How to Teach English Without Cultural Bias

Yunshu Sun

Abstract:

As a global language, English is crucial in international communication, business, and education. However, the issue of cultural bias in English education has gained widespread attention. Cultural bias can lead to difficulties for learners during the educational process, affecting their academic performance and cross-cultural communication skills. This paper investigates how to teach English without cultural bias to promote a more equitable, effective, and inclusive education. In conclusion, English education is crucial in international communication, business, and education in today's globalized world. However, cultural bias can negatively impact English teaching, leading to difficulties in academic achievement and cross-cultural communication for students. Multicultural education theory and cross-cultural education theory provide a solid theoretical foundation to help us understand and address issues of cultural bias. Both approaches emphasize the importance of cultural diversity and the need for educators to take measures to reflect and respect students from diverse cultural backgrounds. While cultural bias is undeniable, we can create a more inclusive and culturally sensitive English education environment with appropriate methods and strategies, promoting students' success and cross-cultural understanding. This is essential for achieving more equitable and effective English education to meet the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds and to promote cross-cultural communication and cooperation.

Keywords: Culture Bias, English Teaching

1. Introduction

As a global language, English is crucial in international communication, business, and education. However, the issue of cultural bias in English education has gained widespread attention (Friedman 2017). Cultural bias can lead to difficulties for learners during the educational process, affecting their academic performance and cross-cultural communication skills. (Chen,G &Starosta, W.J 2000) This paper investigates how to teach English without cultural bias to promote a more equitable, effective, and inclusive education.

The existence of cultural bias in education is an undeniable fact. English educational materials, curriculum design, and teaching methods are often influenced by specific cultural backgrounds and values, which can adversely affect learners. Cultural bias issues include but are not limited to language discrimination, cultural stereotypes, and misunderstandings of cultural differences. The importance of addressing these issues lies in their impact on students' academic success and adversely affecting cross-cultural communication and understanding. The main goal of this study is to delve into cultural bias in English education and the reasons for these cultural biases analyzed from the psychology perspective and propose effective strategies to ensure education is more inclusive, diverse, and culturally sensitive.

Addressing cultural bias issues in English education improves teaching quality and fosters broader social change. Reducing cultural bias can create a more inclusive educational environment, helping students adapt to multicultural societies and enhancing their cross-cultural communication skills. This is crucial for the educational systems in a globalized era. Therefore, the results of this research will contribute to improving English education, promoting recognition of cultural diversity, and fostering international understanding and cooperation.

2. Potential Impacts of Cultural Bias on Education

Cultural bias in language assessments can misjudge students' abilities (Chen, 1985). For example, a language test may include implicit knowledge specific to a particular culture, putting students unfamiliar with that culture at a disadvantage. According to Noam Chomsky, a student's failure to perform well on a language test may not be due to their poor competence in the language. Still, other factors lead to their poor performance on the language test, such as certain cultures they do not know about in the language test. Such unfair assessments can negatively affect students' confidence and self-esteem. (Sag, 2011)

3. Cultural Bias in Educational Materials:

Using culturally biased materials may reinforce stereotypes and reduce respect for other cultures. For example, if educational materials only emphasize the

success and contributions of one culture while neglecting others, it can foster an unequal cultural perspective.

Educators may hold stereotypes about students' cultural backgrounds, which can influence their expectations and treatment of students. For example, students from one culture might face higher expectations, while those from others might face lowered expectations. Cultural bias in the educational environment can lead to communication problems between teachers and students. For example, in language learning, a particular accent may be misinterpreted as a grammatical error when it's actually due to differences in the student's cultural-linguistic context.

Cultural bias has various potential impacts on education, including academic inequality, cultural conflicts, and barriers to cross-cultural communication. To gain a deeper understanding of these impacts, we will explore key cultural and educational theories that help uncover the root causes of cultural bias in education. We can better understand how to address cultural bias issues to create a more inclusive and culturally sensitive educational environment by analyzing theoretical frameworks.

4. Relevant Cultural and Educational Theories

4.1 Multicultural Education Theory:

Multicultural Education Theory emphasizes the importance of cultural diversity and suggests that schools and educational institutions should reflect and respect students' diverse cultural backgrounds. (Banks, 1997). This theory provides a foundation to help educators design culturally sensitive educational curricula.

1. Enhancing Educational Equity: Multicultural Education Theory aims to eliminate cultural bias, ensuring every student has equal learning opportunities, regardless of cultural background.

2. Enriching Educational Content: This theory encourages educators to introduce diverse materials and resources to reflect contributions and perspectives from various cultures.

3. Cultivating Cultural Sensitivity: Multicultural Education Theory strives to nurture students' cultural sensitivity, enabling them to communicate and collaborate in diverse cultural contexts effectively.

4.2 Cross-Cultural Education Theory:

Cross-Cultural Education Theory emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting diverse cultural backgrounds within the educational environment. This theory provides a framework to help educators adapt to and respond to the diverse learning needs of multicultural students (Pacheco, 2020). Here are some key roles of Cross-Cultural Education Theory in English education:

1. Promoting Cultural Awareness and Respect: Cross-cultural education Theory teaches students and teachers how to develop awareness and respect for different cultures, fostering an open and inclusive educational environment.

2. Addressing Cultural Differences-Induced Issues: This theory highlights the need for educators to recognize the learning barriers that cultural differences may create and provides methods to overcome these barriers to enhance learning outcomes.

3. Fostering Cross-Cultural Communication Skills: Cross-Cultural Education Theory encourages educators to teach students practical cross-cultural communication skills essential in an international and diverse society.

By gaining an in-depth understanding and applying these two theories, educators can better adapt to the diverse learning needs of multicultural students, create an inclusive, respectful, and culturally diverse educational environment, and effectively address issues that cultural bias may cause.

5. Manifestations of Cultural Bias in English Teaching:

Through the work of Morgan (2017), we can summarize some methods that can help us understand the manifestations of cultural bias.

1. Overemphasis on Oral Skills: Some teachers may overly emphasize British or American accents, neglecting the legitimacy of other accents and pronunciations, making students feel their culture and pronunciation need to be respected.

2. Selective Emphasis on Specific Culture: Some materials or courses may excessively focus on a particular culture, neglecting others, leading to a lack of understanding and potential stereotyping.

3. Stereotypes and Prejudices: Textbooks may contain stereotypes or negative portrayals of certain cultures, fostering biases among students.

4. Cultural Conflict and Discrimination: Teaching materials or methods may inadvertently cause cultural conflicts or discrimination by not considering cultural differences.

5. Lack of Cultural Diversity: Some English materials may need more multicultural content, leaving students unprepared for a diverse society.

6. Discriminatory Language: Textbooks may contain discriminatory language, negatively affecting certain students or making them feel unwelcome.

7. Role Models with Cultural Bias: Role models in textbooks and courses may reflect cultural bias, influencing students to mimic disrespectful or stereotypical behaviors.

8. Ignoring Cultural Background: Textbooks and courses may overlook students' cultural backgrounds, making them feel misunderstood or excluded.

9. Misunderstanding Cultural Differences: Cultural bias can lead to misunderstandings between educators and students, causing unnecessary conflicts and communication issues.

Once cultural bias is identified, the next step is to take measures to create a culturally sensitive English teaching environment. These strategies ensure inclusive education meets diverse student needs and enhances cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills.

6. Culturally Sensitive Education and Culturally Responsive English Teaching Strategies

According to Appalachia (2021), here is the introduction to Culturally Sensitive Education and its Importance:
Culturally Sensitive Education revolves around respecting each student's culture, language, and background, ensuring equal treatment in educational settings. (McKay, S. L., 2002). This approach helps reduce cultural discrimination and unequal treatment, fostering a more inclusive and multicultural educational environment.

1. Respect and Equality: Culturally Sensitive Education advocates respecting every student's culture, language, and background, ensuring equal treatment in educational environments. This approach aids in reducing cultural discrimination and unequal treatment.

2. Multicultural Education: This education emphasizes different cultures as a wealth, encouraging students to explore and understand other cultures and broadening their perspectives.

3. Cultural Sensitivity: Educators are encouraged to cultivate cultural sensitivity to better understand students' cultural needs, making teaching methods more inclusive.

4. Intercultural Communication: Culturally Sensitive Education promotes intercultural communication between students and educators, facilitating understanding and cooperation.

5. Reducing Cultural Biases: This education helps reduce cultural biases and stereotypes, enabling students to understand and respect other cultures.

6. Enhancing Academic Performance: Culturally sensitive education improves academic performance as students find it easier to collaborate with educators and peers and understand course materials better.

2)The significance of Culturally Sensitive Education lies in its ability to create a more inclusive, equal, and multicultural educational environment. It enhances students' cultural awareness and intercultural skills while reducing cultural conflicts and biases.

1. Impact of Culturally Sensitive Education on Learning English:
Facilitating Effective Intercultural Communication: Culturally Sensitive English education helps students understand and respect people from diverse cultural backgrounds, facilitating more effective intercultural communication. This ability is crucial for communication in our globalized society.

2. Reducing Cultural Barriers: Emphasizing culturally sensitive education reduces cultural barriers. Students learn English and how to study and work with people from different cultural backgrounds, fostering a more harmonious learning environment.

3. Boosting Motivation to Learn: When students feel their culture and language are respected, they are more motivated to learn English. They perceive English learning as an inclusive process, where they don't have to set aside their culture and identity, leading to improved academic performance and enthusiasm for learning.

4. Fostering Global Citizens: Culturally Sensitive English education nurtures students with global awareness and cultural respect. These students can better integrate into multicultural societies and contribute positively in a globalized environment.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, English education is crucial in international communication, business, and education in today's globalized world. However, cultural bias can negatively impact English teaching, leading to difficulties in academic achievement and cross-cultural communication for students.

Multicultural education theory and cross-cultural education theory provide a solid theoretical foundation to help us understand and address issues of cultural bias. Both approaches emphasize the importance of cultural diversity and the need for educators to take measures to reflect and respect students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In conclusion, while cultural bias is undeniable, we can create a more inclusive and culturally sensitive English education environment with appropriate methods and strategies, promoting students' success and cross-cultural understanding. This is essential for achieving more equitable and effective English education to meet the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds and

to promote cross-cultural communication and cooperation.

References

1. Banks, J. A. (1997). Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society. Multicultural Education Series. Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027 (paperback: ISBN-0-8077-3631-7; clothbound: ISBN-0-8077-3632-5).

2. Chen, Z., & Henning, G. (1985). Linguistic and cultural bias in language proficiency tests. Language testing, 2(2), 155-163.

3. Pacheco, E. M. (2020). Culture learning theory and globalization: Reconceptualizing culture shock for modern cross-cultural sojourners. New Ideas in Psychology, 58, 100801.

4. Morgan, S. Y. (2017). Cultural Bias In English Language Arts Curriculum And Its Effect On African American And Spanish-Speaking English Language Learners In A Municipal School.

5. Friedman, S. H. (2017). Culture, bias, and understanding: We can do better. Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, 45(2), 136-139.

6. Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (2000). Developing and validating the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale.

7. Sag, I. A., & Wasow, T. (2011). Performance-Compatible Competence Grammar. Non-Transformational Syntax: Formal and Explicit Models of Grammar, 359-377.

8. McKay, S. L. (2002). Teaching English as an international language: Rethinking goals and perspectives. New York: Oxford University Press.

9. Appalachia. (n.d.). Valuing student experiences: An introduction to culturally Responsive Education (CRE). Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Home Page, a part of the U.S. Department of Education. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/appalachia/Blog/-89663