

# The Pathways for “Cross-Cultural Initiation” in Primary School English Teaching: Designing Cultural Perception Activities Based on Picture Books and Nursery Rhymes

**Jieyi Chen**

School of Foreign Languages,  
Guangzhou Huashang College,  
Guangdong Province, China,  
511300  
1419848937@qq.com

## **Abstract:**

Against the backdrop of educational globalization, cross-cultural initiation in primary school English teaching has emerged as a crucial component for cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence. It facilitates learners' exposure to and understanding of diverse cultures from an early age, laying a foundation for cross-cultural communication and interaction. Picture books and nursery rhymes, characterized by simple language, rich illustrations and profound cultural connotations, have become unique teaching tools for cross-cultural initiation, rendering abstract cultural knowledge more accessible to primary school students. This study employs literature analysis and case analysis methods to explore the application pathways of picture books and nursery rhymes in cross-cultural initiation. The research findings indicate that picture books can facilitate cross-cultural initiation through pre-class cultural exploration, in-class cultural interpretation and post-class cultural extension. The cross-cultural initiation of nursery rhymes is primarily facilitated through three stages: pre-class cultural interpretation, in-class cultural immersion and post-class application. Both picture books and nursery rhymes have been shown to enhance the effectiveness of cross-cultural initiation in primary school English education.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural initiation; picture books; nursery rhymes; primary school English education

## 1. Introduction

As educational globalization continues to advance, cultivating students' cross-cultural awareness and competence has garnered growing attention in primary school English teaching. Consequently, previous studies have explored the field of primary school cross-cultural initiation. Gong explored the role of picture books in primary school English teaching and related teaching strategies, providing references for teaching innovation, yet it lacked in-depth analysis of cultural connotations embedded in picture books [1]. Ding conducted research on the application significance, existing problems and application strategies of picture books in primary school English teaching, yet the research lacked targeted designs in terms of cross-cultural initiation [2]. He discussed strategies for using nursery rhymes to develop effective primary English classrooms and potential challenges, and also mentioned the use of nursery rhymes for Western cultural learning, but the integration of cultural elements was insufficient in teaching practices [3]. These studies indicate that although picture books and nursery rhymes play a positive role in primary school English education, there is a lack of systematic research on cross-cultural initiation.

This study addresses two primary research questions: First, what are the pathways for achieving cross-cultural initiation through picture books? Second, what are the pathways for achieving cross-cultural initiation through nursery rhymes? This study primarily employs literature analysis and case analysis methods. This study provides valuable references for primary school English teachers in implementing cross-cultural initiation education, assisting them in integrating cross-cultural elements into daily instruction more effectively. This approach enhances students' cross-cultural awareness and competence, thereby promoting their holistic development.

## 2. Analysis of Cross-Cultural Initiation Pathways Based on Picture Books in Primary School English Teaching

Picture books, which integrate illustrations and text, can vividly present cultural scenarios and connotations, making them effective vehicles for cross-cultural initiation.

Additionally, picture books serve as cultural bridges that provide valuable opportunities for developing students' cross-cultural awareness and honing their communicative competence. Through the comparative analysis of picture books from diverse cultural backgrounds, students can appreciate cultural differences, enhance their intercultural literacy, and strengthen their communicative and adaptive competence in multicultural environments [4]. The cross-cultural initiation pathways based on picture books can be categorized into three stages: pre-class cultural exploration, in-class cultural interpretation, and post-class cultural extension.

### 2.1 Pre-Class Cultural Exploration

The primary objective of the pre-class stage is to guide students to preliminarily explore the cultural background related to the picture book, activate their existing cultural knowledge and establish potential connections with the picture book content, and stimulate their curiosity and learning interest. Featuring vivid images and concise language, picture books integrate cultural elements from different countries or regions such as distinctive clothing, traditional cuisines, and festival customs into story narration and character portrayal, constructing a miniature cultural world. During the reading process, students embark on a cultural journey where they naturally encounter and perceive the characteristics of foreign cultures, break the cognitive limitations of their own cultural environment, and develop a preliminary understanding of multiculturalism [5]. During this process, teachers can prepare students for the lesson by discussing the picture book's cover, playing interesting short videos, or posing small questions related to the cultural theme.

### 2.2 In-Class Cultural Interpretation

This stage is a critical component of cross-cultural initiation. For primary school students, interesting illustrations allow them to perceive and understand things more intuitively than text. With their narrative mode that combines illustrations and text, picture books effectively lower the cognitive threshold of English learning for primary school students, materialize abstract language knowledge, and stimulate students' learning interest [5]. This also further motivates primary school students to explore the cultural

connotations behind picture books.

Taking *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* as an example, the caterpillar in the picture book eats common Western foods such as Swiss cheese, pickles, and salami. Teachers can adopt dietary culture as the theme, combine pictures or videos to introduce common foods from other countries such as sushi from Japan and curry from India, and guide students to link to their own cultural background to think about what a “Chinese caterpillar” would eat. Students can even create a menu for this caterpillar. This helps students perceive that different countries have different dietary habits and preferences, and that no single culture is superior to others. In addition, teachers can take “life growth” as the theme, arrange pictures to show the caterpillar’s growth process, to allow students to intuitively feel the changes in life. The process of a caterpillar growing from a small egg to a butterfly is a universal natural phenomenon, guiding students to recognize that constant effort and accumulation will eventually lead to a beautiful transformation. This realization helps students understand that although cultural expressions may differ, human emotions are interconnected, thereby cultivating students’ empathy. Zhong pointed out that during thematic reading, students can be exposed not only to diverse cultural backgrounds and knowledge systems, but also develop cross-cultural understanding and global perspectives [5].

### 2.3 Post-Class Cultural Extension

This stage is an important extension of cross-cultural initiation, and it can promote students’ reflection on diverse cultures and cultivate their ability to transfer cultural skills. Designing diverse post-class activities helps students deeply experience the atmosphere of diverse cultures and apply the cultural knowledge they have learned to real life.

Taking *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* as an example again, teachers can instruct students to introduce their family’s signature dishes in English, and also organize a small sharing session where students tell short stories about their efforts and achieved growth in their own lives. These activities can create a multicultural communicative environment that further enhances students’ cross-cultural communication awareness.

## 3. Analysis of Cross-Cultural Initiation Pathways Based on Nursery Rhymes in Primary School English Teaching

English nursery rhymes are characterized by a strong sense of rhythm, vivid language, simplicity, diverse forms, and significant entertainment value, and these features are well-aligned with the cognitive characteristics of primary school students [6]. The pathways for cross-cultural initiation can be categorized into three stages: pre-class cultural interpretation, in-class cultural immersion and post-class application.

### 3.1 Pre-Class Interpretation

In this stage, teachers need to select nursery rhymes rich in cultural elements and conduct in-depth analyses of the historical narratives, architectural culture, and folk customs. Taking *London Bridge Is Falling Down*—a nursery rhyme related to London’s historical architecture—as an example, this nursery rhyme is about the collapse and reconstruction of London Bridge. From a Chinese cultural perspective, the collapse of a bridge is hardly considered a positive occurrence, and it would rarely be recited or sung repeatedly. So why has this English nursery rhyme remained so classic? Teachers should guide students to understand that its creation background reflects the hardships of building the bridge back then and the meaning of the bridge’s turbulent fate. Teachers can collect relevant historical materials and pictures to help students grasp the cultural background of the nursery rhyme. This will arouse students’ desire to explore Chinese and Western cultures, enabling them to learn about the local customs and values in Western culture, fostering students’ awareness of cross-cultural communication [7].

### 3.2 In-Class Cultural Immersion

During this stage, teachers can help students immerse themselves in cultural experiences and enhance their cultural perception through the rhythm of nursery rhymes and classroom interactions. Activities can be designed centering on learning and singing nursery rhymes. The rhythm and musicality of the rhymes can spark students’ interest in learning, enabling them to naturally perceive the linguistic style and cultural atmosphere of Western

countries during the singing process. This approach leaves a more profound impression than direct instruction by the teachers.

Take *If You Are Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands* as an example. Teachers can encourage students to clap their hands, tap their toes, and nod their heads along with the music and as required by the lyrics, or sing while performing the actions, to immerse themselves in the joyful atmosphere of the rhyme. This also prompts them to think: Why do people want to do these actions when they feel happy? How do they themselves express their happiness—Is it as direct as the way in the nursery rhyme? Similarly, for a nursery rhyme like *The Wheels on the Bus*, Shao pointed out that primary school students have strong imitation abilities, as well as keen perception and observation skills for new things. Teachers can guide students to simulate the actions and sounds of passengers and the bus driver [8]. Through such activities, while learning English, students can also develop an understanding of the cultural details of daily travel in foreign countries.

### 3.3 Post-Class Application

The post-class application stage primarily aims to assist students in transferring the cultural knowledge gained from nursery rhymes to real-life contexts, preventing the knowledge from remaining merely theoretical. Nursery rhymes not only pave the way for learning the English language, but also allow students to gain deeper insights into the underlying humanistic customs through their inherent contextual and situational connotations. Making good use of such nursery rhymes can help students understand the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures, and broaden the development pathways of their cultural literacy [7]. Teachers can assign post-class homework. For example, students can perform the learned nursery rhymes for their family members while explaining the cultural elements embedded within them. This practice integrates cultural exchange and sharing into students' daily lives, and gradually makes cross-cultural awareness a subconscious part of their thinking. Additionally, teachers can also hold a group sharing session where students can be divided into groups to simulate scenarios from the nursery rhymes through role-playing activities, enabling them to better experience and understand diverse

cultural atmospheres.

## 4. Conclusion

This study focuses on the pathways to cross-cultural initiation in primary school English teaching based on picture books and nursery rhymes. The findings propose a three-stage pathway for cross-cultural initiation through picture books: pre-class cultural exploration stimulates students' learning interest and curiosity, in-class cultural interpretation deepens their understanding and perception of cultural connotations, and post-class cultural extension promotes the internalization of cultural knowledge. The pathway for cross-cultural initiation through nursery rhymes also operates through three dimensions: pre-class organization of cultural elements in rhymes, in-class perception of cultural atmosphere through teaching activities and interactions, and post-class application of cultural knowledge to real-life contexts. Both picture books and nursery rhymes offer unique advantages to cross-cultural initiation education. Picture books are particularly suited for learning and interpreting cultural connotations, while nursery rhymes strengthen students' cultural perception through rhythm and classroom interaction. The combination of the two can make cross-cultural initiation education more effective.

Nevertheless, this study is not without its limitations. The case analysis involved a limited number and variety of selected texts, which may restrict the applicability of the findings to other text types. Future research could expand the sample size and diversity to derive more comprehensive conclusions and more diversified pathways for cultural initiation. At the same time, researchers could also track changes in students' cross-cultural awareness and competence, so as to further verify the effectiveness of the cross-cultural initiation pathways proposed in this study.

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