

Integrating Local Cultural Heritage into College English for Ideological and Political Education: A Place-Based Pedagogical Intervention and Its Effectiveness

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Abstract

The integration of regional cultural heritage into College English curriculum ideological and political education (CIPE) remains underexplored in empirical research. Drawing upon place-based education (PBE), intercultural communicative competence (ICC), and content and language integrated learning (CLIL), this study designed and evaluated a pedagogical intervention that systematically infused Central Plains (Zhongyuan) cultural content into College English instruction at a university in Henan Province. Employing a mixed-methods design with 120 non-English major undergraduates over 16 weeks, quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-test questionnaires measuring cultural identity, learning motivation, and ICC, while qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews. Results showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group across all variables with large effect sizes, particularly in critical cultural awareness. Thematic analysis identified enhanced engagement through cultural relevance as a key facilitator, whereas resource and time constraints emerged as primary barriers. The findings extend PBE and Byram's ICC framework to Chinese language education, demonstrating regional culture as both a pedagogical resource and a vehicle for intercultural citizenship. This study offers a replicable instructional model and empirical evidence for place-based, content-language integrated approaches to CIPE in higher education.

Keywords

Place-Based Education; Intercultural Communicative Competence; Content and Language Integrated Learning; Central Plains Culture; College English; Curriculum Ideological and Political Education

1. Introduction

The imperative to cultivate morally grounded yet globally competent talent has

become a central concern in higher education worldwide (Nussbaum, 2010). In China, this priority has been formally institutionalized through the Guidelines for Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions (Ministry of Education, 2020), which mandates that all academic disciplines integrate ideological and political education into their curricula to fulfill the fundamental educational mission of Chinese higher education: “fostering virtue through education” (Ministry of Education, 2020). The guidelines explicitly identify cultural literacy as one of the five core dimensions of curriculum ideological and political education, alongside political identity, patriotism, legal awareness, and moral cultivation (Ministry of Education, 2020). Within this policy landscape, College English, a compulsory course for virtually all undergraduate students in Chinese universities, occupies a uniquely strategic position due to its broad student reach and its capacity to mediate between Chinese and foreign cultural traditions (Feng, 2021). The College English Teaching Guidelines (2020 Edition) further stipulate that “College English teaching should be actively integrated into the school’s curriculum ideological and political education system,” establishing a clear policy mandate for value-infused language instruction (College English Teaching Guidelines, 2020). To effectively embed cultural elements into College English teaching, educators should update their pedagogical philosophies, enhance their professional competencies, and systematically reconstruct instructional content to achieve the educational goal of holistic talent development (Liu & Yue, 2020).

A critical challenge in implementing curriculum ideological and political education in College English lies in selecting culturally meaningful and pedagogically appropriate content that resonates with students’ lived experiences (Xiao & Zhao, 2023). While existing studies have explored the integration of Chinese cultural content in general terms, a growing body of scholarship suggests that local and regional cultures offer uniquely valuable resources for value-based language education, as they connect learners to their immediate cultural heritage and foster a sense of place-based identity (Gruenewald, 2003; Sobel, 2004). Place-based education theory, in particular, argues that learning becomes more meaningful and effective when it is grounded in the concrete realities of learners’ local environments, making regional cultural content an ideal source for curriculum ideological and political education materials (Gruenewald, 2003; Shi & Ma, 2025). In the Chinese context, recent empirical studies have begun to explore how culturally responsive teaching can be adapted for College English to simultaneously develop linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Gay, 2010; Liao & Li, 2023). These theoretical and empirical developments point to the pedagogical potential of local cultural resources as organic vehicles for integrating value education into language instruction.

The Central Plains region, which centered on present-day Henan Province, constitutes the geographical and civilizational heartland of Chinese culture (Gao,

2017). As a core concept in traditional Chinese human geography, Zhongyuan denotes “the center of all under heaven”, with its scope broadly encompassing the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River and narrowly referring exclusively to Henan Province (Li, 2007; Zhang, 2007). Henan is the birthplace and enduring locus of Central Plains culture, which, compared with other regional cultures, possesses a distinctive quality of orthodox lineage and historical authenticity (Zhang, 2007; Li, 2023; Zhu, 2017). Over China’s five-thousand-year civilization, the political, economic, cultural, and military centers for 4,200 years of uninterrupted dynastic rule were all situated in the Central Plains region centered on Henan (Liu & Jing, 2024). Given this profound cultural endowment and most university students are from Henan province (around 86%), College English programs in Henan’s universities are uniquely positioned to draw upon Central Plains cultural resources to cultivate students’ political identification, patriotic sentiment, cultural character, and moral cultivation (Zhao, 2023; Zheng, 2023). Integrating these resources into College English teaching not only strengthens the local cultural foundation and value-oriented function of the curriculum but also establishes a distinctive provincial model for curriculum ideological and political education that is both locally grounded and internationally relevant. This integration further prepares students to articulate Henan’s cultural narratives in English, directly addressing the strategic imperative of enhancing the international communication capacity of regional Chinese cultures (Zhao, 2023).

The present study, therefore, seeks to design, implement, and evaluate a pedagogical intervention that systematically integrates Central Plains cultural content into College English curriculum ideological and political education, with the aim of developing a replicable instructional model for regional cultural integration in Chinese higher education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Place-Based Education (PBE)

Place-based education (PBE) is a pedagogical approach that anchors learning in the local environment—its cultural, historical, ecological, and social contexts—arguing that education becomes more meaningful, engaging, and effective when it is grounded in the concrete realities of learners’ lived experiences (Sobel, 2004; Gruenewald, 2003). Gruenewald (2003) articulated a critical pedagogy of place that integrates the progressive tradition of experiential learning with the critical tradition of questioning social and environmental injustices, calling for educational practices that reconnect learners to their communities while simultaneously developing their capacity to critically examine the places they inhabit. Sobel (2004) further demonstrated through numerous case studies that place-based education fosters student engagement, academic achievement, and community involvement by making curriculum content relevant to students’ immediate surroundings.

In the context of language education, PBE has been recognized as a powerful framework for contextualizing language instruction within learners' cultural worlds. Recent empirical studies in China have begun to explore the application of place-based pedagogy in English language teaching, particularly in rural and regional settings where local cultural resources offer rich potential for contextualized language learning (Shi & Ma, 2025; Yang & Wang, 2026). Scholars argue that when language learners are invited to explore and articulate their own local cultures in the target language, they develop not only linguistic proficiency but also a deepened sense of cultural identity and place attachment (Feng, 2021). For the present study, PBE provides the overarching theoretical rationale for integrating Central Plains cultural content into College English instruction: the Central Plains, as the geographic and civilizational heartland of Chinese culture, constitutes precisely the "place" in which Henan's university students are situated, and its rich cultural resources offer authentic, meaningful materials for language learning that is simultaneously locally grounded and globally oriented.

2.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Intercultural communicative competence, as theorized by Byram (1997, 2021), represents a paradigm shift in foreign language education from a narrow focus on grammatical and communicative proficiency toward a broader educational goal of preparing learners to mediate between cultures. Byram's (2021) model identifies five key components of ICC: attitudes (curiosity and openness toward other cultures), knowledge (of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and other cultures), skills of interpreting and relating (ability to interpret a document or event from another culture and relate it to one's own), skills of discovery and interaction (ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under real-time constraints), and critical cultural awareness (an ability to evaluate perspectives, practices, and products from one's own and other cultures critically). Central to Byram's framework is the concept of the "intercultural speaker"—a learner who does not simply imitate native speakers but rather develops the capacity to act as a cultural mediator, drawing on their own cultural identity as a resource for intercultural understanding (Byram, 2008, 2013).

Byram (2008) further extended this framework by arguing that foreign language education should be combined with education for "intercultural citizenship", positioning the language classroom as a site for cultivating learners' capacity to engage critically with cultural difference and to participate as responsible citizens in an increasingly interconnected world. In the Chinese context, recent scholarship has productively applied the ICC framework to College English curriculum ideological and political education, arguing that the goal of cultivating students' ability to "tell China's story well" in English is fundamentally an intercultural citizenship endeavor

(Liao & Li, 2023; Feng, 2021). The present study draws on Byram's ICC framework to conceptualize the integration of Central Plains culture into College English not merely as content delivery but as the cultivation of students' capacity to act as intercultural mediators who can articulate their local cultural heritage to international audiences. In particular, the "critical cultural awareness" component of Byram's model provides a theoretical lens for examining how students develop the ability to evaluate and present Central Plains cultural narratives from a perspective that is simultaneously culturally grounded and critically reflective.

2.3. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL), as articulated by Coyle, Hood, and Marsh (2010), is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used as the medium for teaching both content and language, with the goal of promoting the simultaneous acquisition of subject knowledge and linguistic proficiency. The 4Cs Framework—Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture—provides a foundational conceptual structure for CLIL pedagogy: Content refers to the subject matter being taught; Communication encompasses the language needed to learn that content; Cognition involves the thinking skills required for content processing and knowledge construction; and Culture, the fourth and integrating dimension, acknowledges that all learning is situated within cultural contexts and that CLIL should foster intercultural understanding and global citizenship (Coyle, 2007; Coyle et al., 2010). This 4Cs Framework offers a holistic approach to curriculum design, ensuring that language learning is not treated in isolation but is integrated with content knowledge, cognitive development, and cultural awareness.

In the Chinese College English context, CLIL has gained increasing attention as a pedagogical approach that addresses the perennial challenge of separating language instruction from meaningful content. Scholars have argued that CLIL can serve as an effective vehicle for curriculum ideological and political education by embedding value-laden content within language learning tasks, thereby achieving the "salt dissolving in water" effect of organic integration (Wen, 2016; Xiao & Zhao, 2023). The Production-Oriented Approach (POA), developed by Wen (2016) and increasingly adopted in College English curriculum ideological and political education research, shares significant theoretical affinity with CLIL in its emphasis on "learning-using integration" and its structured pedagogical cycle of "motivating-enabling-assessing". For the present study, CLIL's 4Cs Framework offers a practical pedagogical architecture for designing the instructional intervention: Content is provided by Central Plains cultural topics (history, philosophy, art, spiritual traditions); Communication is developed through English language tasks centered on these topics; Cognition is engaged through analysis, comparison, and interpretation of cultural materials; and Culture is addressed

through explicit attention to how Central Plains cultural narratives can be articulated and positioned in intercultural contexts. This framework thus provides both a theoretical justification and a practical design principle for the integration pathway proposed in this study.

Despite the theoretical potential of PBE, ICC, and CLIL for addressing the challenges of College English curriculum ideological and political education, and the rich cultural resources of the Central Plains, few empirical studies have synthesized these three theoretical frameworks to design and empirically evaluate place-based interventions for College English in Henan, China. This gap necessitates a theoretically grounded investigation that moves beyond descriptive accounts toward rigorous empirical evaluation.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives—place-based education (PBE), intercultural communicative competence (ICC), and content and language integrated learning (CLIL)—to form a coherent analytical framework for designing, implementing, and evaluating the integration of Central Plains cultural content into College English curriculum ideological and political education. The synthesis addresses three fundamental questions: why regional cultural integration is educationally valuable (PBE), what competencies such integration should cultivate (ICC), and how such integration can be operationalized in the language classroom (CLIL).

PBE establishes the philosophical justification for grounding education in local cultural contexts. Sobel (2004) demonstrated that place-based approaches increase student engagement by connecting abstract academic content to tangible local realities, making learning personally meaningful. Gruenewald (2003) further argued that education should foster both “reinhabitation”—learning to live well in one’s place—and critical awareness of the forces that disrupt local communities. In the Chinese College English context, PBE provides the rationale for treating Central Plains culture—the immediate cultural environment of Henan’s university students—as a legitimate and valuable resource for language education, transforming learners’ prior cultural knowledge from a potential obstacle into a pedagogical asset that facilitates deeper engagement with English language tasks.

CLIL provides the pedagogical architecture for operationalizing integration. Coyle’s (2007; Coyle et al., 2010) 4Cs Framework—Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture—offers concrete design principles for embedding cultural content within language learning. The Content dimension specifies subject matter drawn from Central Plains cultural resources; Communication ensures systematic integration of language and content goals; Cognition engages higher-order thinking through analysis, comparison, and creative construction of cultural narratives; and Culture serves as the integrating dimension, explicitly fostering intercultural understanding.

This framework ensures that cultural content is not merely appended to language instruction but organically woven into its fabric.

ICC supplies the educational goal orientation. Byram's (1997, 2021) model identifies five components—attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness—that collectively define the intercultural speaker's capacity to mediate between cultures. Byram's (2008) concept of “intercultural citizenship” further argues that language education should prepare learners to engage critically with cultural difference and participate as responsible citizens in an interconnected world. For this study, ICC operationalizes “effectiveness” in terms of measurable competencies—particularly the ability to articulate Central Plains cultural narratives from a reflective, critically aware perspective—thereby providing the evaluation criteria for assessing learning outcomes.

These three theories are not juxtaposed but integrated in a principled manner: PBE answers why (the educational value of local culture), CLIL answers how (the pedagogical design for embedding content in language instruction), and ICC answers what (the competencies to be cultivated). The Production-Oriented Approach (Wen, 2016) is incorporated as a supplementary pedagogical framework, with its “learning-using integration” principle and “motivating-enabling-assessing” cycle providing systematic procedures for implementing CLIL's 4Cs Framework in the Chinese College English classroom (Zhang, 2025).

Building upon this integrated framework, the present study addresses three research questions, each grounded in one of the three theories:

RQ1. To what extent does the intervention affect students' cultural identity and English learning motivation (drawing on PBE and CLIL) ?

RQ 2. How does the intervention influence students' intercultural communicative competence, particularly their ability to express Central Plains culture in English (operationalized via Byram's ICC model) ?

RQ 3. What are the perceived facilitators and barriers to implementing place-based cultural integration (examined through the integrated lens of all three frameworks)?

4. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), combining quantitative quasi-experimental measures with qualitative semi-structured interviews to address the three research questions.

4.1. Participants

A total of 120 non-English major undergraduates from two intact classes at a university in Henan Province were recruited. One class (n=60) served as the experimental group receiving the Central Plains culture-infused intervention, while the other (n=60) served as the control group following the regular College English

curriculum.

4.2. Intervention Design

The experimental group will participate in a 16-week (two semesters) pedagogical intervention designed according to pedagogical philosophy, teacher development, curriculum materials, learner engagement, instructional methods, practical activities, and bilingual corpus construction, operationalized through CLIL's 4Cs Framework (Coyle et al., 2010) and POA's motivating-enabling-assessing cycle (Wen, 2016). Cultural content will include Central Plains historical figures, philosophical traditions, spiritual legacies (e.g., Yellow Emperor Culture), and contemporary developments.

4.3. Instruments

Three instruments will be employed: (1) a Cultural Identity and English Learning Motivation Scale, adapted from existing validated instruments (Phinney, 1992; Gardner, 2004), measuring the dependent variables for RQ1; (2) an Intercultural Communicative Competence Self-Assessment Inventory, operationalizing Byram's (2021) five-component model, addressing RQ2; and (3) a semi-structured interview protocol for teachers (n=6) and students (n=15) from the experimental group, examining perceived facilitators and barriers for RQ3. All instruments will be piloted and subjected to reliability and validity testing.

4.4. Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-test questionnaires administered to both groups at the beginning and end of the intervention. Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews conducted within two weeks following the intervention.

4.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analyzed using independent-samples t-tests and ANCOVA to compare pre-post differences between groups, with effect sizes reported. Qualitative data will be analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) following a six-phase procedure: familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and reporting. Inter-coder reliability will be established through independent coding of 20% of the transcripts.

5. Results

This chapter presents the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data analyses, organized according to the three research questions. The quantitative results are reported first, followed by the qualitative findings that illuminate and contextualize the statistical patterns.

5.1. Quantitative Results

5.1.1. Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analyses

A total of 120 students completed both the pre-test and post-test questionnaires (experimental group: $n = 60$, control group: $n = 60$), yielding a 100% retention rate, because the questionnaires were administered as part of formative assessment. Preliminary analyses confirmed that the two groups were comparable at baseline, with no significant differences in pre-test scores on any of the dependent variables (all $p > .05$). Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all scales ranged from .82 to .91, indicating good internal consistency. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for both groups on the pre-test and post-test measures across the three dependent variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Pre-test and Post-test Scores Across Groups

Variable	Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Mean Change
Cultural Identity	Experimental	3.42 (.68)	4.18 (.55)	+0.76
Cultural Identity	Control	3.38 (.71)	3.45 (.69)	+0.07
English Learning Motivation	Experimental	3.15 (.74)	4.02 (.61)	+0.87
English Learning Motivation	Control	3.20 (.70)	3.28 (.73)	+0.08
Intercultural Communicative Competence	Experimental	3.05 (.79)	3.95 (.58)	+0.90
Intercultural Communicative Competence	Control	3.08 (.76)	3.15 (.74)	+0.07

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

5.1.2. Research Question 1: Effects on Cultural Identity and English Learning Motivation

To address RQ1, independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the post-test scores between the experimental and control groups, with ANCOVA employed to control for pre-test differences. The results revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups on both dependent variables. Table 2 summarizes the results of the independent-samples t-tests comparing post-test scores between groups. As it is shown, the observed Cohen's d values (1.25 and 1.14) represent very large effect sizes for classroom-based educational intervention. Such large magnitudes may stem from the novelty of the teaching treatment. And Table 3 presents the ANCOVA results, confirming that the intervention effects remained significant after controlling for pre-test scores.

Table 2. Independent-samples t-test Results for Post-test Comparisons

Variable	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d	95% CI
Cultural Identity	6.84	118	< .001	1.25	[0.52, 0.94]
English Learning Motivation	6.21	118	< .001	1.14	[0.50, 0.97]

Note. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) are reported; values > 0.8 indicate large effects. CI = confidence interval.

Table 3. ANCOVA Results for Post-test Scores with Pre-test as Covariate

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η_p^2
Cultural Identity	Group	8.94	1	8.94	24.67	< .001	.174

Cultural Identity	Pre-test (covariate)	5.21	1	5.21	14.38	< .001	.110
English Learning Motivation	Group	10.46	1	10.46	21.38	< .001	.155
English Learning Motivation	Pre-test (covariate)	4.87	1	4.87	9.96	.002	.079

Note. *SS* = sum of squares; *MS* = mean square; η_p^2 = partial eta-squared.

5.1.3. Research Question 2: Effects on Intercultural Communicative Competence

To address RQ2, the same analytical procedures were applied to the ICC scores. The results indicated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on overall ICC and on each of Byram's five subcomponents: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Table 4 displays the subcomponent scores for the ICC variable.

Table 4. ICC Subcomponent Post-test Scores by Group

ICC Subcomponent	Experimental M (SD)	Control M (SD)	t-value	p	Cohen's d
Attitudes	4.21 (.52)	3.42 (.65)	7.38	< .001	1.35
Knowledge (of own & others' cultures)	4.05 (.58)	3.18 (.69)	7.54	< .001	1.38
Skills of Interpreting & Relating	3.92 (.62)	3.09 (.72)	6.85	< .001	1.25
Skills of Discovery & Interaction	3.84 (.65)	3.12 (.71)	5.92	< .001	1.08
Critical Cultural Awareness	3.76 (.67)	2.95 (.76)	6.21	< .001	1.14

Note. *ICC* = Intercultural Communicative Competence. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

5.2. Qualitative Results

5.2.1. Research Question 3: Perceived Facilitators and Barriers

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six teachers and fifteen students from the experimental group. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) generated four major themes: (a) enhanced learner engagement through cultural relevance, (b) increased confidence in expressing local culture in English, (c) challenges related to resource availability, and (d) time constraints within the existing curriculum. Table 5 presents the themes with representative quotations.

Table 5. Thematic Analysis of Perceived Facilitators and Barriers

Theme	Category	Representative Quotation
Enhanced learner engagement through cultural relevance	Facilitator	"I found it much easier to participate in class discussions because I already knew the stories from my grandparents—I was just learning how to say them in English." (S-12, student)
Increased confidence in expressing local culture in English	Facilitator	"Before, I never thought I could talk about Henan's history in English. Now I feel I have something unique to share with international friends." (S-24, student)
Challenges related to resource availability	Barrier	"Finding reliable bilingual materials on Central Plains culture is very time-consuming. We need a well-organized corpus." (T-3, teacher)

Time constraints within existing curriculum	Barrier	"There is so much pressure to cover textbook content and prepare for exams. Integrating cultural content feels like an additional burden." (T-5, teacher)
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6. Discussion

This chapter interprets the findings in light of the three theoretical frameworks—PBE, CLIL, and ICC—and situates them within the broader literature. The discussion is organized by research question, followed by a synthesis of the findings.

6.1. Discussion of RQ 1

The significant improvements in cultural identity and English learning motivation observed in the experimental group provide strong empirical support for the theoretical predictions of PBE and CLIL. PBE posits that learning becomes more meaningful and engaging when it is rooted in students' immediate cultural environments (Sobel, 2004; Gruenewald, 2003). The findings confirm this prediction: Henan students, many of whom grew up with Central Plains cultural narratives—the story of the Foolish Old Man, the legacy of the Red Flag Canal, the historical figures of their home province—reported a deepened sense of cultural identification after being invited to explore these familiar materials through the medium of English. This is not merely an affective response; the CLIL framework, particularly its "Cognition" and "Culture" dimensions (Coyle et al., 2010), suggests that engaging with content at a deeper cognitive level—analyzing, comparing, and reconstructing cultural knowledge in a new language—strengthens the learner's relationship to that content, transforming passive familiarity into active ownership. The substantial increase in English learning motivation merits particular attention. The mean change of +0.87 in the experimental group, compared to only +0.08 in the control group, suggests that the infusion of culturally relevant content addressed a fundamental motivational deficit identified in previous research on College English in China: students often perceive English learning as disconnected from their personal lives and future roles (Liu & Yue, 2020). The intervention appears to have reframed English learning from an externally imposed requirement to an instrument for personal and cultural expression. This finding is consistent with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which holds that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for intrinsic motivation; by enabling students to draw upon their own cultural resources, the intervention satisfied the "relatedness" and "competence" needs that are often unmet in traditional language classrooms (Xiao & Zhao, 2023).

However, the effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.14$ for motivation) warrants careful interpretation. While the size of the effect is substantial, it may reflect not only the quality of the intervention but also a novelty effect—students' initial enthusiasm for a new pedagogical approach. Future longitudinal studies should examine whether

these gains are sustained over multiple semesters.

6.2. Discussion of RQ2

The significant improvement in students' intercultural communicative competence—across all five subcomponents of Byram's (2021) model—constitutes the most theoretically consequential finding of this study. It demonstrates that Byram's framework can be productively operationalized not only in its traditional domain (preparing learners to understand and engage with foreign cultures) but also in a novel direction: cultivating learners' capacity to articulate and critically reflect upon their own cultural heritage in the target language.

The "critical cultural awareness" component—where the experimental group scored 3.76 compared to 2.95 in the control group ($d = 1.14$)—is particularly significant. Byram (2008) defines critical cultural awareness as the ability to evaluate cultural perspectives, practices, and products from both one's own and other cultures in an informed, reflective manner. The interviews confirmed that the intervention fostered this capacity: students reported not simply memorizing cultural facts in English but developing the ability to select which cultural narratives to tell, how to frame them for different audiences, and how to position their own cultural identity in intercultural encounters. As one student articulated, "Before, I never thought I could talk about Henan's history in English. Now I feel I have something unique to share with international friends" (S-24). This statement reflects a transformation from cultural recipient to cultural agent—precisely the kind of intercultural citizenship that Byram envisioned (Byram & Porto, 2021).

Nevertheless, a potential limitation must be acknowledged. The self-assessment nature of the ICC inventory may inflate scores, as students who are newly confident in a domain sometimes overestimate their actual proficiency. The inclusion of performance-based measures—such as oral presentations evaluated by blind raters—in future research would strengthen the validity of these findings. Additionally, the sample's homogeneity (all participants were from Henan Province) raises questions about whether the findings would generalize to students from other regions whose local cultures may have less immediate historical significance.

6.3. Discussion of RQ3

The thematic analysis of perceived facilitators and barriers reveals crucial insights for the refinement and scaling of place-based cultural integration. The identification of "enhanced learner engagement through cultural relevance" as a primary facilitator validates PBE's core premise and addresses a persistent challenge in Chinese College English: the disconnect between students' lived experience and the curriculum. Students who had grown up with Central Plains stories but had never conceptualized them as "content" worthy of English expression experienced what might be termed "epistemic validation"—a recognition that their cultural knowledge

is not merely personal or informal but has academic worth. This finding challenges the assumption that cultural content in language education must be drawn from either the target culture or the "national" culture; regional culture, with its intimate connection to students' identities, may be an even more powerful site for engagement.

The two primary barriers—resource availability and time constraints—corroborate the findings of previous studies that identified "lack of suitable teaching materials" and "insufficient instructional hours" as structural obstacles to curriculum ideological and political education in College English (Xiao & Zhao, 2023; Zheng, 2023). The current study's design included the construction of a bilingual corpus of Central Plains cultural materials; teachers' comments that "finding reliable bilingual materials is very time-consuming" underscore the urgency of institutionalizing such resources rather than relying on individual teachers' efforts. Similarly, the tension between exam preparation and cultural enrichment points to a larger systemic issue in Chinese higher education: the assessment system, dominated by standardized English proficiency tests, exerts a powerful backwash effect that privileges grammatical accuracy and test-taking strategies over cultural competencies (Feng, 2021). The intervention, while effective, required teachers to "squeeze" cultural content into an already congested syllabus—a condition that threatens sustainability without institutional support.

7. Conclusion

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that the integration of Central Plains culture into College English curriculum ideological and political education is not only pedagogically feasible but educationally valuable. The three theoretical frameworks (PBE, CLIL, and ICC) provides preliminary evidence of mutually reinforcing: PBE provided the rationale for content selection; CLIL offered the instructional architecture; and ICC supplied the competency goals and the evaluation framework. The results contribute to the growing body of international scholarship on PBE by demonstrating its applicability in East Asian higher education contexts, where cultural heritage is both a source of national pride and a complex site of negotiation with global influences. The study extends Byram's ICC framework by demonstrating its utility as a pedagogical design tool, not merely an evaluative instrument, and by showing how critical cultural awareness can be cultivated through engagement with local rather than foreign cultural content.

The findings also have implications for curriculum ideological and political education beyond China. In an era of increasing global mobility and cultural polarization, the pedagogical challenge of preparing graduates who are simultaneously locally grounded and globally competent is shared by many nations. This study suggests that the deliberate integration of regional cultural content can foster a form of intercultural citizenship that is not rootless cosmopolitanism but

rather a capacity to engage with the world from a position of cultural confidence and critical reflection (Appiah, 2006). The Central Plains intervention offers a model for how such rooted cosmopolitanism might be cultivated through content and language integrated approaches.

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, the quasi-experimental design, while practically necessary, does not permit causal claims as definitively as a randomized controlled trial would. Second, the 16-week intervention duration, while substantial, may be insufficient to capture long-term retention and transfer effects. Third, the reliance on self-report measures may be subject to social desirability bias. Fourth, the sample was drawn from a single institution in Henan Province, limiting generalizability to other regions and educational contexts.

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Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Henan University of Engineering. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

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