Reflections on the Cultural Ecology of University Classrooms in the Perspective of Postmodernism

Yanhao Xiong¹
¹(¹Department of Education, Southwest University, China)

Abstract: The cultural ecology of university classroom has been influenced by postmodernism and has shown complex and variable characteristics. Specifically speaking, it tends to be both conflicting and interactive in terms of subject relations in the classroom, fragmented and diversified in terms of classroom teaching, and redundant and dynamic in terms of classroom assessment. In order to further harmonize and develop the cultural ecology of university classrooms, it is necessary to expand the space for communication and interaction between teachers and students, improve the overall professional quality of faculty members, and perfect the management and assessment system for university teachers and students.

Keywords: postmodernism; cultural ecology of university classroom; development characteristics; improvement paths

DOI: https://doi.org/10.61414/jeti.v5i4.105

1. Introduction

Postmodernism, as a kind of anti-modernism with the basic connotation of decentralization and counter-rationalization, has a strong penetration and influence on various fields. As the center of society and culture, many postmodern cultural characteristics are also present in the university. More importantly, the university classroom is the prominent reflective field of university cultural characteristics and the constitutive carrier of classroom cultural ecology. In January 2022, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly triggered the Opinions on Further Promoting the Construction of World-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines, and in

¹Yanhao Xiong: Master's degree in progress, Department of Education, Southwest University, Beibei, Chongqing, 400700.
the face of the demand for the construction of ‘double first-class’, the university classroom, as the main site for implementing education and teaching and talent training, has assumed the important task of laying the foundation for development. In the face of the current controversies caused by the silence of university (Zhang et al., 2019), the teaching quality of university courses (Dill & Beerkens, 2013), and the trend of teaching and research integration in classroom assessment with postmodern characteristics (Zhao et al., 2008), it is of great significance to improve the quality of university classroom education and promote the modernization of universities by clarifying development characteristics of university classroom culture and exploring paths to its improvement.

2. The connotation of postmodernism

Postmodernism emerged in the 1960s and has gradually become a worldwide philosophical trend with a great influence on Chinese and Western cultures. In terms of its development, postmodernism can be divided into three major schools, namely, the early romantic reactions to Western capitalist industrialization represented by Rousseau, Martin Luther, Russell, etc., the radical negation and dissolution represented by Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, etc., and the constructive reconstruction of relations and the world represented by David Griffin, Rorty, etc. However, no matter how it is divided and generalized, postmodernism cannot be simply defined. It is a movement of thought and cultural tendency that is birthed in modernism but seeks to deconstruct it and is constantly changing and evolving, with pluralism as the center of the circle and constantly expanding its meaning, covering different fields such as philosophy, literature, and architecture (Bloland, 1995). Specifically, postmodernism is characterized by decentralization and counter-rationalization.

2.1. Decentralization

Postmodernism advocates fragmentation, individualization and pluralism, all of which question and challenge the theoretical logic of ontology, i.e., pointing to the periphery rather than the center, turning to the phenomenal rather than the essential. Its critique of logocentrism announces its renunciation of central authority and all systematic concepts are under-emphasized, which means no value or standard is central, whereas uncertainty and plurality are promoted. The notion of dualism is replaced by relativistic thinking, the center and authority are questioned, and the development of things is directed toward contextualization and uncertainty. This theory moves from the absolute to the concrete, advocates a pluralistic understanding of things, and confronts differences and free individuality with tolerance and equality (Wang, 2014). While deconstructing the whole, postmodernism aims to discover more future possibilities beyond the logical world in the fragmented disorder, espousing a discourse that empowers each individual with an equal opportunity to think emancipation, filling in the opportunity the parts that were previously imprisoned by metaphysics.

The decentralization of postmodernism exists in a bipolar direction, with radical deconstruction at one end and sensitive reflection at the other. Whether in philosophy, aesthetics, literary works or religion, the alienation brought about by postmodernism is evident in the loss of the depth of tradition and the crisis of spirituality. In this way, it rebels against unity and wholeness, expresses differences in the form of rebellion, honors the pluralistic world, and advocates the development of the individual's own creativity.

2.2. Counter-rationalization

Postmodernist philosophers criticize modernism, which is mainly characterized by meta-narratives and grand narratives, denying the absolute rationality of human beings and focusing on the contextual changes of knowledge (Boboc, 2012). Knowledge is no longer considered as an a priori objective existence, but rather as a constructed object produced in the past and present, in personal experience and emotion.
Postmodernists advocate the release of individual creativity and imagination, while the previously emphasized unchanging laws under rationalism pose a threat and hindrance to the development of human society. Post-modernism is a critique of all the ideas that have made people rigid, a demystification of rationality in an environment of change and uncertainty, an attempt to liberate the mind bound under the weight of industrial society, and an attempt to re-establish a beautiful connection between people and the world. At the same time, for postmodernism, historical narratives are not equal to historical facts. In reality, history is considered one-sided and subjective, and the past labels of authoritative and true objectivity are torn off, and narrative perspectives become pluralistic. History and truth do not exist in authoritative texts, but are constructed by individual minds. And the fading of rationality and the creation of historical nihilism are intertwined. When mainstream values are doubted, moral relativism breeds. On the one hand, as sociologist David Lyon has said, postmodernism has helped people broaden their horizons of looking at controversial things, making part of historical facts and related evaluations corrected and complete, and enriching research results. On the other hand, some people, under the banner of postmodernism, wantonly fabricate history and promote fiction as innovation, thus creating the problem of historical nihilism, which affects the establishment of social consensus and historical consensus (Lyon, 1994). Conversely, the prevalence of historical nihilism further dissolves the meaning of rationality, and counter-rationalization is reinforced by the manifestation of value nihilism.

3. The development characteristics of the cultural ecology of university classrooms in the perspective of postmodernism

The concept of cultural ecology in the classroom was derived under the theory of cultural ecology that emerged in the 1970s. In the cultural ecology theory system, the basic characteristics of culture are determined by two key elements, human and environment, and the interrelationship between them (Liu, 2017). Habermas in the theory of communicative action states that educational research can be divided into three main aspects, namely, the study of educational knowledge, the study of the processes by which teachers and students express their knowledge, and the study of the discursive context of teachers and students in the teaching and learning process. These three aspects point to the three rationales of truth validity, discursive validity, and logical validity, respectively, for analyzing and understanding the classroom cultural ecology constituted by teacher-student and student-student behaviors of dialogue, silence, and discussion in the classroom. Carson, an ecologist, has pointed out that even minor sources of disease can pose a serious threat to the ecological world within the body. From Rachel Carson's ecological perspective, if the benign structure and dynamic balance of the elements within the ecosystem is to be maintained, attention needs to be paid to those influences that are easily overlooked and relatively hidden under normal circumstances. Thus, to maintain a healthy balance in the cultural ecology of the university classroom, it is necessary to consider and coordinate key factors such as teacher-student interaction, classroom teaching, and post-class feedback in a diverse classroom environment (Cao, 2022).

3.1. Classroom subjects tend to be contradictory and interactive

Teachers and students constitute the subjects of university classroom culture, and teacher and student behaviors have a direct impact on the cultural ecology of the classroom. In the postmodernist perspective, the development of the relationship between the two classroom subjects tends to be both contradictory and interactive due to the emphasis on difference seeking and individualization. Because postmodernism creates
and students has increased in the university classroom, the reorganization of order and the dismantling of the traditional central authority have also brought another kind of balance to the classroom ecology. In this perspective, due to the infiltration of thoughts about deconstruction and decentralization, the relationship between teachers and students in the classroom has evolved toward an equal dialogue. The teacher's role has gradually changed from that of a mere narrator and transmitter of knowledge to that of a topic guide and listener, and the university classroom has become more vibrant in this atmosphere, where classroom discussions have become more commonplace, where not only the teacher's voice but also different students' perspectives are present, and where teachers and students are jointly responsible for the cultural ecology of the classroom. In the new classroom context, knowledge is fluid and evolving, and the classroom cultural ecology is constantly being generated. With the participation of multiple actors, the key words of classroom cultural ecology are equality and democracy, and the teacher has an important role in such a contextual classroom as the equal chief of the learning community. While students are free to question the teacher and while allowing for interactive discussion, the teacher still has to assume his or her implicit role as a classroom leader who is fully attentive to students' physical, mental, and intellectual growth and development. Postmodernism has had a profound impact on the relationship between subjects in university classroom culture, and has had two contradictory effects. While the former makes teachers and students doubt their lives, studies, and work, plunging the subject into a crisis of spiritual culture and conflict, the latter injects a new source of vitality into the classroom cultural ecology, seeking knowledge together and finding more possibilities of meaning in communication and interaction.

3.2. Classroom teaching tends to be fragmented and diversified
The ecology of the cultural environment of the university classroom is closely related to the quality and level of classroom teaching, in addition to the dual subjects of teachers and students and the relationship between them. Among them, teaching environment and teaching content are two important factors influencing modern classroom teaching. With the advent of post-industrial society, the teaching environment of the university classroom has changed significantly. The classroom that used to be composed of chalk and slate is now replaced by classroom materials and electronic screens. Multimedia teaching makes the classroom content more diverse and vivid, giving students a more complete experience in terms of audio-visual learning. However, these changes have also caused some negative effects. Since multimedia lecture format saves some classroom time for teachers and students, the original teaching content can no longer meet the classroom needs, so teachers tend to will increase the amount of classroom knowledge and the depth of knowledge interpretation. The content in modern university classrooms is often no longer limited to the knowledge of a particular unit or subject, but is intentionally interspersed with interdisciplinary content to stimulate more interest in learning (Project Team, 2014). When the presentation of knowledge becomes rich and dense, teachers take on the heavier task of interpreting and linking, not only being responsible for the content but also responding to individualized questions from students. However, this also places high demands on teachers' own pedagogical skills and experience. If teachers do not play this role well, classroom instruction becomes fragmented, resulting in a lack of depth in student understanding and classroom discussion, which affects the balance of the cultural ecology of the university classroom. At the same time, the traditional layout of the classroom is in the form of a rice paddy, with the desks and podiums spatially separated from each other and implying the distribution of roles and powers between students and teachers. The modern university classroom is more diverse in its setting, in keeping with the postmodernist philosophy of reconstructing human relationships, and the tendency of university faculty to arrange desks in a more communicative pattern when numbers are small and manageable. In this way, students interact more with each other, and the teacher is able to provide personalized guidance to students as the chief among equals, which increases students' confidence and motivation in the classroom. On the other hand, this is also a test of university teachers' ability to organize activities and manage teams. In the relatively free and loose post-modern classroom atmosphere, teachers need to find new ways to guide and assess students beyond the traditional classroom rules and regulations. In general, the content and environment of classroom teaching and learning in the postmodern mindset are versatile and no longer confined to the traditional teaching model. However, in addition to innovation, teachers face new challenges in integrating and understanding the content of knowledge, and students are under more pressure to learn from various types of knowledge, which affects the development of a healthy classroom culture and ecology.

3.3. Classroom assessment tends to be redundant and dynamic

The classroom subject constitutes the classroom, classroom instruction populates the classroom, and classroom assessment bears the responsibility of improving the classroom. The ecological balance of university classroom culture cannot be determined without the feedback of classroom teaching evaluation. Generally speaking, teachers' self-evaluation, students' evaluation, colleagues' mutual evaluation, and leaders' evaluation are the components of university teachers' teaching evaluation (Jiang, 2016). In the spirit of postmodernism, every subject associated with teaching activities should be given the opportunity to conduct evaluation, and the evaluation subjects have
shifted from a minority in the past to a pluralistic and multi-type majority, which is conducive to the final formation of a more comprehensive evaluation result. However, at the level of evaluation indexes, although domestic colleges and universities have generally started several rounds of evaluation of teaching, they do not distinguish the evaluation standards of teachers of different types of colleges and universities among them. Both professional and skill-based universities cover a large number of theoretical and practical teaching indexes, which leads to the characteristic of running a thousand schools in one way. Such a division is not only detrimental to the formation of teachers' classroom culture characteristics, but also tends to burden teachers with overly complicated evaluation criteria, which does not achieve the goal of training all-round teachers, but makes university teachers physically and mentally exhausted, and then affects classroom quality. At the same time, due to the shift to multiple evaluation subjects, evaluators of different qualities and levels evaluate teachers' teaching with different criteria, and due to the value-neutral concept of postmodernism, evaluators tend to carry irrational or even utilitarian inherent evaluation tendencies, which may lead to complex evaluation items and results with low reference value. Moreover, in addition to the pluralistic characteristics of assessment subjects, classroom assessment is also becoming more dynamic, from a single assessment method to a combined assessment mode of diagnostic assessment, process assessment, and conclusive assessment. Under the influence of post-modernism, assessment has become more sensitive to the complex and changing teaching and learning situations, and a more dynamic assessment is conducted through multiple times and multiple subjects within the semester and academic year, combining short-term assessment with long-term assessment to build an assessment system that is more conducive to grasping and helping the healthy development of university classroom culture and ecology, while giving students and university teachers a stronger sense of classroom experience and construction.

4. The construction paths of cultural ecology of university classroom in the perspective of postmodernism

Under the influence of postmodernism, the cultural ecology of university classrooms has shown unprecedented openness and freedom, the creativity of teachers and students has been further stimulated, the classroom environment and teaching contents have become richer and more diverse, and classroom assessment has developed in the direction of long-term dynamics. However, at the same time, the value reconstruction of the cultural ecology of university classrooms also faces such real problems as the conflict between teachers and students, the fragmentation of teaching environment and contents, and the redundancy of classroom assessment matters. Therefore, the cultural ecology of university classrooms still needs to be constantly explored for new construction paths.

4.1. Expanding the interaction space

To expand the space of interaction between teachers and students and to resolve the conflicting nature between university teachers and students, a new classroom cultural ecology can be shaped from two levels: the real classroom and the online classroom expanded by multimedia. In the real life, teachers and students share the real classroom environment, and in the face-to-face space, teachers and students can sense each other's emotional changes and respond to them at the first time. Therefore, universities should do their best to create opportunities for offline communication between faculty and students. In the post-epidemic era, offline teaching is gradually being restored, and some of the tedious clock-in, meetings, and tests of the past are being eliminated. When some of the pressure is released, university teachers have more time and energy to devote to offline teaching, and there will
be more room for interaction between teachers and students. For students, schools can channel their negative emotions through mental health courses, group activities, after-school lectures and other forms of interventions to guide them to face the reality of their own problems caused by the spirit of nihilism, to find meaning in life through interaction with teachers and peers, to fill the spiritual void with positive values, and then to firmly establish the right direction for development. At the same time, the university classroom has more options than the primary and secondary school classrooms. Teachers can choose and create classroom contexts based on course content, such as changing the layout of desks, sketching outdoors, visiting on-campus museums, and other diverse learning styles. These changes can expand the space for real-life teacher-student interactions and help classroom subjects to spark more ideas in the new and varied classroom and enhance the friendship between teachers and students. The post-industrial society has also developed a colorful ecological space of online classroom culture for university classroom learners. In addition to teachers using multimedia devices in the classroom, students are now using electronic media to expand their learning horizons and open up new spaces in the university classroom through platforms such as catechism and virtual schools (Meseguer-Martinez et al., 2019). Because of this, students have more opportunities and ways to learn on their own, and their minds are no longer limited to the content presented by teachers in the classroom, but can explore relatively freely from the classroom content as the center of the circle, with their individual interests as the radius. University teachers can make full use of cyberspace to encourage students to understand and learn more new content, to receive and judge ideas from different perspectives across countries, nationalities, and ages outside the classroom and reality, so that thinking flows from the square to the world. Students then try to express the new knowledge and emotional experiences they have gained from them in real classroom discussions and exchanges, which not only expands the range of cultural sources in the classroom in terms of space, but also expands classroom knowledge in terms of content, achieving the real effect of teaching and learning and teacher-student interaction in the teaching sessions. In this process, the subjective thinking of teachers and students in the classroom cultural ecology is reshaped, the classroom atmosphere with back and forth expands the field of cultural exchange, the conflict between teachers and students is replaced by interactivity, and the creativity of both sides’ thinking is more easily stimulated.

4.2. Improving the quality of faculties

Under the influence of post-modernist thinking, the learning needs of individual students have become more diverse, so university teachers are also under greater psychological pressure at the teaching level and are faced with new requirements to improve teacher quality. On the one hand, in the face of fragmented multidimensional and multi-structured knowledge, university teachers should establish a holistic view of teaching and acquire the ability to link knowledge together. In isolation, fragmented knowledge is one-sided and parochial, and it lacks the wholeness and complete educational value of the knowledge proper. Therefore, university teachers should create a good university classroom ecology in the offline classroom environment and in the interactive experience with students to prompt them to recognize the diversity of knowledge and the importance of filling cognitive gaps. In a society with inflated knowledge and information, people often have a basic understanding of things through partial insights, but few realize that a significant portion of epistemology and metaphysics beyond the knowledge inflation is a domain close to ignorance for individuals (Figueras-Maz et al., 2021). Both teachers and students need to face old knowledge and new knowledge with humility, to balance the
problem of general and specialized knowledge, to solidify the professional discipline, and to broaden the interdisciplinary content, to broaden the cognition and vision. In order to create a good cultural ecology in the university classroom, we should not only form a learning community of teachers and students in the classroom to open up learning ideas in teaching interaction, but also actively build interdisciplinary exchange groups of teachers outside the classroom, improve the overall quality of the teaching team, strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation and innovation, and build a faculty with interdisciplinary awareness and research ability. In the post-modernist perspective, the relationship between students and teachers is becoming more equal, and more individualized learning needs arise. On the premise of building a good foundation of teaching knowledge, teachers should also consolidate their teaching ability in various ways, and stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in learning with flexible and varied teaching methods. Teachers not only need to teach knowledge, but also need to get inside students' minds in order to respond accurately to the new questions that students are asking in different contexts. On the other hand, teacher quality is not only about personal knowledge and teaching ability, but also includes moral quality. Teachers' moral character directly affects the relationship between teachers and students, and a positive ethical relationship between teachers and students is indispensable for the formation of a positive classroom culture. Related studies point out that teachers prefer to sit in front of the so-called good students (Llamas & Coronel, 2006), while teachers act as the chief among equals in the classroom and take the initiative to guide students into the classroom, while students actively participate in the classroom and love the teacher in their hearts because of the teacher's trust and encouragement. In such a classroom context, the positive teaching ethics of both teachers and students will also have a positive impact on the transmission and exchange of knowledge. At the same time, the high moral quality of teachers also facilitates the formation of their holistic view of teaching and learning. In the process of improving their moral conduct, teachers will examine their overall quality, reflect on their own words and actions, and to a certain extent form a good model for students by example.

4.3. Perfecting the evaluation system

The cultural ecology of university classroom is composed of the subject culture, behavior culture and goal culture within the university classroom by teachers and students in the long-term classroom teaching activities. The assessment system of classroom teaching is a manifestation and refraction of the target culture of university classrooms, and the assessment results provide teachers with a basis for judging whether classroom teaching meets expectations, which is a cultural phenomenon that evaluates and promotes university teachers' teaching. To change the phenomenon of redundant criteria and assessment without process in the past university teaching management assessment system, it is necessary to delineate the evaluation criteria and establish a dynamic and long-term classroom assessment mechanism for both teachers and students. Specifically, there should be different evaluation indicators for different types of university teachers. For example, in research-oriented colleges and universities, the evaluation of teaching should focus on the investigation of teachers' scientific research ability and teaching level, and the innovation of teaching should be grasped on the basis of scientific research, which is conducive to improving teachers' comprehensive ability and helping students to learn professional knowledge and lay a good foundation for research. While in skill-based colleges and universities, the evaluation of university teachers should focus on the practical teaching achievements, and pay attention to students' transformation of theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom into...
theoretical knowledge. In skill-based institutions, the assessment of university teachers should focus on practical teaching outcomes and the level of students' ability to transform theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom into practical skills. At the same time, we should improve the evaluation mechanism of university classroom teaching, pay attention to multiple subjects related to the teaching process, combine teachers' self-evaluation with students' and leaders' evaluation, and use the evaluation results as a guide to help teachers form a relatively complete and objective self-cognition, so as to improve their own shortcomings. At the same time, the assessment of teachers' classroom management should not be single and isolated, but the university should establish teaching evaluation files for teachers and organize and back up the records of teaching evaluation every semester and every academic year, so as to dynamically observe, manage and evaluate university teachers. In addition, students, as one of the influential subjects of classroom cultural ecology, should also be given full attention and need to be included in the evaluation system. On the one hand, students need to evaluate and give feedback to teachers' classroom teaching behaviors, and in turn, teachers need to evaluate students' learning, help students reflect on the state of the classroom, and make continuous progress in reflective education, so that the joint efforts of teachers and students can contribute to the balance of classroom cultural ecology (Yi, 2022). Due to the cultural tendencies of postmodernism, such as deconstruction and nihilism, many students are in spiritual crisis, which in turn affects their learning status in the classroom. Therefore, when setting the criteria for assessing students in the classroom, we should not only focus on students' understanding and mastery of knowledge, but also improve our understanding of their physical and mental health, and keep track of their mental health in the classroom through questionnaires, lectures, and other forms. Systematic assessment of both teacher and student subjects in the classroom is conducive to a more organic, pluralistic, and harmonious developmental character of the classroom cultural ecology (Barrow & Grant, 2016).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Under the influence of postmodernism characterized by decentralization and counter-rationalization, the cultural ecology of university classroom shows the characteristics that the relationship between teachers and students tends to be equal but the role cognition is likely to be self-centered. Then, in classroom teaching, there is a situation of knowledge diversification while teachers are faced with the new challenge of integrating fragmented knowledge. Finally, at the level of classroom assessment, the assessment methods focus on the whole process and multi-angles, which also increases the workload of teachers. Based on the above, under the influence of postmodernism, university classrooms should pay more attention to the interaction between teachers and students to correct the tendency of self-isolation, requiring teachers to improve their professional quality to facilitate knowledge transfer (Shi et al., 2023), and at the same time, reducing the problem of unclear rights and responsibilities by implementing a perfect and detailed evaluation system. At last, this paper focuses on the discussion of problem-solving path from a new perspective. However, the lack of empirical evidence is the deficiency of this study. The future development direction should be a deeper combination of theory and empirical research, increasing data collection to make the study more realistic, and exploring its influencing factors from a more microscopic perspective.
References


Cao, C. P. (2022). Cultural Ecology of University Classroom in the Context of New Liberal Art Construction. Journal of Yangzhou University (Higher Education Study Edition), 26(06), 86-93. https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=3uoqIhG8C44YLTOAiTRKibYIV5Vjs7iOt0BO4yQ4m_m0GeS2ml3UA_iOT9r6-arFLo1A-4iQoNHxqXqimBAWGUN6GK2noDd&unipatform=NZKPT.


Liu, J. H. (2017). University Classroom Culture: Rethinking and Reconstructing in Difficult Situations. Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition), 38(11),225-229. https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=3uoqIhG8C44YLTOAiTRKibYIV5Vjs7iAEhECQAQ9aTiC5BjCgn0RtEgg0RjLt5uyeBDlmGhJGn5122XiuJAdMncCy5IXKhd&unipatform=NZKPT.


based on 560 survey samples. *Journal of Southwest China Normal University (Natural Science Edition)*, 44(03), 156-162. https://libresource.swu.edu.cn/piskns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=3uoqIhG8C44YLTIOAiTRKibYIV5js7iLik5jEcCI09uHa3oBxtWoKV7ML-1OsMa6ggILgdVhuNp574WQJMNm-i_j1Yz8GKHkm&uniplatform=NZKPT.
Zhao, J. B., Yang, Y., & Cui, Y. (2008). The exploration of classroom teaching assessment in colleges and universities. *Journal of Xi'an University of Arts and Science (Social Sciences Edition)*, 47(04), 68-70. https://libresource.swu.edu.cn/piskns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=3uoqIhG8C44YLTIOAiTRKghrJ08w1e7VSLHJE7EdEx3q74mKKiY1CMOyBfmeGagVM9MPMxdezaH1veLC91BMexcknLGlzQ7PJ&uniplatform=NZKPT.