

Chinese Undergraduates' Perception of the Integration of Chinese Minority Culture in EFL Classes

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중국 대학생들의 EFL 수업에서 중국 소수민족 문화 통합에 대한 인식

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Abstract This study was conducted to investigate students' perception of the integration of Chinese ethnic minority culture into the college EFL teaching which was carried out in the fall and spring semesters with different presentation topics. One and the same questionnaire was distributed to 61 participants, involving Han Chinese and Chinese ethnic minority students, at a university in ethnic minority area in China at the end of each semester, and SPSS 20.0 was used for t-test to analyze the data. The research results showed that Chinese undergraduates have got more significant improvements in cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes, and multi-cultural values in the spring semester than those in the fall semester. All participants benefit a lot from multi-cultural activities without significant differences between Han Chinese and ethnic minority students in both semesters. It is suggested that ethnic minority culture be integrated into the college EFL teaching, along with English culture and Chinese mainstream culture, which be administered as a practical teaching mode to develop students' intercultural competence.

Key Words : college EFL teaching, integration of ethnic minority culture, cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes, multi-cultural values

요 약 본 연구는 가을과 봄 두 학기에 각각 다른 발표 주제를 가지고 진행되었던 EFL 수업에서 중국 소수민족 문화의 통합에 대한 중국 대학생들의 인식을 조사하기 위해 시행되었다. 중국 소수민족 지역의 한 대학 61명 한족과 중국 소수민족 대학생들을 대상으로 설문조사를 진행하였고 데이터 분석에 t-검정 방법이 사용되었다. 연구 결과 학생들이 문화 인지, 정서, 태도, 다문화 가치관 등 방면에서 가을 학기보다 봄 학기에 더 높은 향상을 이룬 것으로 나타났다. 한족과 중국 소수민족 대학생들 그룹간의 차이 없이 문화 인지, 정서, 태도, 다문화 가치관 등 방면에서 진보를 가져왔다. 나아가 중국 소수민족 문화를 영어문화, 중국 주류문화와 함께 대학 EFL 수업에 통합하고 학생들의 문화 간 의사소통능력 축진을 위한 실질적인 교육 모드로 운영할 것을 제안하였다.

주제어 : 대학교 EFL 수업, 소수민족 문화 통합, 문화 인지, 정서, 태도, 다문화 가치관

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1. Introduction

In the face of the challenge of globalization, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching in China is gradually more focused on broadening international vision and cultivating intercultural communication competence. It is suggested that college students be responsible for spreading Chinese culture to the world, and promoting extensive exchanges with people all over the world[1].

In China, there are 56 ethnic groups including Han nationality and 55 ethnic minority groups, all of whom have a long traditional culture. Chinese ethnic minority culture is embodied in Chinese culture, since Chinese culture is the unity of Han mainstream culture and Chinese minority culture, with the rich and colorful minority culture being indispensable part of Chinese culture[2]. College students undertake the task of spreading Han mainstream culture and ethnic minority culture as well. All students from different ethnic groups learn to respect and appreciate other cultures, establish the self-consciousness of national equality, and cultivate their intercultural competence for national unity[3].

A founder of multi-cultural education, Banks (2010) stresses that in a multi-cultural nation and world, it is essential that students need the knowledge, skills and values that will enable them to live, interact, and make decisions with fellow citizens from different racial, ethnic, cultural, language, and religious groups[4]. In multi-cultural education in Chinese context, the cultural essence or characteristics of the ethnic minorities should be integrated into the existing curricula in schools to reflect multi-cultural perspectives, and help all students (both Han Chinese and ethnic minority students) develop their abilities and attitudes in cognition, skills and emotions[5].

Accordingly in college EFL teaching, especially

for the universities in ethnic minority areas, the integration of ethnic minority culture, along with Chinese mainstream culture and English culture needs to be taken into consideration, and the investigation about the subsequent change of undergraduates' cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values is necessitated. Nevertheless, the integration of ethnic minority culture in EFL teaching has not been drawn enough attention to and few studies have been conducted on students' perception of the integration of minority culture.

To address the concerns, this study attempts to investigate Chinese undergraduates' perception of the integration of minority culture into college EFL teaching in two semesters, firstly exploring whether the integration of ethnic minority culture in college EFL teaching has a significant effect on students' cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values during two semesters; secondly discussing whether there are significant differences between Han Chinese and ethnic minority students in their cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values during two semesters.

We hope that the findings of research help improve the effectiveness of culture education in EFL teaching, and develop college students' intercultural competence by offering some insight into a practical teaching mode.

2. Literature Review

In China, integration of culture into college EFL teaching has been widely recognized and highly valued. Instead of merely inputting grammar and language knowledge, EFL teaching tends to pursue the integration of culture into college English teaching. However, EFL teaching mainly focuses on the introduction of British and American culture, lack of integrative traditional Chinese culture, and rarely involves Chinese

minority culture.

Aiming at the predicament confronting EFL education for minority nationalities, Wu, Xie and Ding (2017) points out that silence of minority cultures is one factor impeding the cultural interaction, and foreign language education in minority areas should be enhanced in terms of ecological environment of education, cultivating open multi-cultural outlooks, incorporating minority culture into the teaching[6]. Chen (2013) states that foreign language education for minority students should pay attention to how to express minority cultures in foreign languages, and at the same time, the ethnic minority cultural elements should be strengthened so that EFL learners consciously make a comparative analysis between their own culture and other cultures, and finally realize the multi-cultural consciousness[7]. Su (2017) argues that minority college students should be guided to understand and interpret their own cultural history in the process of learning English as well as foreign language culture, as to build a rich cultural context and realize the multi-cultural identity. It is further proposed that teachers integrate English culture, Chinese mainstream culture and ethnic minority culture into EFL curriculum concerning instructional content, implementation and evaluation to improve ethnic minority students' multi-cultural identity[8].

Research on distinctive minority culture for specific ethnic minorities in EFL teaching is drawn attention to. A study on Mongolian minority students reveals that lack of Mongolian culture is serious in EFL teaching and advise enhancing the infiltration of mother tongue culture from the perspectives of improvement of teachers' cultural literacy, textbook compilation and extracurricular activities[9]. Similar findings by Wu (2016) indicates that low recognition of Mongolian culture, lack of English vocabulary, weak cultural awareness of teachers and insufficient attention to Mongolian culture in EFL

education for Mongolian college students have led to the phenomenon of the native cultural aphasia[10]. Yin (2015) discusses that the integration of Tujia ethnic culture into EFL teaching is conducive to the inheritance and development of national culture by integrating attentively—selected content of Tujia culture into EFL instruction, developing English teaching materials about their native land, and training instructors[11]. Research on Zhuang ethnic culture shows that Zhuang students seriously lack the understanding of their native culture and do not express their own culture in English. The concrete methods to infiltrate Zhuang culture into college English teaching are proposed, such as compiling Zhuang culture-based school teaching materials, setting up Zhuang culture general courses, developing the second class of Zhuang culture, and infiltrating English vocabulary about Zhuang culture into college English class consciously[12].

However, in spite of intended observations and investigations on minority culture in EFL teaching, the empirical research has not been intensively carried out. Few studies have involved Han Chinese and ethnic minority students as study subjects, and taken account of combining Chinese minority culture with English culture and Han Chinese mainstream culture, and investigated students' perception, such as their cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values.

This paper aims to explore how Chinese undergraduates, involving Han Chinese and ethnic minority students, perceive the integration of minority culture into college EFL teaching in the fall semester and spring semester during which multi-cultural activities have been held respectively with different topics. The following research questions are discussed.

1. Does the integration of minority culture into college EFL teaching have a significant effect on students' cultural cognition, emotions,

attitudes and multi-cultural values during the fall and spring semesters?

2. Are there significant differences between Han Chinese and ethnic minority students in their cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values during the fall and spring semesters?

3. Research Methods

3.1 Participants

The participants of the study were non-English major sophomores from YB University in Jilin Province, China, where the students with different cultural and ethnic background coexist. Based on convenience sampling, 61 students who took English as a compulsory course were selected, 34% of whom were male, 66% were female; 77% being Han Chinese and 23% being ethnic minority students, including Korean, Mongolian, Manchu, Hui, Tujia, Miao, Zhuang nationality.

3.2 Research Design

The experiments on the integration of minority culture into college EFL teaching were carried out in the fall and spring semesters, lasting for 3 weeks each semester, during which different topics were discussed and summarized by group presentations.

In the fall semester, the topic was the festivals and holidays from English countries, Han Chinese and ethnic minority people. Western festivals and holidays in English speaking countries were introduced by the instructor in class such as St Patrick's Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, New Year's Eve, Easter, Labor Day, Fourth of July, and Valentine's Day.

Chinese traditional festivals and ethnic minority festivals were left to the students to give group presentations. They were provided with

related materials, with Chinese traditional festivals consisting of the Spring Festival, the Lantern Festival, the Qingming Festival (Tomb-Sweeping Day), the Dragon Boat Festival, the Double Seventh Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Double Ninth Festival, and the ethnic minority festivals comprising Water-splashing Festival of Dai nationality, Nadam Fair of Mongolian nationality, Torch Festival of Yi nationality, Danu Festival of Yao nationality, Third Month Fair of Bai nationality, Antiphonal Singing Day of Zhuang nationality, Tibetan New Year of Zang nationality, Jumping Flower Festival of Miao nationality and 60th birthday of Korean nationality. Each group was assigned tasks to choose one of Chinese traditional festivals and one ethnic minority festival by drawing lots, or choose other festivals autonomously. Their presentations should contain the date of the festival, the legend of the festival, the celebrations during the festival, and special food of the festival.

The topic in the spring semester focused on food culture. Learning materials from English countries, Han Chinese and ethnic minority groups were selected for students to use, with the titles Cooking and Cuisines, Chinese Food, Development of Food Cooking, The Pleasure of Eating, The World's Healthy Food Culture, Interesting Food Customs of Ethnic Minorities. Each group determine one passage by drawing lots to avoid overlapping topics between groups, and prepared for their presentation in four aspects: analysis of text structure, introduction of key words and expressions, questions for discussion and words quiz.

The participants were divided into several groups previously, with about 4-5 students in each group who were expected to cooperate closely to investigate and discuss their issue, getting timely support from the instructor, and submit their final report Power Point on schedule before the presentations. For the assessment of their report, scoring criteria and detailed

requirements were worked on including preparation, delivery, time, and participation.

3.3 Analysis Method

The questionnaire modified from the questionnaires of Xiao, Xiao, Li & Song (2010)[13] and Liao & Chen (2011)[14], with some revisions made by adding and deleting a few questions for the purpose of research. The questionnaire was measured on a 5-point Likert scale according to the choices of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree to determine students' perception of the integration of ethnic minority culture in college EFL teaching.

It contained 16 questions about cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values. The integration of minority culture into college EFL teaching was conducted in the fall and spring semesters, with the same questionnaire distributed to the participants at the end of each semester. SPSS 20.0 was used for t-test to analyze the data.

4. Research Results & Discussion

4.1 Students' Perception of the Integration of Minority Culture into College EFL Teaching in Two Semesters

4.1.1 Students' Cultural Cognition, Emotions, Attitudes and Multi-cultural Values in the Fall and Spring Semesters

Paired samples t-test analysis was applied to assess the change of students' perception of the integration of minority culture into college EFL teaching in the fall semester and the spring semester (Table 1). Results showed that there were statistically significant differences in students' cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values across the time occasions.

Students' cultural cognition scores in the fall semester were significantly different from those

in spring semester ($t=-2.22$, $df=60$, $p<0.05$). The average score in the spring semester (4.02) was significantly higher than that in the fall semester (3.85). Significant differences occurred in other factors as well, the emotions ($t=-4.90$, $df=60$, $p<0.05$), attitudes ($t=-2.67$, $df=60$, $p<0.05$), and multi-cultural values ($t=-2.26$, $df=60$, $p<0.05$), with the emotions mean difference (-.43) being the most distinctively higher than the other factors. In general, the scores of students' cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values increased with the advance of education time.

Table 1. Comparison of Students' Perception for Fall and Spring Semester

Factor	Fall (N=61)		Spring (N=61)		MD	t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Cultural Cognition	3.85	.64	4.02	.46	-.17	-2.22*
Emotions	3.05	.52	3.48	.72	-.43	-4.90*
Attitudes	3.68	.60	3.91	.55	-.23	-2.67*
Multi-cultural Values	4.11	.56	4.27	.43	-.16	-2.26*

* $p<0.05$

4.1.2 Students' Cultural Cognition in the Fall and Spring Semesters

Table 2. Comparison of Students' Cultural Cognition for Fall and Spring Semester

Factor	Question	Fall (N=61)		Spring (N=61)		MD	t
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Cultural Cognition	1 I have mastered knowledge about English culture.	3.66	1.09	4.13	.62	-.48	-3.23*
	2 I have increased knowledge about Chinese mainstream culture.	4.13	.74	4.05	.64	.08	.74
	3 I have learnt knowledge about ethnic minority culture.	3.80	1.01	4.10	.57	-.30	-2.37*
	4 I could express briefly Chinese culture in English.	3.75	.93	3.62	.64	.13	1.18
	5 I have mastered English words about Chinese culture.	3.89	.80	4.21	.55	-.33	-2.26*

* $p<0.05$

Further analysis was illustrated by way of paired sample t-test to compare the change of

variables in two semesters.

In terms of cultural cognition (Table 2), the findings indicated that the scores of Question 1, 3 and 5 were significantly higher in the spring semester than those in fall semester.

4.1.3 Students' Emotions in the Fall and Spring Semesters

As far as students' emotions were concerned (Table 3), the enhancement of students' confidence in learning English (Question 7) and the reinforcement of their patriotism (Question 8) were the items showing statistically significant improvement from the fall semester to the spring semester.

Table 3. Comparison of Students' Emotions for Fall and Spring Semester

Factor	Question	Fall (N=61)		Spring (N=61)		MD	t
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Emotions	6 Cultural activities promoted cooperation among us.	2.69	.90	2.72	1.23	-.03	-1.19
	7 Cultural activities enhanced our confidence in learning English.	2.39	.74	2.84	1.07	-.45	-3.09*
	8 Cultural activities reinforced our patriotism.	2.80	.79	4.15	.57	-1.35	-11.30*
	9 Cultural activities enlarged our global vision.	4.30	.76	4.20	.51	0.10	1.03

* $p < 0.05$

4.1.4 Students' Attitudes in the Fall and Spring Semesters

Table 4. Comparison of Students' Attitudes for Fall and Spring Semester

Factor	Question	Fall (N=61)		Spring (N=61)		MD	t
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Attitudes	10 Cultural activities were interesting.	4.23	.69	4.08	.53	.15	1.54
	11 I have sincerely prepared for cultural activities.	3.44	1.04	3.84	.78	-.39	-3.06*
	12 I have actively participated in cultural activities.	4.02	.81	4.15	.60	-.13	-1.00
	13 I felt satisfied with the results of cultural activities.	3.03	.95	3.56	.98	-.52	-3.32*

* $p < 0.05$

With regard to students' attitudes (Table 4), the scores of Question 11, students' sincere preparedness for cultural activities, and Question 13, their satisfaction with the results of the project in the fall semester were significantly different from those in the spring semester.

4.1.5 Students' Multi-cultural Values in the Fall and Spring Semesters

Regarding multi-cultural values (Table 5), there appeared significant difference only in Question 15, the enrichment of multi-cultural understanding, with the mean of 3.90 in fall and 4.18 in spring, suggesting that the score of multi-cultural understanding in the second semester was significantly higher than that in the first semester.

Table 5. Comparison of Students' Multi-cultural Values for Fall and Spring Semester

Factor	Question	Fall (N=61)		Spring (N=61)		MD	t
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Multi-cultural Values	14 Cultural activities enhanced multi-cultural awareness.	4.13	.79	4.31	.59	-.18	-1.33
	15 Cultural activities enriched multi-cultural understanding.	3.90	.91	4.18	.59	-.28	-2.73*
	16 Cultural activities improved multi-cultural competency.	4.30	.69	4.33	.57	-.03	-.375

* $p < 0.05$

4.2 Han Chinese and Ethnic Minority students' Perception: Cultural Cognition, Emotions, Attitudes and Multi-cultural Values

Independent samples t-test was used to investigate the impact of ethnic identity on the integration of ethnic minority culture into college EFL teaching in the fall and spring semesters (Table 6). Results demonstrated that Han Chinese students were not significantly different from ethnic minority students on cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and values in both semesters. However, with the passage of time, the average scores of both Han students

and minority students showed an upward growth trend on four factors over two semesters, indicating that students had achievements to some extent. As for multi-cultural values, the mean scores of two groups in both semesters maintained over 4 all the time which was much higher than those of other factors, suggesting that cultural activities brought quite positively remarkable influence on students multi-cultural awareness, understanding and competency.

Table 6. Comparison of Han Chinese and Ethnic Minority for Fall and Spring Semester

Factor	Semester	Han Chinese (N=47)		Ethnic Minority (N=14)		MD	t
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Cultural Cognition	Fall	3.86	.68	3.80	.50	.06	.31
	Spring	4.01	.47	4.06	.45	-.04	-3.11
Emotions	Fall	3.00	.52	3.18	.49	-.17	-1.10
	Spring	3.49	.73	3.43	.73	.06	.28
Attitudes	Fall	3.68	.63	3.68	.46	.00	.13
	Spring	3.88	.58	4.00	.45	-.12	-.73
Multi-cultural Values	Fall	4.11	.57	4.12	.53	-.01	-.74
	Spring	4.26	.45	4.33	.37	-.08	-.59

* $p < 0.05$

5. Conclusion & Implications

This paper has investigated college undergraduates' perception of the integration of ethnic minority culture into college EFL teaching in the fall and spring semesters, keeping track of students' change in cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes, and multi-cultural values.

The comparisons of average scores in two semesters prove that students have made significantly great improvement in their cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values from the fall semester to the spring semester.

In terms of cultural cognition, students' knowledge of English culture, ethnic minority culture, and mastery of English words about Chinese culture increase significantly from the fall semester to the spring semester. With regard

to students' emotions, enhancement of students' confidence in learning English and reinforcement of their patriotism show significant improvement from one semester to the other. As to students' attitudes, students' sincere preparedness for cultural activities and their satisfaction with the cultural activities in the spring semester indicate significantly higher progress than that in the fall semester. In the aspect of multi-cultural values, the enrichment of multi-cultural understanding presents students' higher improvement in the spring semester than that in the fall semester.

The results of the impact of ethnic identity on the integration of ethnic minority culture into college EFL teaching in both semesters demonstrate that there are no significant differences between Han Chinese and ethnic minority students in their cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values. Han students and minority students have made achievements, and above all they have got remarkable outcomes in multi-cultural values with much higher scores than other variable in both semesters.

Considering the improvement of students' cultural cognition, emotions, attitudes and multi-cultural values, the integration of ethnic minority culture into college EFL teaching yield significantly different results which proved feasible and effective. The results had some implications that ethnic minority culture could be integrated into the college EFL teaching, as well as English culture and Chinese mainstream culture, which can be used as a practical teaching mode to promote students' intercultural competence and be administered along with other methods. It was consistent with the findings proved by Liu (2018) that the intercultural competence is malleable and can be augmented through purposeful learning and training[15].

Evans so, we acknowledge that the investigation is restricted by the absence of English materials about ethnic minorities.

Another limitation comes from relatively a small sample, suggesting our future study should be extended to a larger area including college undergraduates from universities in different provinces and areas. In addition, this qualitative research is limited to the questionnaire surveyed by the participants, which could be combined with interview for more reliable research. Future research is needed to remove these limitations though the study has accumulated valuable experience and inspiration for multi-cultural integration into EFL teaching in the future.

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