The Impact of Cultural Background on Second Language Acquisition: Teaching Methods and Effectiveness

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Abstract. In recent years, the effectiveness of second language acquisition has earned widespread scholarly attention, yet research on improving pedagogical approaches and learning outcomes from cultural perspectives remains insufficient. This paper examines the multidimensional impact of cultural background differences on both teaching methodologies and efficacy in second language acquisition. The analysis reveals that cultural values (e.g., collectivism vs. individualism) significantly influence classroom interaction patterns and student engagement; the choice of pedagogical approaches—whether standardized language instruction or contextualized immersive teaching reflects distinct emphases on linguistic accuracy and communicative competence, respectively; traditional educational concepts (such as "respect for teachers and reverence for knowledge") shape perceptions of teacher-student roles and instructional behaviors. Regarding acquisition outcomes, learners from diverse cultural backgrounds exhibit notable differences in language knowledge mastery, practical application skills, and learning motivation. Based on these findings, this study proposes enhancing teachers' cultural sensitivity, promoting contextualized and integrated teaching strategies, and fostering inclusive classroom environments to facilitate the synergistic development of intercultural understanding and linguistic proficiency.

Keywords: Cultural Background, Second Language Acquisition, Teaching Methodology, Intercultural Communication

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, the significance of second language (L2) learning continues to grow worldwide. Against this background, traditional pedagogical approaches increasingly reveal their limitations when facing learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, proving inadequate in addressing varied learning needs and cognitive differences across cultural contexts. Consequently, the student-centered teaching philosophy has gradually become a central direction in L2 educational reform. Kumaravadivelu's post-method pedagogical theory further underscores this shift, asserting that effective foreign language instruction should be grounded in three fundamental parameters: particularity, practicality, and possibility, with particular emphasis on learners' socio-cultural backgrounds and agency [1]. Within this framework, integrating students' cultural diversity into instructional design is not only a theoretical necessity but also holds substantial practical relevance. This study aims to systematically analyze the manifestations of cultural background differences in

L2 classrooms, compare the acquisition outcomes among learners from varied cultural contexts, and delve into the underlying causes. Furthermore, it proposes effective strategies for incorporating cultural factors into L2 teaching practices, with the goal of fostering a more inclusive and open learning environment. Spanning multiple disciplines, including linguistics, education, and sociology, this research aims to broaden the perspective of second language acquisition through a cultural perspective. It offers educators a practical framework for implementing culture-informed pedagogy, thereby enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of L2 instruction and promoting the organic integration of international education and localized practices.

2. The impact of cultural background differences on second language acquisition teaching methods

2.1. The influence of cultural values on classroom interaction patterns

Cultural values have a subtle influence on the interaction between teachers and students in the second language classroom. The contrast between collectivist and individualist cultural concepts is particularly prominent. In Asian cultures where collectivism prevails, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, emphasis is placed on harmony, collaboration, and consensus within the group, with priority given to the collective interests. Therefore, students rely on group identification and tend to avoid expressing their personal opinions openly to avoid conflicts or highlighting themselves. On the contrary, Western countries, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, place more emphasis on individualism, encouraging individual expression, critical thinking, and active participation. As a result, students' participation in the classroom is usually more frequent and direct.

These cultural differences significantly affect students' performance in group activities. Badawi mentioned that Japanese culture places a strong emphasis on maintaining a quiet classroom environment, viewing it as a manifestation of respecting teachers and fostering harmonious co-existence. In contrast, Western classrooms tend to encourage students to engage in discussions and debates [2]. Due to the influence of collectivist culture, students may be more inclined to undertake group tasks that are collaborative and have clear role divisions. However, in situations requiring independent speaking or debating, they tend to be more passive. They usually place greater emphasis on maintaining the integrity of the group rather than expressing their individual opinions. In an individualist culture, students are accustomed to viewing group discussions as a platform to showcase their personal abilities and viewpoints. The interaction and communication are more active, and they are even willing to challenge others' opinions.

2.2. Emphasis on standardized foreign language teaching vs. contextualized teaching

Cultural background also profoundly influences the selection and implementation of teaching methods. Some educational systems, particularly those deeply influenced by structuralist linguistics and emphasizing efficiency and unified standards, tend to adopt the "standardized" foreign language teaching model. Taking English teaching in China as an example, as Yan mentioned, "English as a subject has significantly heightened its importance in most parts of the country, especially in urban areas. Gradually, Chinese parents prioritize the practical benefits of a language over its cultural significance at large" [3]. English was incorporated into the compulsory education curriculum in 1986 and became a required subject for students' further education. Under the exam-oriented education system, learning English is regarded as a means to obtain high scores rather than a way to understand foreign cultures. Therefore, when teaching English, schools focus on the three essential

elements of language (phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar), emphasizing the systematic imparting of language knowledge and mechanical drills. Classroom activities mainly involve repetition, memorization, and formal exercises, aiming at achieving high scores. The advantage of this model lies in its clear knowledge system and ease of assessment, but it tends to overlook the actual usage context of the language, resulting in students' lack of communicative competence despite their mastery of language rules.

In contrast, in high-context cultures or educational systems that value communicative competence, more context-based and immersive teaching methods are widely adopted. These methods use the second language as a communication bridge, emphasizing its use in real or simulated situations. For instance, through drama performances, scenario simulations, task-based activities, or project-based learning, the language is integrated into meaningful communication processes. As Bessadet mentioned, "Drama, as a tool for English language teaching, highlights the inherent connection between the cognitive and emotional aspects of language learning, namely the interactive relationship between thinking and emotions. By engaging in language learning through drama practice, learners can train themselves in both the target language and para-language communication, achieving the integration of cognition and emotion" [4]. This not only enhances students' learning motivation and participation but also helps them internalize the relationship between language forms and functions through experience.

These two teaching orientations reflect different cultural cognitive patterns: one pursues clear, controllable, and systematic knowledge transmission, while the other values experience, interaction, and cultural output. In actual teaching, teachers should not lean towards either extreme but rather integrate the two based on learners' cultural backgrounds and teaching objectives to balance accuracy and fluency.

2.3. The shaping of teaching practices by traditional educational concepts

As a crucial component of the cultural background, traditional educational concepts continuously influence teaching behaviors and the role expectations of teachers and students in second language classrooms. Taking East Asia as an example, the concept of "respecting teachers" in Confucianism has profoundly shaped the educational landscape. Teachers are regarded as authorities of knowledge and moral exemplars, while students are expected to maintain a humble and respectful attitude, mainly listening and accepting in class rather than actively asking questions or raising doubts. Albertson noted that Japan emphasizes student responsibility and stewardship. They also value silence in classrooms as a sign of respect for teachers, which promotes harmony and leads to different expectations for classroom management practices [5]. Although this concept is beneficial for maintaining classroom order and the authority of teachers, it may also suppress students' critical thinking and initiative in language learning. Similarly, influenced by the "exam-oriented education" culture, the focus of teaching often lies on the accuracy of language knowledge and exam-taking skills rather than the cultivation of practical communication abilities. Standardized and unchanging principles are highly advocated. Students tend to pursue "correct answers" and fear making mistakes, thus avoiding participating in open-ended or exploratory language activities. In the face of these cultural constraints, teachers can gradually stimulate students' initiative through deliberate instructional design and help them transform from passive recipients to active learners.

3. Differences in second language acquisition outcomes caused by different cultural backgrounds

3.1. Differences at the level of language knowledge

At the level of language knowledge, particularly in terms of grammatical accuracy and vocabulary size, learners from cultural backgrounds that emphasize "examination-oriented education" often exhibit significant advantages. Taking the East Asian cultural circle (such as China, Japan, and Singapore) as an example, the education systems in these regions highly value language accuracy, systematic knowledge transmission, and written test abilities. Learners typically excel in mastering grammar rules and memorizing vocabulary. This advantage is particularly evident in standardized tests (such as the grammar and reading sections of TOEFL and IELTS). The underlying cultural and educational concept is that the rigorous mastery of language forms is regarded as an important basis for academic rigor and learning effort.

However, this excessive emphasis on language forms may also lead to the rigidity of the knowledge structure. Learners are often good at answering questions with fixed-form knowledge points but may encounter difficulties in tasks that require flexible language output. "Research findings indicate that despite having a solid vocabulary, all the respondents' Chinese accents have, to a certain extent, affected the clarity of their pronunciation. Moreover, their oral expressions are also lacking in coherence and logic." [6]. Therefore, despite the obvious "knowledge advantage", if this advantage cannot be transformed into application ability, its sustainability and practical value will be limited.

3.2. Disparities at the language application level

Compared with the language knowledge level, at the language application level, especially in terms of oral fluency and pragmatic competence, learners from cultural backgrounds that emphasize communication and individual expression generally perform better. Educational systems in Europe, America, and some Western countries commonly stress the effectiveness of communication, the fluency of language expression, and the flexibility of context adaptation. Learners in these regions are more accustomed to negotiating meaning in real or simulated real-life situations rather than pursuing absolute correctness in language forms. In contrast, some Asian countries show relative deficiencies in language application. As Fang pointed out, "Although high school students in China are exposed to various Englishes, they do not have opportunities to use them in their daily lives outside classroom settings" [7].

The level of oral fluency is not only related to the frequency of practice but also closely associated with the cultural attitude towards errors. Amoah and Yeboah noted that Chinese learners encounter oral problems when learning English due to psychological barriers such as low self-confidence, fear of being evaluated negatively, high levels of anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low motivation [6]. In a classroom environment that encourages risk-taking and tolerates errors, learners are more willing to attempt using more complex sentence structures and vocabulary, thereby accelerating the process of language internalization. Conversely, in cultures that highly emphasize accuracy, learners may adopt "conservative strategies" out of fear of making mistakes, using overly simple or repetitive language forms, which restricts the development of fluency.

In addition, pragmatic competence involves the mastery of social and cultural rules. During the process of second language learning, there is an exchange and collision of two cultures. Learners need to face up to these cultural differences and enhance their understanding of foreign cultures to

facilitate international communication and cooperation. If learners lack an understanding of the cultural context of the target language, they may commit pragmatic errors or even offend others, even if their grammar is correct. For example, directly expressing disagreement is considered rude in some cultures, while it is regarded as a sign of sincerity and confidence in others. Therefore, pragmatic competence is not merely a language issue but also a matter of cross-cultural understanding.

3.3. Differences at the level of learning initiative

Learning initiative is a crucial psychological dimension that influences the long-term effectiveness of second language acquisition. Cai and Xiang mentioned that "self-efficacy was indirectly related to English achievement through engagement", which encompasses important aspects such as motivation orientation, self-efficacy, and anxiety level. These factors are significantly shaped by cultural backgrounds [8].

In terms of motivation types, learners from different cultural backgrounds often exhibit distinct preferences. Some learners mainly demonstrate "instrumental motivation", with the primary goals of passing exams, obtaining qualifications, or achieving career advancement. Others show more "integrative motivation", tending to identify with the target language culture and seek cross-cultural communication and integration. The former can usually bring about strong test-taking performance and knowledge accumulation in the short term, while the latter is more conducive to maintaining long-term learning interest and promoting the development of comprehensive language application abilities.

Regarding self-confidence and anxiety experience, the influence of cultural concepts on learners' psychological states is particularly significant. In cultural environments that highly value "face" and avoid public mistakes, learners are more likely to experience classroom anxiety. Especially in tasks that require immediate responses or public expressions, they often show avoidance and silence. This anxious state not only restricts language output but also further leads to a reduction in practice opportunities and a slowdown in language ability development, thus intensifying anxiety and forming a negative cycle of self-avoidance.

In contrast, in cultural environments that encourage experimentation and view mistakes as an integral part of the learning process, learners typically display stronger self-confidence and a greater willingness to participate. They are more willing to actively interact and bravely use the language, thereby obtaining more corrections and feedback to promote the continuous development of language abilities. As Bai, Nie, & Lee stated, "The higher students' perceived value, self-efficacy, and interest in English learning tasks are, the stronger their engagement and self-regulatory abilities during the learning process will be." However, some viewpoints suggest that "Asian teachers may pay more attention to students' actual performance in tasks, while students' interest and self-efficacy are often not fully valued in the classroom." [9]. Therefore, in addition to teaching the language itself, teachers should also focus on the construction of the psychological environment. Especially in cultural backgrounds with a high tendency towards anxiety, they need to strive to create a free, supportive, and harmonious classroom atmosphere to help learners establish positive self-cognition and emotional regulation strategies.

4. Pedagogical insights and recommendations

Given the multidimensional influence of cultural backgrounds on second language acquisition methods and outcomes, teachers and educational institutions should adopt more inclusive and

targeted teaching strategies while respecting cultural differences to achieve truly effective cross-cultural language education. Specifically, teaching practices can be optimized in the following aspects:

Firstly, teachers should enhance their cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural awareness. Creating an inclusive multicultural learning environment in second language teaching practice is crucial for improving students' learning outcomes. As Eden, Chisom, & Adeniyi stated, "Employing a variety of instructional methods that cater to different learning styles and cultural preferences can enhance inclusivity in the classroom and foster a sense of belonging and engagement." Identifying and understanding the learning behavior characteristics of students from different cultural backgrounds is the foundation for implementing differentiated teaching [10]. For instance, for students from high-context and high power distance cultural backgrounds, teachers should establish a relaxed and inclusive classroom environment, gradually introduce student-centered activities, and guide students to participate in interactions, rather than forcing them to immediately integrate into a highly interactive classroom. Teachers can provide students with multiple ways of expression, such as anonymous questions, in-group speaking, and written feedback, to reduce their psychological anxiety. Meanwhile, teachers should clearly convey the concept that "mistakes are a natural part of the learning process" in the classroom. Through self-demonstration and positive feedback, they can help students, especially those from "error-avoiding cultures," gradually develop a positive learning attitude.

Secondly, teaching strategies should emphasize the organic combination of knowledge transmission and contextual application. In particular, the role of scenario-based teaching in promoting cultural understanding and in-depth language learning should be fully exploited. As Dell Hymes mentioned, "To be a good language user, grammar structure and vocabulary are not enough; they should also be applied for oral purposes" [11]. Especially in teaching environments with high requirements for language forms, teachers can design additional pragmatic tasks that fit real-life contexts, such as situational dialogues, role playing, and project inquiries, so that students can master grammar and vocabulary in meaningful communication and gain a deeper understanding of the cultural connotations of the target language. Numonova also suggested that "The ability of students to use language should be identified and evaluated through both oral and written tasks, rather than solely examining their isolated grasp of grammar knowledge" [12]. For example, after explaining grammar structures, teachers can guide students to practice through drama performances or debate activities, which can not only enhance their confidence in language output and expression ability but also help them understand pragmatic rules and social customs. On the other hand, even in classrooms that emphasize fluency and communicative functions, timely guidance and summaries of language forms should be incorporated to prevent students from remaining at a superficial level of communication, thus achieving a balanced development of language accuracy and communicative function.

Finally, educators should promote the establishment of a "culture-integrated" teaching environment. A classroom is not merely a place for language input but also a practical platform for cross-cultural understanding and communication. Teachers can organize students to discuss topics related to cultural differences, guide them to reflect on the influence of their own cultural behavior patterns on learning, and gradually adjust their learning strategies. Moreover, teachers need to consider cultural background differences when designing classroom interactions. In a collectivist culture, highly cooperative tasks such as project-based learning can be gradually implemented to reduce individual expression pressure. In an individualist environment, forms like debates and impromptu speeches can be more frequently adopted to give full play to students' strong willingness

to express. Meanwhile, Andrin suggested that in borderless learning environments, content is often distributed across various platforms, enabling learners to independently choose materials from a rich repository of resources [13]. Digital media is becoming a key force in reshaping traditional education. By leveraging technological tools (such as virtual communication communities and language learning applications), students can be provided with opportunities to have real interactions with native speakers of the target language, thereby enhancing their confidence and motivation in language use.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, cultural background profoundly influences the teaching methods and learning outcomes of second language acquisition. This influence is not only reflected in the differences in language knowledge and application abilities but also in students' learning motivation, confidence, and cross-cultural communication skills. In the future, second language teaching should pay more attention to the integration of cultural factors, promote the development of culture-integrated teaching strategies among teachers, and establish a cross-cultural learning environment supported by technology, to truly achieve the simultaneous improvement of language proficiency and cross-cultural literacy. Further research can focus on the application of digital teaching resources in cross-cultural language education and the in-depth differences in the learning psychological mechanisms of students from different cultural backgrounds.

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