as important as art trainings to develop their fine motor skills and the coordination requires the cooperation of multiple small muscles. Daily activities are like art of origami is soothing and relieves anxiety for kids with autism. What's more, colorful paper is used to create a menagerie of origami animals: bunnies, puppies, cats, and so on. Paper plane is the easiest item of origami, and kids love it so much. Colorful drawings stimulate baby's sense of sight, hearing and touch, and it can be a great art activity to develop their multiple skills. (Lisa, personal communication, March 21, 2020)

Kiki (personal communication, March 20, 2020) added they also have toys in their school that involve the actions of putting together them or taking apart, which can help develop an autistic child's hand and eye coordination. Games, music videos, and story books are also aimed at developing their fine motor, cognitive, language, and sensory skills, so they have these activities in a typical working day (Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020).

Jing (personal communication, March 22, 2020) offered example of the curriculum in Stars and Rain institute: The curriculum provided in Stars and Rain institute is very professional, not only for kids, parents, but also for special educators. She concluded that parent training is about eleven weeks of applied behavior analysis (ABA). It is combined with behavioral intervention with sensory integration strategies. For autistic kids, they offer different classes for different age range. The most popular group is from age three to six. The curriculum involves drawing class, music therapy class, and individual living capacity training (Jing, personal communication, March 22, 2020).

Overall, developing skills for autistic kids through art works in conjunction with other activities which occupy a very important position in special education training schools. Distinctive activities are suitable for autistic students at different levels. Most of the activities develop their verbal expression ability, problem-solving skills, and stimulate their potentials.

## Summary

Throughout the data analysis process, strategies to en-

gage the autistic learners, modification and adaptations, and developing autistic children's skills through art activities were discussed. In this chapter, the strategies of classroom management, the method of teacher training, and the means of parent involvement were also discussed. Furthermore, lesson scaffolding, curriculum, and art activities were offered by three study participants. Kiki and Lisa provided art educators curriculum and lesson plans and explained eight stages of suitable art activities for children at different levels. Three art teachers revealed the real lives of children with autism in China, and while they agreed that there are many challenges in teaching autistic kids, they also provided the solutions. Chapter 5 explores the discusses the findings of the study.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

### Introduction

This study addressed strategies art teachers use in teaching autistic students in art classroom and proved the ways to modify and adapt art instruction to enhance autistic children's pedagogical skills and problem-solving skills. The study also holds implications for Chinese elementary school art educators working with autistic kids. In this chapter, the connection between the result of study and literature review discussed and the suggestion for further research is provided.

### Discussion

Several similarities emerged between the literature and the study's findings. Three participants (Jing, personal communication, March 22, 2020; Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020; Lisa, personal communication, March 21, 2020) stated that art educators must modify lessons and make adaptations for children with autism in art room. Similarly, Van, Reichle, and Schopler (2003) noted that individualized schedule should be provided for kids with autism that depends on their personal characteristics, needs and abilities, the curriculum, and learning objectives and schedule should be easy to follow for each child<sup>[32]</sup>.

According to Kellman (1999), children with autism are strong in visual learning and processing focused on their interests. Art teachers should find out children's interests to engage them in art learning<sup>[16]</sup>. Three participants also concluded that art teachers should engage the autistic students by drawing onto their interests (Lisa, personal communication, March 21, 2020; Jing, personal communication, March 22, 2020; Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020).

In the study, Lisa and Kiki suggested that the curricu-



lum of teaching art to autistic kids should be scaffolded. Their description of eight stages of teaching kids in different levels support this idea (Kiki, personal communication, March 20, 2020; Lisa, personal communication, March 21, 2020). Similarly, Andrus (2006) also provided the principle that art educators should guide autistic learners by asking questions like “Could you show me...?” or “What will you do next?” to create step by step learning<sup>[3]</sup>. Derby (2012) also stated that art teachers should have clear concise directions, reasonable expectations, and art activities to draw autistic children’s interests and address their concerns. These are strategies to overcome the challenges in teaching students with special needs<sup>[8]</sup>.

Behaviors can also present a challenge when working with autistic children. Kurth and Mastergeorge (2012) contended that it is challenging for art teachers to obtain attention from students with autism in art class<sup>[20]</sup>. The challenges were echoed in this study when Kiki (personal communication, March 20, 2020) expressed that having autistic students’ attention can be more difficult than non-autistic children, and the solution is to find out what their interests are to engage them. Sun and Shek (2012) recommended to build a harmonious environment in art classroom by establishing behavior management and class rules.<sup>[30]</sup> Similarly, Lisa (personal communication, March 21, 2020) stated that she set several strict rules for autistic kids and noted that they should be rewarded for good behavior and punished for breaking the rule to help them understand appropriate behavior in class.

However, most of the autistic kids have trouble expressing their difficulties or problems, in that way art teachers should pay attention to children’s facial emotions and movements (Lisa, personal communication, March 21, 2020). Lisa (personal communication, March 21, 2020) further described some daily activities (such as art of origami) that can sooth and relieve anxiety for kids with autism. Children with autism can act apathetically because of emotional issues like the feelings of aloneness, anxiety, and fear among them. Art educators should be sensitive to students’ emotional alterations and movements (Andrus, 2006)<sup>[3]</sup>. Thus, teachers should pay more attention on autistic children’s emotions regarding their social communication deficits, emotional issues.

### Relationship to Practice

The process and the result of the study have brought forward some thoughts, measures, and methods for me to teach students in accordance with their aptitude. To properly address this issue, students with special needs must be taught patiently, while art teachers should be able to read students’ performances and identify the patterns to deter-

mine what students really need. The study has inspired me to reconsider advocating for pragmatic educational objectives and the aptitude teaching principle in teaching children with special needs. As a result of the study, it provided me with strategies. The author can utilize in my classes. Art teachers should pay attention to students’ personality, class culture atmosphere, and set up an appropriate lesson plan. The curriculum and the lesson plan should contain the cultivation of autistic students’ interests and enhancement of students’ practical skills.

In addition, the research and the data have influenced my attention in eliminating social discrimination to children with autism and addressing the topic of equality for them. The study empowered me as an art educator to strengthen my connection with every student. As an outcome of this study, the author will develop a lesson on self-portrait that will include adaptations for the autistic student in my class. This lesson intends to tell students it is acceptable to be different and we should respect each other.

### Implications for Further Research

If the author were to replicate this study, I would prepare more interview questions to cover all the information. The author wants to acquire from participants. Preparing a list of accessible questions for the interview would be helpful, but the interview questions should be more precise. Time could be increased for data collection and analysis, and the author would potentially expand the number of participants to gain more thoughts. If the author could study this topic further, I would also want to know the time allocation of a successful art class and the most attractive art activities for autistic kids.

This study implied challenges art teachers face and relevant strategies they can use when teaching autistic students. Through the study, the author hopes more art teachers will become aware that students with special needs are increasingly integrated into the general classrooms and demand more attention from the teachers. Thus, teachers should gain more insights into different strategies used in teaching kids with special needs. Cultivating professional knowledge and developing specific inclusive training of how to support special students’ learning for art teachers is as important as having more in-service teacher trainings and support for effective to an inclusive classroom.

### Conclusions

This study examined strategies to enhance art teachers’ pedagogical and problem-solving skills for working with autistic students. To engage autistic students in learning

art, art teachers should identify students' preferred art materials and modify and adapt suitable art instructions for them. For art teachers who have insufficient preservice preparation and experience in inclusive education, they should gain more information and comprehensive understanding the method of working with students with special needs.

Through the process of the research, the author learned about the frustration and confusion in inclusion art rooms and learned about the strategies to cope with them. Beyond helping my practice as an art educator, this study could further assist other educators. Art serves as an important part for children with autism and they require more instruction and guidance during the art class. Art teachers' efforts can help children with autism not only to develop pedagogical skills but also to teach them behavior, problem-solving skills, and social skills.

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# Ideology and Identity--A Brief Analysis of Anzaldua's Book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

Zhouna Shao\*

Xianda College of Economics and Humanities, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, 200083, China

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is to explore Anzaldua's autobiographical book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, to discuss how multicultural environment influenced Gloria, why she considers herself as a border person, a person with multiple identities, to analyze how she struggles in a land where there is uniformity between sexual oppression and racial oppression, refusing to be reduced to the "other". I will briefly introduce Anzaldua's early experience as well as her identity as a colored lesbian. Her life is a crossover where gender, racial, sexuality, class problem connect with each other. In the first part, I will discuss about Anzaldua's idea of taking Ideology as culture tyranny which creates visible and invisible pressure from outside that keeps shaping Chicano's sense of self, objectifying the colored people. In the second part, I will analyze the oppression that Chicano women suffer from the male dominated white society, and how the ideological oppression shapes their identity. In the third part, I will explore Anzaldua's radical theory -- "new Mestiza consciousness".

## 1. Introduction

In 1987, Gloria Anzaldua published her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* which became an important event in Chicano Feminism Movement. It is regarded as an example of Chicana Post/colonial writing. Her book inspired lots of Chicano Feminist writers who shared the same experience as Gloria Anzaldua. When Anzaldua was three years old, she began menstruating. She was excluded by other people since early childhood because of her precocious sexual development. She describes how that unusual experience influenced her psychology as well as how she developed awareness of being treated as the "other", as "not normal". Her sense of self has been gradually shaped by the shame that imposed by "normal" people. Later, her colored lesbian identity makes

her even more exclusive. Long time oppression arouses her rebellious spirit. She takes writing as a method to resist, challenging the hegemonic belief that marginalizes the disadvantaged groups. Growing up in a farmer family on a ranch settlement in South Texas, Gloria spent most of her childhood working in the fields of her home valley. Since then, she started to know the hardship of being a migrant labor, and felt close to the land. South Texas is located at the border of U.S. and Mexico, where different cultures cross over. The multicultural environment has influenced Gloria a lot. She considers herself as a border person, a person with multiple identities. Take a historical look, border could always be a pronoun for War, conflict, contradiction or exploitation, as a border woman. Gloria compares her psychological territory of inner self to borderland where there is always struggling amidst hatred,

\*Corresponding Author:

Zhouna Shao,

Xianda College of Economics and Humanities, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, 200083, China;

Email: 1810070@xdsisu.edu.cn



anger, adversity and violation. She admits that being a multi-identity woman brings her unavoidable pain.

As a colored lesbian, her life is a crossover where gender, racial, sexuality, class problem connect with each other. In the first chapter, she adopts the genre “autobiographical writing” to narrate history, using personal experience to restructure history. Foucault argues power produced history; knowledge is the production of power. He opposes the view of “Grand History” which presupposes that history is continuous, lineal and progressive. In his opinion, history is occasional events that produced during the rivalry of powers. He denies any causality and purposefulness in history<sup>[8]</sup>. Therefore, a new way of studying history is to explore how the casual events constructed by various powers and discourses, how some events are highlighted while some are eliminated. In Anzaldua’s autobiographical writing, she provides readers with a new perspective of reading history through fragmented experience of minority groups, and “presents history as a serpentine cycle rather than a linear narrative. The history she tells is a story in which indigenous icons, traditions, and rituals replace Post-Cortesian Catholic customs”<sup>[9]</sup>. In the last two decades, autobiographical writing became popular among Chicana feminist, for through deconstructing mainstream discourse, it “has proved to be an effective means for members of ethnic and/or sexual minorities to articulate, voice and legitimize their long-silenced and marginalized experiences.” as well as “a way of making sense of and coming to terms with experiences of pain and suffering that, once articulated and organized, comprise a system that serves as source of empowerment and knowledge that is instrumental in the creation of politically informed collective identities.”<sup>[4]</sup>

## 2. Ideology as Culture Tyranny

Gramsci points out that Capitalist leadership consists of two forms of power, “rule” and “identify with”. “rule” is to make ruled class obedient by the strong force, while “identify with” is to approach to the predominant value. The colonial rulers and post-colonial rulers realized that it is extremely important to consolidate power by letting the colonized identify with their ideology, for the function of ideology is to legalize the governing. Therefore, all kinds of attempts are made to publicize their values, through media, schools, social organizations and so on<sup>[13]</sup>. The all-pervasive Ideology is just like air, as the whole society breathes it without even noticing its existence. Gloria

takes Ideology as culture tyranny. “We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture.”<sup>[1]</sup> She revisited the history of how U.S. invaded Mexico and forced her to give up Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and California, of how the original inhabitants being invaded by the Anglo language, values and their white supremacy, and the borderland between the two countries was not simply physical one, but psychological borderland, sexual borderland and spiritual borderland. Chicanos often have low estimation of self, since their native tongue, Chicano Spanish is viewed as inferior language. She remembered that her teacher arrogantly asked her to talk like an “American” when she tried to tell her how to pronounce her name. In the university, she and other Chicano students were required to take speech class in order to get rid of their accents. When she taught Chicano students English in High School, she was forbidden to supplement the required texts with Chicano works. She was told that she was supposed to teach English and American literature. “Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self”<sup>[1]</sup>. She describes the complicated feeling when Chicanos sit together and speak with each other. Neither Spanish nor English they speak with each other would make them feel comfortable. “To be close to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we’ll see there—Shame, low estimation of self”<sup>[1]</sup>. That’s the power of the dominant culture. The codes and principal it represents exist as natural, unchallengeable. Most people follow those principal in order to be accepted by the society. A few people try to resist it, but the visible and invisible pressure from outside keeps shaping their sense of self.

Anzaldua also criticizes the binary structure in western thinking is another form of violence. It keeps people away from embracing ambiguity. The world is split into true/false; progress/backward; rational/irrational; Subject/object, female/male, white/colored. The rigid categorization of people leads to stereotype and prejudice, because during the process of categorizing, the individuality is more or less being ignored. Female, colored people become the “other”. In the colonized society, color is most visible borderland that divides people into different groups. White people, as a privileged group who own the discourse power is the subject of narrative. Colored people, as a silenced, inferior group, are inevitably being objectified. In

the white narrative context, they are merely the reference of white people; they are the empty shell whose blood and flesh are being constructed out of the Whites' imagination. Edward W. Said says in the *Culture and Imperialism* that the imagination of geography and history (in the story told by Colonial explorer and novelist for instance) actually helps to strengthen colonists' sense of self. Their feeling of existence is enhanced through dramatizing the difference between the near and distant area. As for the Colonized, their subjectivity is deeply influenced in the Colonists' gaze <sup>[11]</sup>. In Said's famous book *Orientalism*, he cites Karl Marx's sentence "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." East exists as exotic fantasy in the West's imagination. It is produced and reproduced in the Western discourse, and orientalism is that kind of colonial discourse that reduces the Colonized into "the other", which is powerful enough to confuse the colonized "the other" with "the self", like a broken mirror distorting their image. They have to identify themselves with that image since they are told repeatedly it is who they are. Anzaldua also associates woman with the Colonized because of their "otherness". There is uniformity between sexual oppression and racial oppression.

In *Entering into the Serpent*, Anzaldua explains how the female deities are split in the patriarchal society by the western value of duality. Those female deities once owned both light and dark side. They had more depth in their nature just like human beings until western churches split their wholeness, and they become uni-dimensional. The light ones possess all the traditional moral parts (defined by the male): pure, motherhood, sacrifice...so that women could follow them as example without any confusion. And the dark powerful goddesses are given the monstrous attributes so that they could be dis-empowered and substituted by the male deities. According to Derrida, "a binary structure constructs an "other" as a privileged term, against which the latter can distinguish itself. One term is taken out of a system of terms and is given a positive value, which thus constructs an "other" or negative of itself which signifies everything that it does not accept... The second term is thus denied an existence of its own; it is merely a negation of the first term." <sup>[7]</sup>

### 3. New Mestiza Consciousness

In the final part, Anzaldua raises a radical theory --"new Mestiza consciousness" to build multiple identities. It is necessary to transcend the predefined self and recon-

struct the identity with new consciousness. The purpose of establishing New Mestiza consciousness is to break up dualism ingrained in the western thinking. Dualism split things into opposite categories: good/bad; female/male; white/black; Dualism emphasizes difference rather than sameness, which results in exclusion rather than inclusion. There is no respect room for something in between, for ambiguity and contradiction. Mestiza Consciousness aims to create a sense of plurality of self--the self is not confined in one Category, rather, it is the unity of differences.

### 4. Conclusions

Gloria Anzaldua's trans-disciplinary book redefines the traditional meaning of identity. Identity is not essential, since there exists no fixed "Essence". Identity is not invariable, stable and universal, rather, it is fragmented, constructive and it experiences continuously changing. Identity is being constructed both within and outside. It is influenced by a system of representation such as language, culture... And those representations react to people as ideology. So the process of identity construction is to some extent very political. As a "border" group whose history, living space, language and culture are being invaded by the dominant Anglo, Chicana's identity are split up by the western dualism, and their inner selves are fragmented. Therefore, Anzaldua's Mestiza Consciousness is valuable methodology to free them from dominant ideology, to form new identities which embrace the ambiguity and difference.

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# The Enlightenment of Cooper's Learning Circle Theory to the Construction of College Student Team

**Xi Wang\***

Shenyang Jianzhu University, Shenyang, Liaoning, 110168, China

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## ABSTRACT

At the present stage of development, colleges and universities in the training of students and management of student team construction there are some problems, although many colleges and universities to take the corresponding management plan, effectively improve the quality of students, but educators still need to face how to cultivate a mature student team in a short time. In this regard, combining Dewey's "experiential learning" and Cooper's experiential learning theory, the paper applies experiential learning theory and practice to the training of college student team construction, aiming at improving the overall quality of the student team effectively, so as to promote the comprehensive development of students.

## 1. Introduction

For college students, the cultivation of professional ethics is as important as the cultivation of professional skills, and the improvement of students' ability is closely related to their daily work and study. The vast majority of students are able to perform very well in their jobs because of the good training they get in college. Suhomlinsky also pointed out that the best education is real and life education, and emphasized to seek education in life experience. Therefore, how to use the best management way to excavate the potential of the student team, improve the ability of the students, is an important new task facing colleges and universities.

## 2. The Theory of Experiential Learning

### 2.1 Cooper's Four-stage Model

Cooper conducts research on experiential learning from

multiple perspectives, such as psychology, philosophy and physiology, and believes that learning can create knowledge effects by transforming thoughts through experience. In 1984, he constructed a theoretical model of experiential learning, pointing out that experiential learning is a circular process, which is divided into four links: concrete experience, observation and reflection, inductive idea formation theory, conclusion applied to new environment<sup>[1]</sup>. These links are closely linked and complement each other. Experience is the basis of observation and reflection. New problems are found in observation and experience, and transformed into abstract concepts by thinking, and finally new ideas are formed. And constantly testing new ideas in the process of new links, this is a cycle of iterative progress.

### 2.2 Dewey's Idea of Experiential Learning and Learning by Doing

The experiential learning foundation of student team

\*Corresponding Author:

Xi Wang,

Shenyang Jianzhu University, Shenyang, Liaoning, 110168, China;

Email: 121697021@qq.com



construction not only relies on Cooper model theory, but also on Dewey's ideas of experiential learning and learning by doing. Dewey pointed out that any education and experience can not be separated, education is in experience, is the process of experience development. And criticized the traditional education relies on indoctrination form of teaching, is no effect, its use method has no relation with students. In teaching, we should learn to show and cultivate students' personality, and oppose the indoctrination education mode. As long as we achieve these, we can realize the learning experience by doing.

### **2.3 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

From bottom to top, the hierarchy of needs theory includes physiology, security, emotion, belonging, respect and self-actualization. If students' physiology, psychology and needs are well satisfied, they will continue to find their sense of belonging and honor in the class, and promote their thoughts of self-worth by winning the respect of others. In this regard, teachers can guide practice with the help of theory and explore the law of training student team construction. To cultivate student team construction, we should start from students' thoughts and emotions, adopt activities, games and other forms, let teachers and students implement communication, give full play to the guidance and coordination role of educators and managers, so as to better mobilize students' initiative and innovation, and promote the development of students' various abilities.

## **3. The Development of Experiential Education of Student Team Construction**

### **3.1 Centering on Participation, Focusing on Reflection and Perception**

In experiential education activities, students' participation should be taken as the center, and students' reflection and perception should be taken as an important core point to carry out activities. In the activity, students should not only obey and simulate the arrangement, but let students see clearly the essence of things. After participating in the activities, students will have corresponding changes. Firstly, they can transform the way of life into their own healthy character, and secondly, they can transform their healthy character into good behavior in their heart.

### **3.2 Experiential Education Should Start from Concept, Responsibility and Ability**

From the whole module of experiential education, we should combine concept, responsibility and ability as a

starting point, and adjust and arrange each module according to the actual situation. The development of each module should be carried out with the help of warm-up, activity experience, reflection and sharing, summary and sublimation and other links <sup>[2]</sup>. To ensure good results, make sure there are no more than 15 people in each group and avoid getting too familiar with each other. The teacher should play a guiding role, so that the group members can choose the group leader through the discussion, and the group leader will lead the members to complete the task.

### **3.3 Focus on Cultivating Students' Sense of Responsibility**

In terms of school activities, students usually cannot actively participate in them at the beginning, but after several links of activities, members of the group will gradually develop enthusiasm and pay more attention to the sense of collective honor of their own group, so as to promote students to establish the awareness of team building. Then, it is to focus on cultivating students' sense of responsibility of team construction, and promote students' comprehensive ability to be promoted. For example, in the guidance of responsibility consciousness, students can discuss how to use their own rights, for their own use, or for the overall situation? Another example is that the communication and expression ability plays an important role in the construction of the student team. The form of performance can be used to further promote students to correctly understand the importance of good communication ability.

### **3.4 To Point with Surface, Promote Students to Have Emotional Resonance**

Empathy is an ability that everyone has, and sensitive students will be touched in a certain activity scene to create emotional resonance. For example, some students mentioned in the activity sharing activity of responsibility link that the school allocated less funds for their own activities, which was far from meeting the requirements of the activity. Thanks to the cooperation of everyone, the activity was very successful. After the activity, he cried for a long time. His tears were both gratifying and affirmation to himself. Many students gave him a standing ovation after hearing his share. Therefore, it can be seen that sometimes the best results can be obtained by telling them in combination with reality, which is also the advantage of experiential education. It is far more resonating to students than monotonous lectures, but in all links of experiential education, students can also keep thinking and acting, so as to promote their own sublimation, and at the same time, after the activity, students can establish a deep friendship.

## **4. The Requirements of Experiential Education for Teachers and Administrators**

### **4.1 Experiential Education Has Higher Requirements for Participating Teachers**

In experiential education, teachers should not only have rich theoretical knowledge, but also master corresponding work experience, good communication skills and keen observation ability, so as to comprehensively grasp students' emotions, further understand students' ideas, and better guide students to express their real feelings. At the same time, listening skills are also necessary for teachers to master, to hear the connotation of students to express, so as to better understand students. In the implementation of activities, students may not be able to use the most suitable words to express their feelings due to their own reasons. At this time, teachers should continue to encourage and guide students, so that students can truly express their feelings and ideas.

### **4.2 Teachers are Guides and Coordinators in Experiential Education**

Teachers are not only disseminators of knowledge, but also guiders and coordinators. They guide students to solve problems, summarize and share through self-discovery and analysis, and promote students to timely independent exploration and reflection. We should learn to guide students to reflect and apply their reflection to practice. To be specific, during the experiential education activities, students should learn to leave space and time for appropriate reflection and full reflection, so as to promote students to constantly improve their overall perception of work, study and life in reflection, and then adjust their own development. At the same time, it can also guide students to recall the most impressive things to themselves, especially the memory of events covering morality, psychology, interests and so on, so that students can comprehensively understand and evaluate themselves, related events and people in the memory. Finally, teachers should learn to combine the expression and statement of students, guide students to summarize, and can let students realize their own shortcomings, so as to timely improve, promote the correct establishment of students' outlook on life, values and world outlook, and realize the coordinated and unified development of students' cognition and behavior.

### **4.3 In Experiential Education, Teachers Need to Spend More Energy on Designing Schemes**

In daily life and work, teachers should consciously collect the corresponding materials based on the characteristics of students, and apply them to practice in the design scheme, so as to be corrected in the process of inspection. Only by designing diversified activities in line with the actual development of students can we promote the development of students and the smooth implementation of the effect of activities<sup>[3]</sup>. At the same time, in the process of activity implementation, teachers implement effective measures to avoid students paying too much attention to the game winning or losing, entertainment and neglecting to master the spirit and connotation. Through games and activities, students can get more specific experience and perception. At this time, teachers can summarize and summarize the experience of students, promote the sublimation of students' theories, and let students transfer this experience to similar situations, so as to achieve the maximum effect of education. However, in this link, teachers need to bear in mind that there is enough time for students to experience, discuss and think, so teachers should refine their own summary. Also, don't put personal considerations into it, and be fair and equitable to all groups of students.

## **5. Conclusions**

In short, experiential education has the characteristics of practicability and feasibility. Based on this, teachers should integrate the student team into the training, so as to make the student team toward scientific and rational development, and promote the effective improvement of the quality of student team construction.

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# The Application of WeChat in College English Teaching in Yunnan

Fanghua Li\*

School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan Minzu University, Kunming, Yunnan, 650031, China

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## ABSTRACT

With the widespread promotion and application of the Internet and mobile devices, the WeChat platform has become more and more involved and used in the teaching process due to its fast, convenient and efficient features. This paper mainly analyzes the advantages of feasibility and convenience of WeChat platform in teaching, and focuses on the application form of WeChat in college English teaching, and puts forward teaching strategies suitable for college English teaching in ethnic colleges and universities, so as to enrich English teaching resources and methods, make up for the shortcomings in traditional teaching and comprehensively improve teaching quality, promote the reform of college English teaching and explore an adaptive teaching mode suitable for college English in ethnic colleges and universities.

## 1. Introduction

According to the 46th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development issued by China Internet Information Center (CNNIC) on September 29, 2020, as of June 2020, the number of mobile Internet users in China had reached 932 million, of which the proportion of mobile Internet users reached 99.2%. Mobile instant messaging users reached 930 million, accounting for 99.8% of mobile Internet users. Among them, the utilization rate of WeChat Moments is 85%, and the utilization rates of Qzone and microblog are 41.6% and 40.4% respectively<sup>[1]</sup>.

WeChat (WeChat) is an instant chat software launched by Tencent in January 2011 to send text messages, voice, small videos and pictures through mobile phones, tablets and web pages. Compared with traditional network communication methods, WeChat has faster, flexible, intelligent, efficient and other instant messaging functions, which is deeply loved by contemporary college students.

Affected by this trend, mobile learning has become more accessible.

*The Outline of the National Medium and Long Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)* emphasizes that "information technology has a revolutionary impact on education development"<sup>[2]</sup>. As a communication tool, WeChat not only provides public platform, circle of friends, message push and other functions, but also can send customized content to multiple users who use WeChat at the same time. It is also precisely the above powerful functions that make the application of WeChat in college English teaching possible<sup>[3]</sup>.

## 2. The Advantages of WeChat in English Teaching

### 2.1 The Feasibility of WeChat in College English Teaching

In recent years, with the wide popularization and appli-

\*Corresponding Author:

Fanghua Li,

School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan Minzu University, Kunming, Yunnan, 650031, China;

Email: 48602131@qq.com

cation of smart phones, the market share of smart phones for college teachers and students has increased year by year. Smart phones have become a necessary product for college students' life and study. Meanwhile, 4G and 5G networks have been continuously upgraded and promoted, and the tariff standard has been continuously reduced. WiFi equipment in schools, families, shopping malls and other public places is also becoming more and more common, which provides convenience for students to carry out mobile learning at present and in the future.

At present, the vast majority of students are using WeChat, and many subject teachers have established WeChat groups in their own classes. Compared with the convenience and frequency of microblog and WeChat, WeChat has obvious advantages. Wechat supports mobile phone, pad and computer online functions at the same time, which makes it more convenient to use WeChat to carry out in-class teaching and extracurricular counseling<sup>[4]</sup>. During the interviews, the researcher learned that the students had already gained part of their English experience by using the corresponding functions of WeChat. For example, learning English by using official account, sharing learning links with WeChat moments, and using WeChat group to conduct one to one oral English courses with foreign teachers. Based on the powerful function of WeChat and the use of students, it is highly feasible to use WeChat in English teaching.

## **2.2 The Convenience of WeChat in College English Teaching**

With its powerful learning function, WeChat provides a variety of conveniences for educating learners in the selection of learning course locations, learning course time, learning course content, learning course progress, resource sharing and pushing, and teacher-student communication and interaction, which is conducive to promoting effective development of mobile education learning.

### **2.2.1 Using WeChat to learn English, the learning time and learning length can be changed**

Learners can flexibly choose the learning time and set the learning length according to their physical condition and learning status, and gradually complete the requirements of the entire learning activity.

### **2.2.2 Using WeChat to learn English, the learning location is flexible and changeable, and you can switch between multiple rooms**

Using the WeChat platform for English learning, the learning place is no longer limited to the classroom, but

can be transferred to multiple places such as outdoor and home, thus improving the previous situation of English teaching requiring multiple classrooms. Many places required in the learning process, such as multimedia classrooms, audition training classrooms, English corners and so on, can be converted through the platform. In terms of tariffs, WeChat users only need to pay for Internet access, and in public places where WIFI is popular, the tariff is almost zero.

### **2.2.3 Using WeChat to learn English, learning resources are pushed quickly and efficiently, which can be shared and recycled**

The WeChat public platform or official account is rich in learning resources, and teachers can share teaching materials at any time through message push, sharing in the circle of friends, etc. Those who have spare capacity can adjust their learning progress according to their own situation and complete the learning tasks ahead of time. Those who have difficulties in learning can repeatedly study the learning materials or teaching videos pushed by teachers, reduce the difficulty of learning content, and catch up with the teaching progress as soon as possible.

### **2.2.4 Using WeChat to learn English, the learning content and difficulty can be layered, and the progress can be adjusted**

According to the teaching progress and teaching objectives, teachers can design teaching content and push it to the public account or WeChat group. In addition, with the help of mobile learning software, teachers can choose audio and video materials with different levels of difficulty for listening, reading, writing and other materials for the same teaching content to assign to students, so as to achieve hierarchical learning in accordance with their aptitude.

### **2.2.5 Using WeChat to learn English can strengthen the interaction between teachers and students and enhance the relationship between teachers and students**

The WeChat platform provides a variety of convenient ways for teachers and students to communicate. Teachers can not only provide targeted guidance to students by setting up different levels of WeChat groups, but also answer questions one-on-one through private messages. By controlling the number of WeChat groups, teachers can implement a small class targeted teaching mode. In addition, teachers can flexibly use WeChat's plug-in functions, such as expression packs, small videos, etc., to evaluate



students' learning in real time, making the evaluation methods diverse and interesting<sup>[5]</sup>.

### **3. The Applying Forms of WeChat in English Teaching**

#### **3.1 The Application in Different Teach Sessions**

In the pre-class session, teachers can use WeChat official account or WeChat group to release the requirements for pre-class preview to students, provide pre-class preview materials, help students understand the distribution of new language points, and prepare for classroom learning by reading relevant background information of teaching materials.

In the classroom teaching process, teachers can use the transmission and sharing functions of WeChat to upload various teaching materials, and can save and share the materials with students, which is convenient for students to review after class. Using the communication function of WeChat, teachers can design different classroom activities, allow students to practice in the classroom, and upload the results of the activities directly to the class group through mobile devices. Using the micro-video function, teachers can explain a language point in real time, and students can review it repeatedly.

In the extracurricular development session, teachers can use WeChat to achieve after-school tutoring, video explanations to students, online Q&A, synchronous explanations and other functions. Students can also record and complete reading assignments offline, and upload them directly to the class group, which is convenient for teachers to check and correct the pronunciation. Teachers can also complete the arrangement and inspection of other text assignments, and mark and correct assignments through the picture editing function.

#### **3.2 The Application in Different Learning Styles**

WeChat can be applied to a variety of learning styles, including self-directed learning, cooperative learning, and inquiry learning.

As a new type of modern learning method, self-directed learning has changed the unilaterally accepted traditional learning method. Self-directed learning emphasizes that students are the main body of the learning process<sup>[6]</sup>. The whole learning process is completed by the students and is not affected by the outside world. Students complete the reading of the learning materials, listen to the lectures by themselves, discover and observe problems by themselves, research problems, and practice by themselves. Individuals are continuously changed by completing the entire learning process on their own.

Cooperative learning is a creative and effective teach-

ing guiding theory and strategy. In cooperative learning, 2-6 students form study groups according to their ability differences, and participate in and complete the learning content and goals in the form of group cooperation and mutual cooperation within the group. The cooperative learning model emphasizes improving the overall performance of the group on the premise of promoting individual learning, thereby obtaining cooperative learning rewards. Students can carry out group activities in class through the WeChat platform and cooperate to complete classroom learning tasks, such as group discussions, dialogue performances, sitcom exercises, etc. After class, students can also use the WeChat group to form a group to participate in after-school tutoring and practice, and use the question and answer of others in the WeChat group to correct their mistakes, so that the group's academic performance can be improved together.

Inquiry learning refers to the students' active participation in the learning process, based on subjective conjectures or assumptions, under the guidance of scientific theories, comprehensively using various scientific methods to conduct research on problems. Improve innovation and practical ability in the research process, and promote the development of scientific research thinking, so as to independently build a knowledge system.

With the help of WeChat, students can freely use offline resources and platform resources without being restricted by the classroom, and complete the learning tasks by themselves according to the tasks designed by teachers. For example, in WeChat listening teaching, teachers can assign English songs on topics related to the textbook. For example, to find the English song task of country music, students can refer to the official account to find relevant songs for learning. Students can play the teacher's explanation video by themselves to complete the learning of a certain knowledge point. After class, students can also complete English homework on the platform alone and get comments from teachers, which is beneficial to protect students' privacy. With the help of WeChat's sharing and interaction functions, students can switch with other software, making it easier to experience various real English scenarios. Through dubbing, imitation and recording of English audio and video, and uploading their own personal works, it helps to increase students' practice and use opportunities.

### **4. The Applying Strategies of WeChat in English Teaching**

#### **4.1 Determining Learning Objectives and Content Based on Problems and Needs**

As an important educational information means to

assist English classroom teaching and extracurricular tutoring, WeChat has multiple advantages of mobile learning, but not all English teaching materials are suitable for teaching using WeChat. Therefore, the selection of WeChat learning content and methods should be reasonably selected according to the problems existing in students' learning and students' needs for English learning.

In the selection of English listening and speaking materials, the topic-based listening and speaking practice mode should be changed, and text materials with novel content and close integration with current events should be added to classroom teaching. For example, use the rich content of the students' English newspaper to update the learning materials from time to time; supplement the audio and video English learning materials other than text, increase the situational learning of English listening and speaking, and improve the students' interest in learning. In the listening and speaking activities in the classroom, the listening and speaking activities are designed to focus on students' independent learning and cooperative learning, so as to increase teacher-student and student-student interaction, and cultivate students' ability of independent learning and cooperative learning. In the selection of English reading and writing learning materials, English extracurricular reading materials guided by supporting reading methods are selected, background knowledge materials related to the topics of the textbooks are supplemented, and reading materials of different reading levels are selected according to the actual needs of students. Design discussion topic tasks for different reading topics, and design matching writing tasks according to the theme of the reading text.

#### **4.2 Choosing Application Timing According to Learning Conditions**

Under the condition that WeChat is available, the use of WeChat for English classroom teaching should also meet the relevant conditions. When teaching in class, we should fully consider whether the teaching content needs to use the relevant functions of WeChat, such as the use of stand-alone software, WeChat official account, etc., and use the text communication, voice communication, and video communication functions in WeChat groups to interact. Use WeChat's instant storage function to upload and save classroom learning materials in a timely manner. It should also be considered whether the intervention of WeChat can effectively improve the teaching effect and whether it is conducive to the better promotion of teaching activities. Extracurricular teaching should take into account whether the learners meet the conditions for mobile learning, whether the learning environment is relatively stable, and

whether the parents are supervised by the healthy use of network resources and other factors.

#### **4.3 Improving Users' Information Literacy**

Information literacy is a basic ability, which is required to adapt to the information society. In the 21st century, the qualities that college students need to possess include basic study skills (reading, writing, arithmetic), information literacy, innovative thinking ability, interpersonal communication and cooperation spirit, and practical ability. In order to better use WeChat to carry out English teaching, both teachers and students must enhance their information awareness, improve their information technology capabilities, and learn to use information technology to discover, analyze and solve problems. At the same time, they should also improve their information ethics and resist the spread of bad network information. Since the use of WeChat requires learners to complete corresponding learning tasks in the Internet environment, teachers should ensure that students consciously engage in English learning during the learning process without being disturbed by irrelevant network information, so as to ensure the quality of learning and learning result. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate a relevant WeChat usage system and improve the information literacy of WeChat users.

#### **4.4 Formulating an Effective Usage System**

When using WeChat for classroom teaching, teachers should supervise students' electronic devices. If they need to hand out mobile phones, they should select students who are conscious and easy to manage as group leaders for collaborative supervision, and take back electronic devices in time after class. When conducting extracurricular teaching, teachers should first manage the WeChat group used for teaching, formulate corresponding group rules, and do well in extracurricular supervision. During classroom teaching, opportunities for interaction with all students should be increased, students' learning effectiveness and participation in using WeChat, and notes and answers to classroom exercises should all be checked in a timely manner. Use the voice function to quickly ask questions for spot checks, use the video function to observe the students' learning environment, or direct face-to-face teaching to ensure students' concentration in the classroom. During and after class, teachers should conduct procedural evaluation of tasks in the teaching process. At the end of the semester, teachers should check students' stage learning and give result evaluations, so that students can understand the effect of using WeChat to learn English and make continuous improvement.

## 5. Conclusions

To sum up, the WeChat platform creates a good atmosphere for students to learn and communicate, enhances the mutual communication between students and teachers, students and students, shares learning experiences, effectively improves and consolidates the actual teaching effect, and comprehensively improves It improves students' learning initiative and basic English ability. At the same time, it also provides a wealth of English courses and learning resources for college teachers and students, making up for some shortcomings in the traditional English teaching mode, comprehensively improving the quality of college English teaching, and promoting the reform of college English teaching.

## Research Project

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# A Study on the Mechanism of Cohort Effect on the Formation of National Identity among College Students

**Kai Yang\***

Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, 100024, China

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## ABSTRACT

The lack of subjective awareness of national identity among young people is a common phenomenon in all countries. In this paper, we investigate the role of cohort effect in the formation of national identity among college students based on the theory of cohort effect. The results of the empirical study show that at the current stage, the formation of national identity within the group of Chinese college students mainly relies on the herding mechanism, followed by the competition mechanism and then the learning mechanism.

## 1. Introduction

If national cohesion is insufficient, more serious consequences may occur, even leading to the division of the country. Most scholars agree that enhancing national identity can increase national cohesion. Scholars have further argued that adolescence is an important stage in the formation of national identity. However, because the worldview, life view, and values of adolescents are still in the process of formation during this period, the formation of their national identity is highly uncertain.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholars at home and abroad have been studying national identity for a long time and have made fruitful research results, which mainly focus on three directions. First, scholars have tried to define and analyze the concept of national identity from different perspectives. Secondly, they focus on the influence of national identity. Third,

scholars focus on the elements underlying the formation of national identity.

Scholars at home and abroad have achieved fruitful research results in the field of national identity, but there are still some shortcomings, mainly in the following aspects. First, the research method is relatively single. Secondly, the focus on group characteristics is insufficient. Third, it is trapped in the black box of research on this issue.

## 3. Research Hypothesis and Theoretical Model Construction

### 3.1 The Role of Cohort Effect on the Formation of National Identity of College Students

The study by Ferman et al. shows that people are more likely to imitate the decisions of experienced investors. University is one of the most important learning stages in life, during which college students not only learn various professional knowledge, but also develop their worldview,

*\*Corresponding Author:*

Kai Yang,

Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, 100024, China;

Email: 1751289897@qq.com



life view, values, and other concepts within their own group through learning, which also includes the formation of national identity. Therefore, we propose research hypothesis 1.

Research hypothesis 1: The cohort effect due to social learning mechanism will positively affect the formation of national identity among college students <sup>[1]</sup>.

Christakis and Fowler's research suggests that herding mechanisms can have a significant impact in many situations. Since college students are not fully mature, they may not be able to form their own independent judgment on certain matters or objects, so herding becomes the most convenient way to make decisions in a group. Based on the above theoretical deduction, we propose research hypothesis 2.

Research hypothesis 2: The herding effect caused by the herding mechanism positively affects the formation of national identity among college students.

Jane's research found that chasing after the leader in groups can occur stemming from competitive mechanisms. Competition among university students is no longer limited to academic competition, but is manifested in various aspects. In the context of the increasing importance of national identity cultivation in all countries, various thematic activities with the meaning of cultivating national identity have emerged, and college students are facing more and more competition in such activities <sup>[2]</sup>. Based on the above scenario analysis, we propose research hypothesis 3.

Research hypothesis 3: The cohort effect caused by the competition mechanism positively affects the formation of national identity among college students.

### **3.2 The Role of Gender Factors on the Formation of National Identity of College Students**

Research findings in psychology and behavior suggest that gender has a significant impact on decision making. The differences in interests, cognitive styles, and decision-making styles between male and female college students may affect the formation of their national identity. Therefore, we believe that gender should be used as a control variable so as to ensure the unbiased net effect of the cohort effect in the empirical study. Therefore, we propose research hypothesis 4.

Research Hypothesis 4: Gender factor has a significant effect on the formation of college students' national identity.

### **3.3 The Role of Age Factor on the Formation of National Identity of College Students**

Scholars have found significant differences in decision making between groups based on age grouping. In order

to better observe the net effect of the cohort effect on the formation of national identity among college students, age should be used as a control variable <sup>[3]</sup>. Based on the data characteristics of this study, and in order to ensure the operability of the empirical study, we categorized college students of different ages into lower and higher age groups, so we proposed research hypothesis 5.

Research hypothesis 5: There is a significant difference between the national identity of college students in the lower and higher age groups.

### **3.4 The Role of Ethnic Identity Factors on the Formation of College Students' National Identity**

Scholars have found many similarities in the characteristics of natural in-group members formed on the basis of ethnicity. In the scenario of national identity formation among college students, in order to prevent ethnic characteristics from confounding our observations of the net effect of cohort effects acting on national identity formation among college students, ethnicity should be used as a control variable, so we propose research hypothesis 6.

Research Hypothesis 6: The factor of ethnic characteristics has a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students <sup>[4]</sup>.

### **3.5 The Role of Group Size Factors on the Formation of National Identity of College Students**

In the specific scenario of national identity formation among college students, there is a significant difference in the size of college student groups, and to ensure the unbiasedness of the empirical findings, group size should be used as a control variable, so we propose research hypothesis 7.

Research Hypothesis 7: The cohort size factor has a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students.

### **3.6 The Role of the Factor of Going Abroad Experience on the Formation of National Identity of College Students**

External environmental factors are one of the important factors that cannot be ignored in the study of national identity <sup>[5]</sup>. For college students, going abroad is a major external environmental change scenario, so we use abroad experience as a proxy variable for external environmental factors and propose research hypothesis 8.

Research hypothesis 8: The factor of experience abroad has a significant effect on the formation of national identity of college students.

### 3.7 Theoretical Model Construction

Based on the above theoretical analysis and research hypotheses, the learning mechanism, herding mechanism and competition mechanism of cohort effect are introduced as explanatory variables in this paper, and these three variables are continuous variables, denoted by  $X_1$ ,  $X_2$  and  $X_3$ , respectively. In this paper, gender, grade, ethnicity, group size, and abroad experience are introduced as control variables in the model, where gender is a categorical variable,  $X_4$  denotes the male group, and the base group is the female group. Grade is a categorical variable,  $X_5$  denotes the higher grade group, and the baseline group is the lower grade group. Ethnicity is a categorical variable,  $X_6$  indicates the minority group, and the baseline group is the Han group. Group size is a categorical variable,  $X_{71}$  and  $X_{72}$  denote the medium-sized group and the large-sized group, respectively, and the benchmark group is the small-sized group. The categorical variables are abroad experience,  $X_8$  indicates the group with abroad experience, and the benchmark group is the group without abroad experience. In this paper, national identity of college students is the explanatory variable, which is a dichotomous variable with  $P=1$  indicating that college students have a high sense of national identity and  $P=0$  indicating that college students have a low sense of national identity<sup>[6]</sup>. In summary, the logistic model constructed in this paper is as follows.

$$\text{Logit}(P) = \ln\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \beta_{71} X_{71} + \beta_{72} X_{72} + \beta_8 X_8 + \varepsilon$$

## 4. Data Collection

The questionnaire data for this study were collected from June to September 2021. A total of 1648 questionnaires were distributed and 1405 questionnaires were actually returned, with a return rate of 85.25%. Of the 1405 returned questionnaires, 1325 were valid, with an efficiency rate of 94.31%.

## 5. Empirical Analysis

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

In the model constructed in this paper, the explanatory variable  $P$  is a 0-1 dichotomous variable, the explanatory variables  $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ , and  $X_3$  are continuous variables, and the remaining control variables are all categorical variables, so the descriptive statistical analysis involves only the explanatory variable  $P$  and the explanatory variables  $X_1$ ,  $X_2$ , and  $X_3$ , as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistical analysis

VARIABLES	N	mean	sd	min	max
P	1,325	0.696	0.175	0.000	1.000
CONF	1,325	3.771	0.814	1.000	0.000
COMP	1,325	3.523	0.759	1.000	5.000
STUDY	1,325	3.128	0.627	1.000	5.000

### 5.2 Logistic Regression Analysis

Logistic regression analysis was performed and the regression results are shown in Table 2. The regression results show that the quasi-R<sup>2</sup> is 0.4812. the results of the Wald test based on robust standard errors show that the joint test of all regression coefficients is significant at the 0.001 level of significance.

**Table 2.** Logistic regression analysis

	Coef. ( z )
$X_1$	1.206**** (4.53)
$X_2$	1.007**** (3.69)
$X_3$	0.837*** (3.26)
$X_4$	0.324 (0.17)
$X_5$	0.399**** (4.17)
$X_6$	0.430*** (3.23)
$X_{71}$	-0.326**** (-6.79)
$X_{72}$	-0.437**** (-6.33)
$X_8$	0.249*** (3.28)
_cons	5.73**** (9.94)
N	1325

z statistics in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table 3 shows the results of the multicollinearity test, where all VIF values are less than 10 and less than 5, indicating that the logistic regression results in this paper are not substantially affected by the multicollinearity problem.

**Table 3.** Multicollinearity test

Variable	VIF
X <sub>1</sub>	1.45
X <sub>2</sub>	1.68
X <sub>3</sub>	1.77
X <sub>4</sub>	3.74
X <sub>5</sub>	3.09
X <sub>6</sub>	1.95
X <sub>71</sub>	1.94
X <sub>72</sub>	1.67
X <sub>8</sub>	1.59
Mean VIF	2.10

## 6. Model Interpretation and Research Findings

The regression coefficient of learning mechanism is 0.837 at 0.01 level of significance. College students will acquire knowledge and information about national identity for learning purposes, which will enhance their national identity<sup>[7]</sup>. Based on the results of the t-test, the regression coefficients of the learning mechanism are significantly lower than those of the herding mechanism and the competition mechanism. This indicates that the role of this path is much lower than the role of the crowd and competition paths at this stage.

The regression coefficient of the herding mechanism is 1.206 at the 0.001 significance level, which indicates that college students obtain knowledge and information about national identity from their peers for the purpose of herding, and thus enhance their national identity. On the one hand, this shows that it is important and urgent to improve the national identity of college students at this stage, and on the other hand, it shows that an effective way to improve the national identity of college students at this stage is based on the herd behavior within the group.

The regression coefficient of the competition mechanism is 1.007 at the 0.001 significance level. On the one hand, in the various thematic activities aimed at enhancing the national identity of college students, college students compete for the satisfaction of personal achievement<sup>[8]</sup>. On the other hand, the results of the above-mentioned thematic activities are linked to the overall ranking of college students in various forms, which also triggers the competition mechanism within the group. Therefore, competition mechanism is another effective way to enhance the sense of national identity within the college students' group.

Gender does not have a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students at this stage. There is no significant difference between male and female college students' national identity because both of them do not pay enough attention to national identity subjectively. This suggests that the same level of attention

should be given to male and female college students in improving the national identity of college students.

Ethnic characteristics have a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students at the 0.001 significance level. The national identity of ethnic minority college students is significantly higher than that of Han Chinese college students. We believe that this should be the result of China's various inclined support policies for ethnic minority regions.

The grade difference has a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students at the 0.01 level of significance. The national identity of college students in the upper grade group is higher than that of college students in the lower grade group. This should be attributed to the fact that along with the deepening of national identity-related perceptions of college students in the senior group, their sense of national identity also increased accordingly.

Group size has a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students at the 0.001 level of significance. In the specific scenario of national identity formation among college students, the effect of cohort effect decreases with the increase of group size. This is also consistent with the findings of the existing literature.

Abroad experience has a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students at the 0.01 significance level<sup>[9]</sup>. College students who had the experience of going abroad had higher national identity due to the changes in the external environment.

## 7. Conclusions

Enhancing young people's sense of national identity is a real and important issue<sup>[10]</sup>. This paper explores the role of the herd effect in the formation of national identity among college students based on the herd effect theory. The results of the empirical study show that at the current stage, the formation of national identity within the group of Chinese college students mainly relies on the herding mechanism, followed by the competition mechanism, and then the learning mechanism. Unlike the existing studies, this paper adopts a quantitative research method to explore the paths of the cohort effect on the formation of national identity among college students on the basis of portraying the characteristics of college students' groups. Therefore, the findings of this paper are more relevant, valid and feasible. However, there are still shortcomings in the analysis of sample representativeness, control of college students' group characteristics, and the interaction of cohort effect paths in this paper. We hope to further improve the research based on stratified sampling, increasing the control variables of group characteristics, and interac-

tion term analysis in the follow-up work.

## Research Project

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# The Evaluation of the Cultural Contents in the English Textbook for Non-English Major Students: A Case Study at Independent College in China

**Jing Zhao**\*

Yunnan Medical Health College, Kunming, Yunnan, 650033, China

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the existing General English textbook focusing on the cultural contents to enhance the intercultural awareness cultivation of Non-English major students in China. The findings of this study can provide the valuable information of cultural contents adaptation in the textbook. It also can reveal teachers' expectation and their awareness of teaching General English together with integrating cultural contents. Apart from the textbook analysis, 10 English teachers participated in the study. Data were collected using New Century College English Zooming In: An Integrated English Course, checklist, and in-depth interview. The findings from the checklist verified that the cultural contents of the existing textbook are insufficient. Moreover, the in-depth interview uncovered that though the cultural contents appear in the textbooks, however, they are somewhat minimal expressions that deficient to support the effective intercultural cultivating. Based on the results of the analysis and exploration, this study provides a guidance on the types of intercultural content to be adapted in this course. The findings of this study can be beneficial to the intercultural textbook adaptation for academic institutes and individuals interested in the field of English language teaching and learning.

## 1. Introduction

In the globalization age, English is widely used as an international language all over the world. It is used in several countries categorized as Inner Circle countries where English is spoken as the first language such as United Kingdom, the U.S.A., Australia, etc. Outer Circle countries are the countries where English is used as a second language such as the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, etc. Expanding Circle countries are the countries where English is studied as a foreign language such as Japan, Germany, China, etc. <sup>[1]</sup>. The corresponding classification of language, cultural contents are divided into three types

as well: Source Culture, Target Culture, and International Culture <sup>[2]</sup>. English is used in cross-cultural interaction contexts among people from many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds <sup>[3]</sup>. Song and Bai (2018) revealed that along with such accelerated process of world integration, English, as the most widely tool, plays an active role in the information exchange of various contexts <sup>[4]</sup>. Based on the theories of linguistics development, more and more language teachers and scholars are becoming aware of the language teaching and culture teaching both as quite essential components in language education process. In other words, they cannot be taught separately. To be a proficiency English speaker, it is required not only linguistics

*\*Corresponding Author:*

Jing Zhao,

Yunnan Medical Health College, Kunming, Yunnan, 650033, China;

Email: [jingzhao1209@qq.com](mailto:jingzhao1209@qq.com)

competence, but also intercultural competence since language and culture are inseparable. Thus, teaching a variety of cultural contents should be advocated and intercultural awareness should be fostered taught with the target language in order that the learners' intercultural competence could be enhanced to support for smooth communication in the different cultural backgrounds.

Effective language learning is inseparable from the aid of qualified teaching materials. Therefore, textbooks are one of the vital materials presented in the language classroom as a resource both for the linguistic contents and culture <sup>[5]</sup>. However, the teaching efficiency might still be weak due to various <sup>[6]</sup>. Tomlinson found that there are two main reasons causing in efficient teaching. First, nowadays, many teaching materials in the market are written and published in order to meet the commercial purposes without the awareness on students' need. Second, the editors normally write the materials merely according to their own preferences and on the demands of their institutes. The real requirements of students and their actual language levels are always ignored <sup>[7]</sup>. In fact, there are several methods that can promote the teaching efficiency; making evaluation of teaching material is one of the most useful approaches to solve the problem. Steele (2018) <sup>[25]</sup> restated that it is crucial and necessary for teachers to evaluate materials before using in the class <sup>[8]</sup>. They must be aware whether the selected materials can fulfill the learning needs of students or not. Therefore, teachers play a significant role in choosing and using course books. Their perceptions and opinions of cultural contents in textbooks are very valuable information. However, a number of language teachers lack of the professional skills to choose and evaluate what type of the intercultural teaching materials that are suitable to their practical implementation. This may be because their intercultural knowledge is insufficient <sup>[9]</sup>.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 The Relationship between Language and Culture

What we see and hear in our daily lives is influenced by the language we applied. Language is a tool to assist communication. People use it to inform, chat, request, express, persuade, exchange and to try to make their expressions be understood by others. Meanwhile, language cannot be merely regarded as a communicative tool, but it also should be considered as a record of culture <sup>[10]</sup>. People record the historical developments of human life and natural phenomena experience using language. Kramsch <sup>[13]</sup> claimed, "...language is the principal means whereby

we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways...". From other perspectives, language is also as one of the most crucial sign that can distinguish us from animals. Language even shapes our consciousness that strongly impact on our lives. In such a multicultural world where people perform and share diverse identities, language is not only a part of definition of culture, but it also reflects culture as well.

### 2.2 "Big C" Culture and "Small C" Culture

The definition of culture in the academic world is quite complicate and it is difficult to make a clear explanation. The first effort to the definition of culture was made by Sir Edward B. Tylor who coined the first definition of culture. In his book *Primitive Culture*, culture was defined as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." <sup>[11]</sup>

Even the notion of culture is hard to be explained, it should be clearly defined so that student can be aware of it, master it and implement it with individuals from the different cultural backgrounds. There is a distinction between what he called " 'Big C' culture which concerns cultural domain including history, geography, politics, economics, and literature, of the country of the target language. By contrast, 'small c' culture," in the meantime, he defined it as "any cohesive social grouping" such as linguistic behaviors connected with typical oral communication in people's social interaction <sup>[12]</sup>. Coincidentally, Xiao also divided the type of culture into "Big C" culture and "small c" culture. Breaking "Big C" culture apart from nine components which refer to politics, economy, history, geography, literature or art, social norms, education, architecture and music; in terms of the cultural topics under the umbrella "small c" culture which contains seven cultural elements: "food, holiday, lifestyles, customs, values, hobbies and verbal expressions" <sup>[13]</sup>.

The normally cultural issues in the textbook related to "Big C" culture which is clearly designed by a curriculum because "Big C" culture can easily be perceived and it is convenient for teachers to inform in the classroom. On the contrary, "small c" culture refers to those cultural factors with much deeper and invisible sense which is difficult to acquire and master in such short class time. However, individual's intercultural behavior is influenced by "small c" culture which may particular be presented as an anecdotal, peripheral, or supplementary way, depending on the interest and perception of teachers and students <sup>[14]</sup>. In response to the phenomenon, the contents for the intercultural teaching materials should make a balance between

the factors of “Big C” culture and “small c” culture. These two major types of culture must be presented equally in the language class that can equip students with deeper understandings of intercultural knowledge so that they can communicate with other cultural communities more appropriately and efficiently <sup>[15]</sup>.

### 2.3 Source Culture, Target Culture and International Culture

According to Cortazzi & Jin <sup>[3]</sup>, there are three categories of cultural contents contained in the most existing textbook. They categorized the cultural contents based on diverse cultural subordination:

Source culture materials refer to the textbooks which present students’ own culture. The main purpose of this category of textbooks is tend to foster the ability for students to communicate their own culture with foreigners rather than be prepared to encounter other cultures. The implementation Source Culture materials as a foundation are beneficial to the effective learning on the target culture because students might not feel totally isolated from their familiar social backgrounds <sup>[16]</sup>. They can acquire the multicultural factors naturally through the comparison on their own cultures and the target cultures to identify both similarities and differences between cultures in order to obtain better and solid understandings.

Target culture materials usually focus on one or two target cultures. In China, such target cultural teaching materials are usually stressed on the culture of UK and America. It is not surprising since the two countries are the main inner circle countries of English language where most of the English commercial textbooks are published from. However, we must admit that target cultural teaching materials are the crucial facilitator in the target cultural learning process.

International culture materials refer to other cultural categories which are neither containing in the Source Culture nor include in the Target Culture. Cortazzi & Jin illustrated that the rationale for such cultural category is that students who are not the native speakers or do not speak the target language as their first language frequently but they need to implement the target language in some certain of international situations. The importance of integrating International Cultural factors into the textbook is common recognized since we live in such a multicultural world. But in the matter of fact, this type of textbook is rare in the market and also it is insufficient implemented in the classroom as well.

Consequence, integrating other cultural contents into a language teaching process is necessary since this will also develop students with the complete personalities. In that

case, not only their own cultural background, and possible settings of target culture should be considered, but also the whole range of various cultures and cultural factors should be provided. Thus, it could be one of the most estimable criteria to appraise the qualification of language textbook.

### 2.4 Materials Evaluation

Teaching material is one of the main mediator which is implemented for the mission. Nowadays, there are various textbooks in the market that need to be examined on its qualification, to identify whether they are suitable for the target students or not before <sup>[7]</sup>. Teachers should evaluate their existing teaching materials in order to make sure the suitability of the teaching materials can be applied to support the effective teaching process, which has positive impact on students’ learning of the English Language <sup>[18]</sup>. Therefore, evaluation of teaching materials highlights particularly important. Cunningsworth referred that materials evaluation as the core process of measuring the expectation of the teachers and students, methodological preferences, and the perceived needs and levels of students together with the curriculum requirements. It is also vital to evaluate whether the materials are suitable with students’ personality. Therefore, implementing a quality teaching material can guarantee the success of curriculum. Teaching materials evaluation should be run through the entire teaching process so that the weaknesses in the materials can be revealed and improved in time. Thus, there are three types of materials evaluation: “Preliminary, Summative, and Formative” formed by Robinson which can be guided in the materials evaluation process <sup>[19]</sup>. In this study, the researcher utilized Preliminary Evaluation type to evaluate the degree of intercultural contents in the actual English textbook for the General English Course since it refers to the evaluation process that measure pre-existing knowledge, determine demands of some specific issues, and it quite suitable to the situation in this study.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Independent College in China

Since 1999, Independent College has been a new type of higher education resulted from the heavy burden of public educational system due to a large number of populations in China. According to the official data released by the Chinese Ministry of Education, by the year of 2019, there were 817 public undergraduate colleges, while there were 417 Independent Colleges in China. The Independent College has founded to be beneficial to increase

opportunities for more people to ensure that they can receive higher education and achieve their goals. The government authorized the established Independent College that means well for the nation-base education. However, insufficient qualified teaching resources and lower than national admission criteria are common situations among these new institutes due to lack of the financial support by the government.

### 3.2 Subjects

The materials evaluation in this study was conducted by 10 experienced English teachers. They have more than five years teaching experiences and they are responsible for teaching General English Course for the non-English major students. These 10 teachers were chosen to evaluate the materials because they have been using the textbook for teaching the General English Course. They all have master degree in Applied Linguistics on English language teaching.

### 3.3 The Evaluation of the Existing Textbook

In order to identify the inadequacy of intercultural contents in the actual textbook, the researcher evaluated the textbook to examine the infusion of the intercultural contents of each unit entitled New Century College English Zooming In. This textbook is designed for General English Course developed for Non-English major students, which will be used as the teaching material in the academic year 2020. This textbook has been selected as the main teaching resource for the General English Course because it is one of the most popular teaching material which is widely used for non-English major college students around China.

The structure of the textbook consists of 8 theme-based units. The content of these units covers topics ranging from manners, interpersonal relationship, gender, communication, and other good qualities and characters which contemporary college students should be cultivated. Thus it can be seen that the main teaching objective of the textbook is merely to enhance the target students' linguistic competence and promote their moral awareness. However, the intercultural contents are insufficient. Each unit is comprised of six sections which are:

**Get Started** serves as a warm-up activity to activate students' existing knowledge and to encourage them to share their personal experiences or opinions on the topic of the unit;

**Listen and Respond** introduces topics through listening activity and conduct listening training;

**Read and Explore** includes two passages with the sim-

ilar themes but are presented in different ways. Students' reading skills on global reading and intensive reading will be trained in this section;

**Optional Classroom Activities** provide students with an autonomous environment to learning, teacher implements these optional activities in the classroom according to the teaching conditions and the actual situations of the students;

**Enhance Your Language Awareness** focuses on the linguistic competence training, such as lexical, syntax, grammar, and translation;

**Enjoy English** creates a relaxing atmosphere with short poems, humors, and jokes for students to read by themselves after the class.

According to the opinions of the target teachers and the researcher's own teaching experience, it is noteworthy that although the components of the textbook seem to serve the whole teaching process, the half of sections (2, 4 and 6) are generally ignored in the class since the teaching period is very limited. Meanwhile, based on the results of the evaluation, the researcher also found that the intercultural teaching rationale and objectives are not addressed for specific students. Moreover, the target culture is not introduced clearly and the cultural topics and the relevant sufficient details are not provided. In addition, the distribution of world culture is uneven. Also, activities and teaching aids are insufficiently provided and inappropriate implemented. Besides, other intercultural contents seem to appear in the existing textbook, however, it has no introductions or guidance on the implementation process. Moreover, all these teaching sections in each unit are expected to cover 4-5 class periods with only 40 minutes per period. Therefore, there is too limited teaching time to cover the intercultural teaching except the other linguistic skills training in the class.

### 3.4 Evaluation Checklist

The researcher asked 10 full-time teachers with more than 5 years English teaching experience working in the target college to evaluate the actual textbook particularly focusing on intercultural contents based on the "Guidelines to Evaluate a Textbook" which is designed by Kilickaya<sup>[20]</sup>. According to the guideline, the researcher adopted the evaluation checklist and distributed the checklist to the respondents. The evaluation checklist includes 25 items:

Question 1-5: Rationale and Objective.

Question 6-20: Cultural Materials.

Question 21-22: Class Activities and Cultural Activities.

Question 23-25: Teaching Aids.

The criteria scale ranging from 1 to 5 with 1 represent-



ing very dissatisfied, 2 representing dissatisfied, 3 representing neutral, 4 representing satisfied, and 5 representing very satisfied. Table 1 illustrated the corresponding values for the 5-Likert scale, interpretation for the researcher's perception of the intercultural element contains in the actual textbook of these values, and the data analysis scores used for inferential statistics:

**Table 1.** Criteria Scale for the Researcher Evaluation Checklist

The respondents' perceptions on the actual textbook	Range
Very Dissatisfied	1.0- 1.50
Dissatisfied	1.51 - 2.50
Neutral	2.51 - 3.50
Satisfied	3.51 - 4.50
Very Satisfied	4.51 - 5.00

### 3.5 The Interview

In order to explore the deeper reasons of the target teachers' choices in the checklist, especially for those items in the Neutral scale or lower, the researcher conducted an interview with the following questions:

1. Which item is insufficient intercultural resource in the textbook?
2. Why do you choose Neutral scale on these items?
3. Why do you choose Disagree scale on these items?
4. Is learning about the culture of the target language important? Why or why not?
5. Is it important to learn about the cultures of other countries? Why or why not?

The results of the interview were used to support and explain the findings from the checklist.

## 4. Findings and Discussions

In order to fulfill the purposes of this study, the intercultural content of the existing textbook was evaluated by 10 teachers according to the "Guidelines to Evaluate a Textbook" checklist which is designed by Kilickaya. The findings are shown in Table 2.

### 4.1 The Description of the Results

#### 4.1.1 Rationale and Objectives

For the intercultural rationale and objectives of the existing textbook, the evaluation showed that the total average mean scores of teachers' perception was 2.64 in the scale of 2.51-3.50 meaning that the teachers' perception on the intercultural rationale and objectives of the existing textbook was regarded as neutral.

Among these five items, the teachers rated the highest mean on the part mentioning that they could know their roles during the teaching process based on some suggestions given by the existing textbook ( $M=2.97$ ,  $SD=0.63$ ). While both the part on the textbook address for the specific learners and its clarification of the target language culture were ranked the lowest ( $M=2.45$ ,  $SD=0.97$ ). To be more specific, they felt neutral on the guidance gained from the textbook. Moreover, they felt dissatisfied on the insufficient introduction about the target language culture that they need to teach and the demands of specific learners are not considered.

Furthermore, in order to explore a deeper understanding of the reasons why the teachers made such decision on the intercultural rationale and its objectives of the existing textbook, the researcher conducted an interview on

**Table 2.** The Teachers' Evaluation on Intercultural Contents in the Existing Textbook

A. Rationale and Objectives	SD	Mean	Interpretation	Group Avg	Interpretation Avg
1. The textbook gives information, instruction or suggestions about how the book may be used and how the cultural content may be handled.	1.15	2.83	Neutral	2.64	Neutral
2. The textbook addresses specific learners and there are specific characters of the learners that the book addresses.	0.97	2.45	Dissatisfied		
3. The textbook suggests some roles for teachers in teaching.	0.63	2.97	Neutral		
4. The textbook clearly introduces the target language culture.	0.97	2.45	Dissatisfied		
5. The textbook does not include generalizations about the culture (i.e. it informs the audience of the fact that what is true for one part is not necessarily true for the other parts).	0.67	2.52	Neutral		

A. Rationale and Objectives	SD	Mean	Interpretation	Group Avg	Interpretation Avg
B. Cultural Materials	SD	Mean	Interpretation	Group Avg	Interpretation Avg
6. The cultural language used in the textbook is comprehensible to EFL learners.	1.27	3.3	Neutral	2.72	Neutral
7. The Textbook promotes active student participation to communicate different values (i.e. mannerism, and courtesy).	0.79	2.98	Neutral		
8. The cultural content includes generalization about the target culture(s).	0.67	3.06	Neutral		
9. The textbook presents various cultural topics and themes.	0.82	2.53	Neutral		
10. The textbook provides cultural topics in each and every lesson in all units.	0.57	1.96	Dissatisfied		
11. The textbook provides sufficient details and information about the cultural topics.	0.7	2.25	Dissatisfied		
12. The textbook includes variety of the world culture.	0.63	2.6	Neutral		
13. The textbook includes just specific cultures such as American or British culture.	0.7	3.15	Neutral		
14. The textbook represents real target language culture not the author's view.	0.79	2.98	Neutral		
15. The textbook does not provide any topics that might not be culturally suitable for the learners in class.	0.95	2.54	Neutral		
16. The textbook provides adequate coverage of a variety of people and this is not limited to chosen people.	0.74	2.89	Neutral		
17. The cultural information is not presented with comments such as being good or bad.	0.92	2.63	Neutral		
18. The textbook advocates certain cultural values.	0.82	2.8	Neutral		
19. The textbook provides a balanced view of world culture.	0.7	2.43	Dissatisfied		
20. The textbook engages learners in cultural topics.	0.57	2.69	Neutral		
C. Class Activities and Cultural Activities	SD	Mean	Interpretation	Group Avg	Interpretation Avg
21. Learners are given opportunities to use their language ability to discuss cultural issues.	1.05	2.82	Neutral	2.54	Neutral
22. The cultural activities provide students with opportunities to participate in games, songs, celebrations, sports, or entertainment representative of the foreign culture.	0.7	2.25	Dissatisfied		
D. Teaching Aids: Illustrations, Exercises, workbook & Supplementary Materials.	SD	Mean	Interpretation	Group Avg	Interpretation Avg
23. The illustrations are self-explanatory and appropriate to learners' native culture.	0.92	2.63	Neutral	2.59	Neutral
24. The characters represent different nationalities, countries, and the local society.	0.52	2.41	Dissatisfied		
25. The illustrations tell us about the values of the social groups who adopt them.	0.88	2.72	Neutral		

those items. The teachers' responses are exactly the same. Though the contents seem to appear in the textbooks, they are somewhat minimal expressions which are insufficient to support the effective intercultural teaching.

### 4.1.2 Cultural Materials

For the cultural materials, the results showed that the total average mean scores of teachers' perception was 2.72, in the scale of 2.51-3.50, according to the criteria of interpretation, it meant the teachers' perception on the cultural materials of the existing textbook was regarded as neutral.

Among these fifteen items, the teachers rated in the highest mean on the cultural language used in the textbook is comprehensible to EFL learners ( $M=3.30$ ,  $SD=1.27$ ) and the lowest mean on the textbook provides cultural topics in each and every lesson in all units ( $M=1.96$ ,  $SD=0.57$ ). To be more specific, they felt dissatisfied on the involvement of cultural topics in the existing textbook which is insufficient to provide the cultural information to the teaching and learning in all units.

Furthermore, in order to explore a deeper understanding of the reasons why the teachers made such decision on the cultural materials of the existing textbook, the researcher interviewed the teachers on those 15 questions. The question of interviewing is on the reason of choosing a neutral attitude on these items. The teachers' responses are exactly the same that the provided content is not enough to support the effective intercultural teaching.

### 4.1.3 Class Activities and Cultural Activities

For the class activities and cultural activities, the findings showed that the total average mean scores of teachers' perception was 2.54, in the scale of 2.51-3.50, according to the criteria of interpretation, it meant the teachers' perception on the class activities and cultural activities of the existing textbook was regarded as neutral.

Among these two items, the teachers rated in the highest mean on the item that the students are given opportunities to use their language ability to discuss cultural issues ( $M=2.82$ ,  $SD=1.05$ ) and the lowest mean on the cultural activities provide students with opportunities to participate in games, songs, celebrations, sports, or entertainment representative of the foreign culture ( $M=2.25$ ,  $SD=0.70$ ). This can be interpreted that they felt dissatisfied on the chances provided just for students to acquire the target culture during the language class. For the item on the chances for students to perform what they have learned on linguistic competence, they reported that this part was in the textbook. However, there is no guidance and the teaching period is limited, so they cannot implement the

activities in the class.

The analysis from the interview presents deeper understanding of the reasons why the teachers made such decision on the class activities and cultural activities of the existing textbook. The teachers' responses are exactly the same. Class activities have been prepared and provided in the class focusing only on students' linguistic competence without cultural activities.

### 4.1.4 Teaching Aids

For the teaching aids such as illustrations, exercises, workshop and supplementary materials, the results showed that the total average mean of teachers' perception was 2.59 in the scale of 2.51-3.50 meaning that the teachers' perception on the teaching aids of the existing textbook was regarded as neutral.

Among these three items, the teachers gave the highest score on the illustrations about the values of the social groups who adopt them ( $M=2.72$ ,  $SD=0.88$ ). However, the lowest score was rated on the characters representing different nationalities, countries, and the local society ( $M=2.41$ ,  $SD=0.52$ ). To be more specific, they felt dissatisfied on the internationalization and the diversification of the teaching aids. Meanwhile, they indicated that the illustrations in the textbook were sufficient. However, they have no idea how to relate them or utilize them in the teaching process.

Furthermore, in order to explore a deeper understanding of the reasons why the teachers made such decision on the cultural materials of the existing textbook, the researcher interviewed them. The teachers' responses are the same, because these teaching aids appear in the textbooks, however, they are insufficient to support the effective intercultural teaching.

## 4.2 Results and Discussion

Apart from the textbook evaluation, this study provides a guidance to the types of intercultural content that could be adapted in an EFL textbook used in a General English Course at college with the goal of cultivating non-English major students' intercultural awareness and improve their intercultural competence as well. The findings of this study can be beneficial to the intercultural teaching materials adaptation for academic institutes and individuals that are interested in the field of English language teaching and learning. In particular, teachers can use the results contributed by this study as a guideline in choosing or evaluating EFL textbooks. With the preceding findings found in this study, the following recommendations were forwarded.

### 4.2.1 Rationale and Objectives

According to the findings of this study, the teachers felt neutral on the intercultural teaching rationale and objectives of General English Course for the non-English major students. In order to respond to this result, meanwhile, considering that the textbooks are chosen by the school, most teachers have no right to decide which textbooks they prefer to use. Therefore, the teacher might try to flexibly adjust the teaching procedures, create more intense cultural activities to motivate the students to participate. Moreover, they should supply more suitable explanations about how to make a good use of the intercultural factors listed in the textbook to assist both teachers and students to master the intercultural part well during learning the target language.

### 4.2.2 Cultural Materials

According to the findings of this study, the teachers made neutral attitude toward the cultural materials of General English Course for the non-English major students was indicated. Consequence, the types of cultural materials must be considered carefully when teachers try to evaluate or develop the language teaching materials. As mentioned by Lee (2009), the cultural topics under “Big C” culture and “small c” culture must be presented equally. Besides, source culture, target culture, and international culture also should be involved in the cultural teaching process so that students can acquire the multicultural issues while learning the foreign language. In that case, merely specific culture or just focus on superficial cultural knowledge learning can be effectively avoided.

### 4.2.3 Class Activities and Cultural Activities

According to the findings of this study, the teachers felt neutral on the class activities and cultural activities of General English Course for the non-English major students were found. Teachers noted that sufficient class activities are provided in the language classroom, however, most of the activities merely stress on students’ linguistic development, a few tasks for their intercultural awareness or their intercultural competence. Therefore, in order to cultivate students’ intercultural awareness and improve their intercultural competence, not only activities for the target language are provided, but also the tasks for the target culture must be enhanced. In addition, no matter the class activities or the cultural activities should not merely limit to the learning of two mainstream cultures, but the infiltration of multiculturalism that can really improve the intercultural competence of students.

### 4.2.4 Teaching Aids

According to the findings of this study, the teachers felt neutral on the teaching aids of General English Course for the non-English major students was illustrated. Therefore, various types of teaching aids such as illustrations, exercises, and workshop and supplementary should be integrated into the teaching procedure in order to enhance the intercultural learning become more effective. Moreover, the students’ local culture cannot be ignored when they eager to develop their intercultural sense. That is to say, having a better understanding on their own culture can help them accept other different culture smoothly.

### 4.3 The Guideline of the New Teaching Material

To respond to the evaluation findings of this study, a guideline is advocated by the researcher to design the new teaching material in order to cultivate the students’ intercultural awareness and improve their intercultural competence. The specific procedures are as follows: 1) identify the needs and levels of the target students; 2) explore the language, meaning, functions and skills; 3) decide the type of the contexts; 4) produce the exercises, activities and teaching approaches; 5) adapt the new teaching material; 6) apply the pilot study before the material implementation; and 7) evaluate the new teaching after use <sup>[21]</sup>.

The principles of the new material contain both “Big C” culture and “small c” culture as well. The teaching objectives are as follows: 1) understand their own culture and the target culture they are dealing with; 2) increase their intercultural awareness of the different culture issues in some certain of given situations; 3) show willingness to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds; 4) collect and analyze the message across effectively in all social contexts; and 5) enable students to be aware of the target culture and to inspire the perception of empathy on the people who live in different cultures.

The new teaching material contains 7 units, and each unit takes 90 minutes with three steps which are pre-class (30 mins) to collect the background information of the international culture; in-class (30 mins) to discuss the cultural content and provide the relevant intercultural activities; after-class (30 mins) to quiz the intercultural skills by the given situation, and the results of each quiz will be recorded as one of the assessment of the students to evaluate the effectiveness of the intercultural teaching materials.

## 5. Conclusions

This study provides insights into the cultural content of an EFL textbook used in General English Course at Independent College in China. The college’s management



or English teachers can use the results of this study as a guidance in evaluation process before they choose EFL textbook. In addition, the study can raise the teachers' awareness of the importance of cultural content in language teaching. According to Xiao's statement (2010), the target language cultural teaching was great significant for language learners. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance knowledge about the target language cultural in order to communicate successfully.

Moreover, this study can be extended even further to select the type of teaching materials that can be utilized for the non-English major students to promote intercultural communicative competence. Moreover, further study should be conducted on the analysis of various textbooks by higher number of respondents both teachers and students. The researcher believes that it would be significant and interesting to further study in the intercultural field since it has been accepted that language demonstrates more importance in today's increasingly diverse and inter-connected world. It is hoped that this study would inspire more researches and collaboration and systematic exploration that will further enrich the knowledge of intercultural competence and language teaching.

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