

International Journal of Social Science and Education Research



ISSN Print: 2664-9845
ISSN Online: 2664-9853
Impact Factor: RJIF 8.42
IJSSER 2025; 7(2): 625-634
www.socialsciencejournals.net
Received: 23-08-2025
Accepted: 25-09-2025

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Evaluating intercultural awareness and competence in middle school English education: A perspective based on china's compulsory education curriculum standards

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26649845.2025.v7.i2h.413>

Abstract

This review explores the importance and key elements of cultivating and assessing intercultural awareness and competence in middle school English teaching in China, with a particular focus on integrating the Chu culture of Jingzhou, Hubei. Drawing on the definitions of scholars such as Byram (1997) ^[5] and Deardorff (2006) ^[9], and based on the requirements of the new curriculum standards, this paper examines the definitions of intercultural awareness and competence in the Chinese context, highlighting their significance in education. Additionally, the review analyzes the new curriculum standards' requirements for intercultural education, emphasizing the integration of cultural content and the challenges faced during implementation, such as teacher preparedness and resource availability. The article discusses effective teaching methods, including project-based learning and intercultural dialogues, and emphasizes comprehensive teacher training and the selection of culturally rich teaching materials. Various assessment methods are also explored, including self-assessment questionnaires, behavioral observation, situational judgment tests, and combined assessment methods. Finally, the review advocates for the use of multiple assessment methods to comprehensively evaluate students' intercultural competence.

Keywords: Intercultural Awareness, Intercultural Competence, the new curriculum standards (2022)

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

In today's globalized world, the ability to understand and interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds is increasingly important. Intercultural awareness and competence are crucial skills for fostering mutual respect and understanding in a multicultural society. According to Byram (1997) ^[5], intercultural competence involves not only language proficiency but also the ability to navigate cultural differences. Deardorff (2006) ^[9] emphasizes that intercultural competence is essential for effective communication in a globalized context. These competencies are also highlighted by Fantini (2009) ^[11], who discusses the role of intercultural skills in effective international interactions.

China's Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards (2022) highlight the importance of cultivating students' intercultural communication skills. The curriculum aims to develop students' understanding of diverse cultures and their ability to engage in intercultural communication. This is in line with the UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2006), which stress the need for education systems worldwide to promote intercultural understanding and respect.

In the Chinese context, scholars such as Zhang Hongling (2007) emphasize the importance of integrating intercultural competence into language education. Zhang (2007) argues that understanding and appreciating cultural diversity is essential for students' overall development. Similarly, Gu (2016) discusses the challenges and opportunities in implementing intercultural education in China, noting the need for effective assessment tools to measure students' progress in this area. Despite the clear importance of these skills, there is a gap in effective measurement tools and methods for assessing intercultural awareness and competence among middle school students in China.

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This literature review aims to explore existing research and methods for evaluating these competencies within the context of China's education system.

1.2 Research Objectives

Based on the background and importance, the primary objectives of this review are to summarize key definitions and theoretical frameworks related to intercultural awareness and competence, examine current measurement tools and methods used in both international and Chinese educational contexts, identify gaps and challenges in assessing intercultural competencies among Chinese middle school students, and propose recommendations for effective measurement strategies that align with China's educational standards and international guidelines.

Specifically, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these competencies can be effectively measured to enhance curriculum development, instructional practices, and educational outcomes in the context of China's middle school English education.

2. The Definition and Importance of Intercultural Awareness and Competence

2.1 The Definition of Intercultural Awareness

Intercultural awareness refers to the understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities. Byram (1997) ^[5] defines it as the ability to recognize the ways in which culture influences behavior, communication, and perceptions. This involves understanding both one's own culture and other cultures, and the ability to view one's culture from an outsider's perspective. Deardorff (2006) ^[9] extends this definition by emphasizing the importance of sensitivity to cultural nuances and the ability to adapt one's behavior in culturally appropriate ways.

Chen and Starosta (1996) propose that intercultural awareness consists of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. The cognitive component involves knowledge of cultural norms and values, the affective component includes attitudes such as empathy and respect, and the behavioral component encompasses the skills to act appropriately in intercultural contexts. Similarly, Kramsch (1993) ^[17] describes intercultural awareness as the ability to understand the "third place" between cultures, where individuals can mediate and negotiate meanings.

Zhang (2007) highlights that in the Chinese context, intercultural awareness also includes recognizing the historical and societal factors that shape cultural identities. This broader perspective helps students develop a more comprehensive understanding of global cultures. Furthermore, Gu (2016) suggests that intercultural awareness in the Chinese education system should focus on fostering respect and understanding for cultural diversity, as it is essential for students' holistic development.

Integrating these scholarly perspectives with the Curriculum Standards (2022), intercultural awareness in the Chinese educational context can be defined as the understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities, including knowledge of cultural norms, values, and historical and societal factors. This involves cognitive, affective, and behavioral components that emphasize empathy, respect, and appropriate action in intercultural contexts. The Curriculum Standards (2022) aim to foster a deeper understanding of global cultures and promote sensitivity to cultural nuances, aligning with the holistic

development goals of Chinese education. This comprehensive approach ensures students develop the necessary skills to navigate and appreciate cultural diversity, thereby preparing them for effective global citizenship.

2.2 The Definition of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006) ^[9]. This competence involves more than just language proficiency; it includes the ability to interpret and relate cultural contexts, mediate conflicts, and adapt one's behavior to different cultural settings.

Over the years, scholars have conducted extensive research on intercultural competence from various perspectives. Although there were disagreements among scholars on the definition of intercultural competence in the 1970s and 1980s, there has been a growing consensus over the past two decades. For example, Chen and Starosta (1996) define intercultural competence as the ability to perform communication behaviors effectively and appropriately to achieve desired responses in a specific environment. Byram (1997) ^[5] emphasizes that developing intercultural competence requires students to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical intercultural awareness related to intercultural communication in the European model.

Spitzberg (2000) ^[21] posits that intercultural competence comprises knowledge, motivation, and skills, which are interrelated and interdependent. Campinha-Bacote (2002) ^[7] introduces five interdependent components for developing intercultural communication competence: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skills, cultural encounters, and cultural desire. Fantini (2000) suggests that intercultural competence includes four aspects: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness, noting that "behavioral effectiveness" relates to communication competence, while "behavioral appropriateness" pertains to cognitive competence.

Kim (2001) ^[16] asserts that intercultural competence consists of cognitive, affective, and behavioral abilities, which are interconnected and mutually influential. Lustig and Koester (2010) ^[18] emphasize three key components of intercultural competence: communication and environment, appropriateness and effectiveness, and knowledge, motivation, and actions, highlighting the dependence of intercultural competence on the "relationship and environment in which communication occurs." Samovar and Porter (2004) categorize intercultural competence into motivation, knowledge, and skills. Deardorff (2006, 2009) ^[9] outlines that intercultural competence includes elements from individual-level knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes to expected external and internal outcomes at the interaction level. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) ^[22] summarize the core components of intercultural competence, including knowledge, skills, motivation, effectiveness, and appropriateness.

Integrating these scholarly perspectives with the Curriculum Standards (2022), intercultural competence in the Chinese educational context can be defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical awareness. The Curriculum Standards (2022) emphasize the development of practical intercultural communication skills, enhancing language proficiency,

cultural knowledge, and adaptive abilities. This comprehensive approach ensures that students are well-equipped to navigate diverse cultural settings and contribute to a globalized world, reflecting the multifaceted nature of intercultural competence as defined by scholars.

2.3 The Importance of Intercultural Awareness and Competence in Education

The importance of intercultural awareness and competence in education cannot be overstated. Byram (1997) ^[5] argues that these skills are essential for fostering global citizenship and promoting mutual respect among diverse populations. Intercultural competence enables students to navigate and thrive in multicultural environments, which is increasingly important in today's globalized world.

Deardorff (2006) ^[9] and Fantini (2009) ^[11] both emphasize that intercultural competence enhances students' ability to work effectively in international settings. According to Gudykunst (2003) ^[12], intercultural competence contributes to better intercultural relationships and improved communication in diverse teams. Jackson (2019) ^[15] suggests that intercultural competence helps students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are valuable in both personal and professional contexts.

Zhang (2020) notes that in China, intercultural education helps students develop a global perspective, which is crucial for the country's international engagement and cooperation. Gu (2016) supports this view, highlighting that intercultural competence is vital for fostering understanding and cooperation between China and other countries.

Hu (2015) further argues that intercultural awareness and competence are not only important for individual students but also for the broader educational system. By promoting these competencies, schools can create more inclusive and respectful learning environments that benefit all students.

The Curriculum Standards (2022) integrate intercultural education as a core component, recognizing its role in preparing students for global citizenship and international cooperation. This aligns with the broader educational goals of fostering intercultural competence and awareness, ensuring that students are equipped with the skills needed to navigate and thrive in a multicultural world.

2.4 The Relationship of Intercultural Awareness and Competence

Intercultural awareness and competence are closely related yet distinct concepts. Intercultural awareness serves as the foundation for developing intercultural competence. Byram (1997) ^[5] explains that without an awareness of cultural differences, individuals cannot develop the skills needed to navigate intercultural interactions effectively. Deardorff (2006) ^[9] further elaborates that intercultural awareness is a critical component of intercultural competence, as it informs and guides the development of appropriate attitudes and behaviors.

Fantini (2009) ^[11] suggests that intercultural competence is an advanced stage of intercultural awareness, where individuals not only recognize cultural differences but also possess the skills to engage with them constructively. Bennett (1993) ^[3] emphasizes that developing intercultural competence involves moving from ethnocentric to ethnorelative stages, where individuals become more open and adaptable to different cultures. Emphasizes that cultivating intercultural awareness is the first step towards

achieving comprehensive intercultural competence in the Chinese educational context. He argues that awareness of cultural differences helps students develop the skills and attitudes necessary for effective intercultural communication. Similarly, States that intercultural awareness provides the necessary foundation for students to develop the deeper competencies required for meaningful intercultural interactions.

The Curriculum Standards (2022) highlight the sequential relationship between intercultural awareness and competence, ensuring that students first develop a deep understanding of cultural differences, which then serves as the basis for building practical intercultural skills. This approach aligns with the definitions provided by scholars, ensuring that students are well-prepared for effective and appropriate intercultural communication.

3. Requirements of Intercultural Education in China's Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards

3.1 Overview of the new curriculum standards (2022)

The latest Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards in China, updated by the Ministry of Education in 2022, emphasize a comprehensive approach to education that includes not only academic knowledge but also the development of key competencies required for personal development and social participation in a globalized world. These standards aim to foster students' holistic growth, incorporating moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education. A significant aspect of these standards is the inclusion of intercultural education, recognizing the need to prepare students to engage effectively in a diverse and interconnected global society.

The New Curriculum Standards (2022) emphasize the importance of understanding and respecting cultural diversity. The curriculum seeks to develop students' abilities to communicate and collaborate across cultural boundaries, fostering a sense of global citizenship. This aligns with the principles outlined by UNESCO (2006), which stress the need for education systems to promote intercultural understanding, respect, and dialogue.

The New Curriculum Standards (2022) highlight the core literacy of cultural awareness, which includes understanding and appreciating cultural diversity, as well as developing the ability to interact effectively in a multicultural environment. This component is crucial for students to develop a comprehensive worldview and become competent global citizens.

3.2 Specific Requirements for Intercultural Awareness and Competence in the New Curriculum Standards

The Curriculum Standards (2022) detail specific requirements for the development of intercultural awareness and competence, particularly in the context of English language education. These requirements are designed to ensure that students not only learn the language but also develop the necessary skills to navigate and appreciate cultural differences.

- **Intercultural Awareness:** The Curriculum Standards (2022) emphasize the need for students to gain knowledge about different cultures, including their customs, traditions, values, and social norms. This knowledge should be incorporated into the curriculum content, teaching materials, and classroom activities. Incorporating cultural knowledge into various aspects

of education helps students build a solid foundation for intercultural understanding. As Byram (1997)^[5] suggests, intercultural awareness involves understanding the relationships between different cultural perspectives and being able to critically reflect on one's own cultural assumptions. This reflection is essential for students to recognize their own cultural biases and develop a more balanced view of the world.

- **Intercultural Competence:** Beyond awareness, the New Curriculum Standards (2022) call for the development of practical skills necessary for effective intercultural communication. This includes language proficiency, the ability to interpret and relate cultural contexts, and the skills to mediate and negotiate meanings across cultures. Developing these practical skills is vital for students to interact successfully in diverse cultural settings. Deardorff (2006)^[9] highlights that intercultural competence encompasses attitudes of openness and respect, knowledge of cultural differences, and the skills to interact appropriately and effectively in diverse cultural settings. These components ensure that students are not only aware of cultural differences but also equipped to handle intercultural interactions in a respectful and effective manner.

Specifically, the Curriculum Standards (2022) emphasize several key areas for developing intercultural competence. First, enhancing students' English language skills is crucial for facilitating better communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. This improvement in language proficiency is complemented by integrating cultural content into language lessons, which provides students with a deeper understanding of global cultures. To further strengthen their intercultural competence, the standards encourage students to critically analyze cultural differences and reflect on their own cultural identities, fostering critical thinking skills. Additionally, practical communication skills are developed by providing opportunities for students to practice intercultural communication through activities such as role-plays, discussions, and projects that involve cultural exchange. This comprehensive approach ensures that students are well-equipped to navigate and appreciate cultural diversity in a globalized world.

Supporting this framework, Fantini (2009)^[11] argues that these components are essential for developing a well-rounded intercultural competence that allows students to function effectively in a multicultural world. Furthermore, Zhang (2020) emphasizes that integrating these elements into the curriculum helps students develop a more profound understanding of cultural diversity and equips them with the necessary skills for global interactions.

3.3 Current Implementation and Challenges of the New Curriculum Standards

Despite the comprehensive framework provided by the New Curriculum Standards (2022), the implementation of intercultural education in Chinese middle schools faces several challenges.

- **Teacher Preparedness:** Points out that professional development programs focusing on intercultural education are essential to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to implement the curriculum

effectively. Therefore, one of the primary challenges is the lack of adequate training and resources for teachers. Many educators may not have the necessary background or experience to effectively teach intercultural competencies.

- **Curriculum Integration:** Integrating intercultural education into existing subjects can be challenging. Teachers may struggle to find the right balance between covering the required academic content and incorporating intercultural elements. Additionally, there may be limited availability of culturally diverse teaching materials that align with the curriculum standards.
- **Assessment and Evaluation:** Measuring intercultural awareness and competence is complex, and there is a lack of standardized assessment tools. Fantini (2009)^[11] argues that effective assessment methods are crucial for evaluating students' progress and the impact of intercultural education programs. However, the current focus on high-stakes testing in China may limit the attention given to developing and implementing such assessments.
- **Cultural Attitudes and Stereotypes:** Overcoming deeply ingrained cultural attitudes and stereotypes is another significant challenge. Students and teachers alike may hold biases or preconceived notions that can hinder the development of intercultural understanding. Therefore, Byram (1997)^[5] emphasizes the importance of fostering an environment that encourages open-mindedness and critical reflection on cultural assumptions.

In conclusion, while China's Compulsory Education Curriculum Standards (2022) provide a robust framework for integrating intercultural education, the practical implementation faces several hurdles. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from educators, policymakers, and the broader educational community to ensure that students are equipped with the intercultural skills needed for success in a globalized world.

4. Cultivating Intercultural Awareness and Competence in Middle School English Teaching

4.1 Educational Goals and Curriculum Design

The educational goals for intercultural awareness and competence in middle school English teaching are to foster students' understanding of different cultures and to develop their ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. According to Byram (1997)^[5], the aim is to equip students with the skills needed to interact appropriately and effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This involves not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to understand and respect cultural differences. In achieving these goals, it is essential to consider both the global and local contexts, ensuring that students are well-prepared for intercultural interactions in various settings.

The New Curriculum Standards (2022) emphasize the integration of cultural content into the English curriculum to enhance students' intercultural communicative competence. These standards highlight the importance of developing students' awareness of cultural diversity and their ability to engage in intercultural communication. The curriculum design should therefore include clear objectives that

promote cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and intercultural skills. This includes not only understanding cultural norms and values but also developing critical thinking skills to analyze and reflect on cultural differences. According to Zhang (2007), these objectives should be aligned with broader educational goals that prepare students for participation in a global society. The integration of intercultural education into the English curriculum should be comprehensive and systematic, ensuring that students gradually build their intercultural competence over time. This can be achieved by embedding intercultural elements into various aspects of the curriculum, such as language lessons, cultural projects, and extracurricular activities.

In the context of China's educational system, it is important to balance the focus on local cultural heritage with the introduction of global cultural perspectives. Suggests that incorporating local cultural content alongside international topics can help students appreciate their own cultural identity while becoming more open to other cultures. This approach can foster a sense of pride and belonging, which is essential for building a strong foundation for intercultural competence.

Incorporating local cultural elements such as the rich Chu culture of Jingzhou, Hubei, into the curriculum can provide a meaningful context for students. The Chu culture, known for its unique contributions to Chinese art, literature, and history, offers a wealth of material that can be seamlessly integrated into intercultural education. For example, educators can design curriculum units that focus on comparing Chinese festivals with those from other countries. By including the Dragon Boat Festival, which originated from the Chu culture, students can explore its history and significance, and then compare it with similar festivals in other cultures, such as Japan's Tanabata Festival or Mexico's Dia de los Muertos. This comparison can help students see similarities and differences, fostering a deeper intercultural understanding.

Furthermore, integrating cultural themes from Chu culture into language lessons can provide students with meaningful contexts for practicing their language skills. For instance, reading and discussing Chu Ci (楚辞), the famous anthology of poetry from the Warring States period, can be a valuable activity. Students can analyze the themes and styles of Chu Ci and then compare them with literary works from other cultures. This not only enhances their linguistic proficiency but also promotes cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Additionally, project-based learning can be used to deepen students' understanding of both local and global cultures. Students can be assigned projects to research and present on various aspects of Chu culture, such as its unique music, traditional clothing, or ancient rituals. These projects can then be compared with similar cultural elements from other countries, encouraging students to draw connections and reflect on cultural diversity. Beckett and Slater (2005) ^[4] note that project-based learning allows students to apply their language skills in meaningful contexts and fosters critical thinking about cultural issues.

Intercultural dialogue and reflection are also critical components. Fantini (2009) ^[11] argues that providing students with opportunities to reflect on their cultural experiences and discuss them with peers can enhance their intercultural awareness and understanding. In the context of Chu culture, students can be encouraged to keep cultural journals where they document their reflections on local

cultural events, such as visiting the Jingzhou Ancient City or participating in local festivals. These reflections can then be shared and discussed in class, providing a platform for intercultural dialogue.

In summary, by integrating Chu culture from Jingzhou into the curriculum, educators can create a rich, culturally immersive learning environment. This approach not only enhances students' linguistic and intercultural skills but also fosters a strong sense of cultural identity and global awareness. Such a balanced educational strategy aligns well with the goals of the New Curriculum Standards (2022), preparing students to navigate and thrive in a multicultural world.

4.2 Teaching Methods and Strategies

Effective teaching methods and strategies are essential for cultivating intercultural awareness and competence in middle school students. Deardorff (2006) ^[9] suggests that interactive and experiential learning activities are particularly effective in promoting intercultural skills. These activities can include role-plays, simulations, cultural exchange projects, and collaborative learning tasks that encourage students to engage with different cultural perspectives.

One effective strategy is the use of project-based learning, where students work on projects that require them to research and present on various cultural topics. Beckett and Slater (2005) ^[4] note that project-based learning allows students to apply their language skills in meaningful contexts and fosters critical thinking about cultural issues. For instance, students could undertake projects on different aspects of Chu culture, such as traditional music, festivals, and historical figures, and compare these with elements from other cultures. This not only deepens their understanding of local heritage but also broadens their global perspective.

Additionally, incorporating multimedia resources such as films, documentaries, and online cultural exchanges can provide students with authentic cultural experiences. Showing documentaries about the history and traditions of Chu culture alongside similar media from other cultures can spark discussions about cultural diversity and commonalities. Online cultural exchanges with students from other countries can further enrich these experiences, allowing for real-time intercultural communication and learning.

Intercultural dialogue and reflection are also critical components. Fantini (2009) ^[11] argues that providing students with opportunities to reflect on their cultural experiences and discuss them with peers can enhance their intercultural awareness and understanding. Teachers can facilitate discussions and reflections through structured activities such as cultural journals, discussion forums, and peer feedback sessions. For example, after studying Chu culture and engaging in comparative cultural projects, students could maintain journals reflecting on what they have learned about both their own and other cultures. These reflections can be shared in class discussions, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. In Chinese classrooms, teachers can integrate interactive activities such as cultural days where students present different cultures through food, music, and customs. For example, incorporating Chu culture, students might organize a festival day showcasing traditional Chu music, dance, and

food, which can be compared with cultural presentations from other countries. This not only makes learning engaging but also provides practical experience in intercultural communication. Additionally, using technology to connect with classrooms in other countries for virtual exchange projects can provide real-world intercultural communication practice, allowing students to apply their skills in authentic contexts. In conclusion, effective teaching methods and strategies are essential for cultivating intercultural awareness and competence in middle school students. By integrating project-based learning, multimedia resources, and opportunities for intercultural dialogue and reflection, educators can create a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Incorporating elements of Chu culture from Jingzhou provides a meaningful context for students to connect their local heritage with global cultural perspectives, thereby enhancing their intercultural communicative competence and preparing them to navigate a multicultural world.

4.3 Teacher Training and Professional Development

The successful implementation of intercultural education relies heavily on the preparedness and competence of teachers. Gu (2016) emphasizes the importance of professional development programs that equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to teach intercultural competencies. Such programs should include training on cultural theories, intercultural communication skills, and strategies for integrating cultural content into language teaching.

Teacher training should also focus on developing teachers' own intercultural competence. Cushner and Mahon (2002) highlight that teachers who possess strong intercultural skills are better able to model and teach these skills to their students. Professional development can include workshops, seminars, and exchange programs that provide teachers with firsthand intercultural experiences. For example, workshops could include sessions on Chu culture, providing teachers with deep insights into its history, traditions, and significance, which they can then incorporate into their teaching.

Moreover, ongoing support and collaboration among teachers are essential. Jackson (2019) ^[15] suggests that creating professional learning communities where teachers can share experiences, resources, and best practices can enhance the overall effectiveness of intercultural education. Peer observation and mentoring can also provide valuable feedback and support for teachers as they implement intercultural teaching strategies. In the context of Chu culture, teachers could collaborate to develop a repository of resources and lesson plans focused on this rich cultural heritage, ensuring consistency and depth in their teaching.

In China, establishing teacher exchange programs with schools in different countries can provide valuable intercultural experiences. For instance, teachers from Jingzhou could participate in exchange programs with schools in other countries to share their knowledge of Chu culture and learn about other cultural practices. Additionally, regular professional development workshops focused on intercultural competence can help teachers continuously improve their skills and knowledge, ensuring they are well-prepared to guide their students in developing these essential competencies. In conclusion, the successful implementation of intercultural education in middle school

English teaching requires comprehensive teacher training and professional development. By equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach intercultural competencies, and by providing ongoing support and opportunities for collaboration, educators can create a dynamic and effective learning environment. In Jingzhou, incorporating elements of Chu culture from Jingzhou into these training programs can provide teachers with rich, authentic cultural content that they can use to enhance their students' intercultural learning experiences.

4.4 Selection of Teaching Materials and Resources

The choice of teaching materials and resources plays a crucial role in fostering intercultural awareness and competence. The curriculum should include materials that represent a wide range of cultural perspectives and experiences. Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) ^[24] note that culturally rich materials can provide students with insights into different ways of life and promote empathy and understanding.

Authentic materials, such as literary texts, films, and multimedia resources, are particularly valuable. Kramsch (1993) ^[17] points out that authentic materials can expose students to the language as it is used in real-life cultural contexts, helping them to understand the nuances and complexities of different cultures. In Jingzhou, incorporating materials related to Chu culture, such as the anthology of Chu Ci, documentaries on Chu traditions, and multimedia resources showcasing Chu art and music, can provide students with a deep and immersive understanding of this local heritage. These materials can then be compared with similar resources from other cultures, fostering a rich dialogue and understanding.

Additionally, digital resources and online platforms can facilitate cultural exchanges and collaborations with students from other countries, providing interactive and immersive learning experiences. For example, students can participate in virtual tours of Chu cultural sites in Jingzhou and compare these experiences with virtual tours of cultural sites in other countries. This interactive approach can make learning more engaging and relevant.

It is also important to select materials that challenge stereotypes and promote critical thinking. Holliday, Hyde, and Kullman (2010) ^[13] argue that teaching materials should encourage students to question cultural generalizations and explore the diversity within cultures. By presenting a nuanced view of Chu culture and comparing it with other cultures, educators can help students develop a more informed and critical perspective.

Chinese educators should select textbooks and supplementary materials that include diverse cultural narratives and perspectives. Incorporating Chinese cultural elements alongside international ones can make the learning more relevant to students. Using Chu culture as a case study, for example, can help students appreciate their own cultural heritage while learning about the broader context of global cultural diversity. Additionally, using online platforms to access global resources can enrich the teaching materials available, providing a wide array of perspectives and experiences. In conclusion, cultivating intercultural awareness and competence in middle school English teaching requires a comprehensive approach that includes clear educational goals, effective teaching methods, robust teacher training, and carefully selected teaching materials.

By integrating these elements, educators can create a learning environment that prepares students to navigate and thrive in a multicultural world.

5. Assessment Methods for Intercultural Awareness and Competence in Middle School English Teaching

Effective assessment of intercultural awareness and competence is crucial for understanding students' progress and guiding instructional practices. This section explores various assessment methods, supported by perspectives from both Western and Chinese scholars, and provides specific examples from the context of Jingzhou's Chu culture to illustrate their application in the classroom.

5.1 Self-Assessment Questionnaires

Self-assessment questionnaires are a widely used tool for evaluating intercultural awareness and competence. According to Deardorff (2009) ^[10], effective self-assessment questionnaires should be designed based on established intercultural competence frameworks. They should include clear, culturally relevant questions that prompt students to reflect on their intercultural experiences, attitudes, and skills. Fantini (2009) ^[11] emphasizes that these questionnaires must cover multiple dimensions of intercultural competence, such as knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness. This comprehensive approach ensures that students' self-assessments provide a holistic view of their intercultural development.

One well-known self-assessment tool is the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), developed by Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003). The IDI measures individuals' orientations towards cultural differences and provides insights into their intercultural development stages. It has been used in various educational settings to help students understand their intercultural competence and identify areas for improvement.

In the Chinese context, developed a self-assessment questionnaire tailored for Chinese middle school students. This questionnaire integrates elements of the national curriculum standards and assesses students' intercultural awareness and competence through questions about their experiences with cultural diversity, attitudes towards different cultures, and self-perceived communication skills. Application of this tool in several Chinese middle schools demonstrated its effectiveness in raising students' awareness of their intercultural abilities and guiding educators in curriculum adjustments.

There is a case in point, if the students in Jingzhou learn something about Chu culture, they might be given a self-assessment questionnaire that includes questions about their experiences with Chu culture, such as participating in local festivals or understanding the significance of Chu Ci poetry. For instance, a question might ask, "How do you think the Dragon Boat Festival helps you understand the values and traditions of Chu culture?" This allows them to reflect on their cultural identity and how it relates to broader intercultural experiences.

Self-assessment can effectively increase students' self-awareness, allowing them to reflect deeply on their cultural experiences and how they relate to others. However, it may also be limited by students' ability to accurately judge their own skills and experiences. This method is subjective and may be influenced by students' personal biases or lack of self-awareness. Combining self-assessment with other

methods, such as peer feedback or teacher observations, can help mitigate these limitations and provide a more balanced view of students' intercultural competence.

5.2 Behavioral Observation

Behavioral observation involves systematically observing and recording students' interactions and behaviors in intercultural contexts. Deardorff (2006) ^[9] suggests several key indicators for assessing intercultural competence through observation, including:

- **Communication Skills:** This involves evaluating both verbal and non-verbal communication effectiveness. Verbal communication includes clarity, appropriateness, and the ability to articulate thoughts and ideas in a culturally sensitive manner. Non-verbal communication involves body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and gestures, which are crucial for conveying respect and understanding in intercultural interactions.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Demonstrated respect and understanding of cultural differences. This can be observed through students' willingness to listen to different perspectives, their ability to empathize with others, and their respectful behavior towards cultural norms and practices that differ from their own.
- **Adaptability:** The ability to adjust behavior and communication styles in different cultural settings. This includes observing how students modify their speech, tone, and behavior to align with cultural expectations and how they handle unexpected cultural scenarios. Adaptability also involves being open to learning from mistakes and showing flexibility in intercultural interactions.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Skills in mediating and resolving intercultural misunderstandings. This involves assessing students' ability to identify sources of conflict, understand different viewpoints, and employ strategies to resolve disputes amicably. Effective conflict resolution requires patience, negotiation skills, and the ability to maintain positive relationships despite cultural differences.

A practical example of behavioral observation is the framework developed by Byram (1997) ^[5], which includes a set of criteria for teachers to observe students' intercultural interactions. This framework has been adapted for use in classroom settings, where teachers document students' participation in cultural discussions, their responses to cultural stimuli, and their ability to navigate intercultural conflicts.

In a middle school in Jingzhou, teachers might observe students during a group project on Chu culture. In this project, students could be discussing traditional Chu music, preparing presentations on the history of Chu Ci poetry, or organizing a mock Dragon Boat Festival. Teachers would note how students communicate their ideas, show respect for the cultural practices discussed, and handle any disagreements or misunderstandings that arise.

Behavioral observation provides direct insights into students' interactions and real-time application of intercultural skills. This method captures authentic behaviors in natural settings, offering a rich source of data. However, it can be time-consuming and requires trained observers to ensure consistency and objectivity.

Additionally, there might be an observer effect, where students alter their behavior because they know they are being watched. To enhance reliability, multiple observers and repeated observations are recommended.

5.3 Situational Judgment Tests (SJT)

Situational Judgment Tests (SJT) are designed to assess how individuals respond to hypothetical, culturally diverse scenarios. According to Lievens and Sackett (2012), SJTs should include realistic scenarios that students might encounter in intercultural interactions. These scenarios should require students to choose the most appropriate responses from a set of options, reflecting their intercultural competence.

One notable SJT is the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) developed by Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) ^[1]. The ISI presents various intercultural situations and asks respondents to select the best course of action. This test has been widely used in educational and corporate settings to evaluate intercultural competence.

In Jingzhou, an SJT might present students with scenarios involving Chu culture, such as interacting with a visitor who misunderstands a local custom or explaining the significance of the Dragon Boat Festival to a foreign guest. Students would choose the most appropriate response from several options. For example, a scenario might describe a foreign student accidentally offending local customs during the Dragon Boat Festival, and students would have to choose the best way to address the situation respectfully.

SJTs can effectively assess students' practical decision-making skills in intercultural contexts, providing a realistic measure of their ability to navigate cultural differences. They are structured and can be easily administered and scored. However, their success depends on the relevance and realism of the scenarios presented. Additionally, students may sometimes choose the "correct" response based on what they think is expected rather than their true feelings or inclinations. To address this, SJTs should be complemented with other assessment methods to gain a fuller picture of students' intercultural competence.

5.4 Combined Assessment Methods-Multi-Source Assessment (360-Degree Assessment)

Multi-source assessment, or 360-degree assessment, involves collecting feedback from multiple sources, including self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher assessment. According to Bracken, Timmreck, and Church (2001), this method provides a comprehensive view of students' intercultural competence by incorporating diverse perspectives.

Combining self-assessment with other assessment methods can enhance the accuracy and reliability of the evaluation. Fantini (2009) ^[11] suggests that integrating self-assessment with peer feedback and teacher observations can provide a more nuanced understanding of students' intercultural skills. This approach allows for triangulation, where multiple data points confirm the assessment results.

In Jingzhou, a combined assessment might involve students completing a self-assessment questionnaire on their experiences with Chu culture, receiving peer feedback on their presentations about Chu festivals, and being observed by teachers during intercultural discussions. For instance, after a unit on Chu Ci poetry, students could self-assess their understanding and attitudes, receive peer feedback on their

group presentations, and be observed by teachers during class discussions.

This multi-faceted approach offers a well-rounded perspective on students' intercultural competence, revealing strengths and areas for improvement that might not be apparent from a single assessment method. It provides comprehensive feedback, fostering a deeper understanding of intercultural skills from multiple viewpoints. However, it requires careful coordination and can be resource-intensive to implement effectively. To maximize its benefits, schools need to ensure consistent standards and adequate training for all participants in the assessment process.

5.5 A Brief Summary

Assessing intercultural awareness and competence in middle school English teaching is complex and multifaceted, requiring a variety of methods to capture the full scope of students' abilities and progress.

Self-Assessment Questionnaires are useful for fostering self-awareness and reflection among students, allowing them to consider their own intercultural experiences and attitudes. However, their subjectivity and reliance on students' self-perceptions can limit their accuracy. They are best used in conjunction with other assessment methods to provide a more balanced evaluation.

Behavioral Observation offers direct and authentic insights into students' interactions and behaviors in intercultural contexts. It captures real-time application of skills and provides rich, qualitative data. Nevertheless, it can be resource-intensive and requires trained observers to ensure consistency and objectivity. Regular and multiple observations can help mitigate these challenges.

Situational Judgment Tests (SJT) effectively measure students' decision-making skills in hypothetical intercultural scenarios, providing structured and easily administered assessments. However, their success hinges on the relevance and realism of the scenarios. They should be complemented with other methods to capture a fuller picture of students' competencies.

Combined Assessment Methods such as multi-source assessments provide a comprehensive and well-rounded view of students' intercultural competence by incorporating diverse perspectives. This approach enhances the reliability and validity of the evaluation but requires careful planning, coordination, and resource allocation to implement effectively.

In the context of Jingzhou's Chu culture, integrating local cultural elements into these assessment methods can enrich students' learning experiences and provide meaningful contexts for developing intercultural awareness and competence. Each method has its strengths and limitations, and the choice of assessment should be tailored to the specific educational setting and objectives. By employing a combination of these methods, educators can create a robust and effective framework for assessing and enhancing intercultural competence in middle school English teaching.

6. Summary

This literature review has examined the critical elements of cultivating and assessing intercultural awareness and competence within the context of middle school English teaching in China, emphasizing the integration of local cultural heritage, particularly Hubei Jingzhou's Chu culture.

The introduction highlighted the increasing significance of intercultural awareness and competence in education, given the globalized world we live in. It outlined the research background, emphasizing the importance of these competencies for fostering global citizenship and mutual respect. The objectives of the study were also delineated, aiming to explore definitions, importance, curriculum requirements, teaching methods, and assessment strategies for intercultural competencies.

In defining intercultural awareness, scholars such as Byram (1997)^[5] and Deardorff (2006)^[9] emphasized understanding cultural influences on behavior, communication, and perceptions. Intercultural competence was described as the ability to communicate effectively in diverse cultural settings, incorporating knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for such interactions. The importance of these competencies in education was highlighted by scholars like Fantini (2009)^[11], who noted their role in enhancing students' employability, problem-solving skills, and global perspectives. There was a focus on how these competencies enable students to navigate multicultural environments successfully, which is increasingly vital in today's interconnected world.

The Curriculum Standards (2022) in China underscore the need to develop students' intercultural awareness and competence. The review detailed these standards, focusing on integrating cultural content into the curriculum to foster students' understanding and communication across cultures. Challenges in implementation were discussed, such as teacher preparedness and resource availability, with references to scholars like, who highlighted the need for professional development and supportive educational environments. This section underscored the alignment of these standards with broader educational goals that prepare students for participation in a global society.

Educational goals and curriculum design emphasized aligning intercultural objectives with broader educational aims, incorporating Chu culture into the curriculum to enhance students' local and global cultural understanding. Effective teaching methods included project-based learning and intercultural dialogues, supported by interactive activities such as cultural days and virtual exchanges. For instance, students could undertake projects on different aspects of Chu culture, such as traditional music, festivals, and historical figures, and compare these with elements from other cultures. This not only deepens their understanding of local heritage but also broadens their global perspective.

Teacher training was identified as crucial for successful implementation, with recommendations for professional development programs and collaborative learning communities. According to Cushner and Mahon (2002)^[6], teachers who possess strong intercultural skills are better able to model and teach these skills to their students. Professional development can include workshops, seminars, and exchange programs that provide teachers with firsthand intercultural experiences. In the context of Chu culture, teachers could collaborate to develop a repository of resources and lesson plans focused on this rich cultural heritage, ensuring consistency and depth in their teaching.

The selection of teaching materials was also discussed, emphasizing the need for culturally rich, authentic resources that challenge stereotypes and promote critical thinking. Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004)^[24] note that culturally rich

materials can provide students with insights into different ways of life and promote empathy and understanding. Incorporating materials related to Chu culture, such as the anthology of Chu Ci, documentaries on Chu traditions, and multimedia resources showcasing Chu art and music, can provide students with a deep and immersive understanding of this local heritage.

Various assessment methods were explored. Self-assessment questionnaires are useful for fostering self-awareness and reflection among students, allowing them to consider their own intercultural experiences and attitudes. However, their subjectivity and reliance on students' self-perceptions can limit their accuracy. For instance, in a classroom in Jingzhou, students might be given a self-assessment questionnaire that includes questions about their experiences with Chu culture, such as participating in local festivals or understanding the significance of Chu Ci poetry. Evaluating this method, self-assessment can effectively increase students' self-awareness but may also be limited by students' ability to accurately judge their own skills and experiences.

Behavioral observation provides direct and authentic insights into students' interactions and behaviors in intercultural contexts. It captures real-time application of skills and provides rich, qualitative data. In a middle school in Jingzhou, teachers might observe students during a group project on Chu culture, noting how they discuss and present different aspects of the culture, such as traditional music or festivals. However, it can be resource-intensive and requires trained observers to ensure consistency and objectivity.

Situational Judgment Tests (SJT) effectively measure students' decision-making skills in hypothetical intercultural scenarios, providing structured and easily administered assessments. In Jingzhou, an SJT might present students with scenarios involving Chu culture, such as interacting with a visitor who misunderstands a local custom. These tests can effectively assess practical decision-making skills but depend on the relevance and realism of the scenarios presented.

Combined assessment methods, such as multi-source assessments, provide a comprehensive and well-rounded view of students' intercultural competence by incorporating diverse perspectives. In Jingzhou, a combined assessment might involve students completing a self-assessment questionnaire on their experiences with Chu culture, receiving peer feedback on their presentations about Chu festivals, and being observed by teachers during intercultural discussions. This multi-faceted approach offers a well-rounded perspective on students' intercultural competence, revealing strengths and areas for improvement that might not be apparent from a single assessment method. However, it requires careful coordination and can be resource-intensive to implement effectively.

Assessing intercultural awareness and competence in middle school English teaching is complex and multifaceted, requiring a variety of methods to capture the full scope of students' abilities and progress. Each method has its strengths and limitations, and the choice of assessment should be tailored to the specific educational setting and objectives. By employing a combination of these methods, educators can create a robust and effective framework for assessing and enhancing intercultural competence in middle school English teaching.

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