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Study on the Strategies for Improving the Application Ability of Three Unified Textbooks in Study Travel from the Perspective of Practical Course-Based on the Case Comparison of China, US and UK

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Abstract: Translating knowledge from the unified textbooks for Chinese Language, Morality and the Rule of Law, and History into practical capabilities and subject-specific core competencies hinges on students' practical application of textbook content. As a vital carrier for comprehensive social-practice curricula, study-tour programmes offer a tangible pathway for textbook knowledge to enter real-world contexts and achieve knowledge transfer and application. Grounded in constructivism, situated learning and core-competency education theories, this paper draws on study-tour practice cases from China, the United States and the United Kingdom. Adopting multiple research methods including case comparison, policy-document review and in-depth interviews, it dissects the internal mechanisms through which study-tour activities facilitate students' practical use of the three sets of unified textbooks, and puts forward corresponding improvement strategies. The study finds that study-tour programmes across the three countries differ in curriculum-goal orientation, content-organisation logic, implementation modalities and evaluation-mechanism development, yet all follow the fundamental learning logic of "textbook knowledge-real-world context-competence transformation". Current domestic study-tour practices are confronted with challenges such as low alignment between textbook knowledge points and study-tour tasks and insufficient interdisciplinary curriculum design. Drawing on U.S. and British experience in interdisciplinary curriculum design, inquiry-based learning organisation and process-oriented assessment, a multi-dimensional comprehensive evaluation mechanism can be established. The findings of this research provide references for integrating practical curricula at the basic-education level with national unified textbooks, and deliver actionable practical insights for fostering students' textbook-application competence and realising core-competency-oriented education.

Keywords: Study-tour; Unified textbooks for Chinese Language, Morality and the Rule of Law, and History; Textbook-application competence; Practical-oriented curriculum; International comparison

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1. Review of domestic and international research

Knowledge transfer and application derived from textbook materials have long attracted attention in international education research. Numerous studies have discussed the correlation between textbook-utilisation proficiency and student learning outcomes. Jean Piaget, a representative scholar of constructivism, posits that knowledge acquisition and application constitute an active constructive process for learners. Students must engage in hands-on practical activities to transform abstract textbook concepts into authentic personal experience. Jerome Bruner's discovery-learning theory emphasises that students should uncover and apply learned knowledge through inquiry-oriented activities so as to develop capabilities for solving real-world problems. With the growing prevalence of core-competency-oriented education, an increasing number of researchers regard textbook-application competence as a pivotal literacy that ought to be cultivated through interdisciplinary instruction and practical curricula.

Domestic scholarly research on textbook utilisation mainly focuses on three dimensions: the real-world status of textbook implementation, practical dilemmas and instructional optimisation pathways. Existing studies indicate that many students rigidly understand textbook knowledge and struggle to transfer what they have learned to unfamiliar contexts. Such deficiencies need to be addressed through contextualised teaching and practical curricula. Some scholars also examine the implementation of unified textbooks and explore classroom-teaching reforms to enhance students' knowledge-application proficiency. Nevertheless, notable gaps persist in extant research. First, academia has not reached a consistent, clear conceptual definition for "textbook-application competence". Second, most studies remain confined to in-classroom settings. Relatively few investigations explore the linkage between off-campus social-practice activities such as study-tours and the three sets of unified textbooks [1].

Overall, domestic and international scholars have conducted research on textbook application and study-tour practices, yet three research gaps remain [2]. There is a lack of assessment frameworks and systematic classifications targeting application competence for the three unified textbooks; the internal mechanisms whereby study-tour activities drive the transformation of textbook knowledge have not been fully unpacked; cross-national comparative research is insufficient to derive universally applicable practical strategies. Against this backdrop, supported by constructivist learning theory, situated-learning theory and core-competency education theory, this paper takes study-tour cases from China, the United States and the United Kingdom as research subjects. By combining case comparison, policy-document analysis and in-depth interviews, it explores feasible pathways for study-tour programmes to enhance students' competence in applying unified textbooks, so as to fill gaps in existing scholarship.

2. Comparative analysis of study-tour practices and the implementation of unified textbooks in China, the United States and the United Kingdom

2.1. Case-selection criteria

Three criteria guided case screening in this research. First, representativeness: selected study-tour programmes should enjoy certain visibility within their respective countries and genuinely reflect local developmental features and real-world implementation of study-tour education. Second, relevance: cases must demonstrate the utilisation of subject-textbook knowledge in study-tour activities, enabling observation of how students draw on textbook content to complete learning tasks. Third, diversity: cases should display distinguishable features in curriculum objectives, content design, implementation modes and assessment

approaches to facilitate horizontal comparative analysis. In accordance with the above criteria, this paper selects the Dunhuang cultural study-tour programme in China, a U.S. history-themed PBL study-tour project, and a British castle-heritage study-tour programme as analytical cases [3].

2.2. Basic profiles of selected cases

2.2.1. The Dunhuang cultural study-tour programme (China)

Jointly developed by a key senior high school in China and the Dunhuang Academy, this five-day programme targets senior high-school students under the theme "Exploring Dunhuang Culture and Inheriting Chinese Civilisation". Its curriculum deliberately integrates content from the unified textbooks for Chinese Language, Morality and the Rule of Law, and History, and sets a series of inquiry-based learning tasks. Drawing on texts related to the Mogao Caves in Chinese-Language textbooks, students read local Dunhuang historical documents. Through on-site visits to historical sites including the Mogao Caves and Yumen Pass, they sort out the historical evolution of the Dunhuang region. Centring on themes such as cultural confidence and inheritance of fine traditional Chinese culture from the Morality and the Rule of Law textbook, group seminars are organised to consolidate students' cultural identity and sense of responsibility. The programme incorporates expert lectures, on-site heritage-site investigations, collaborative group inquiry and learning-outcome presentations. It endeavours to connect theoretical textbook knowledge with local real-world scenarios in Dunhuang and trains students to comprehensively draw on content from the three sets of textbooks to analyse practical issues.

2.2.2. The U.S. history-themed PBL study-tour project

Co-developed by a local educational institution and the United States National Park Service, this seven-day project serves junior-high-school students. Its curriculum prioritises historical-context reconstruction and the cultivation of students' critical thinking. Learning content covering history, language arts and civic education is integrated within a project-based-learning (PBL) framework. Students conduct field visits to historical sites and examine archival materials concerning the American Revolutionary War and westward expansion, so as to comprehend the backgrounds of major historical events and their enduring influences on contemporary society. In line with language-arts curriculum requirements, students produce two categories of written outputs: research reports and historical narratives. Debates on civic responsibility and social equity are held to build connections between historical events and present-day social life. Comprising field investigations, archival research, group collaboration and thematic presentations, the curriculum guides students to identify research questions independently and conduct inquiries. It facilitates the transfer of textbook knowledge to real-world contexts by fostering critical thinking through practice.

2.2.3. The British castle-heritage study-tour programme

Co-designed by a British secondary school and a castle-heritage-conservation organisation, this four-day programme targets Year 5 and Year 6 primary-school students under the theme "Exploring Ancient Castles and Understanding Cultural Heritage". Adopting an experiential-learning model, its curriculum aligns core learning points for history, English literature and civic education with the cognitive level of upper-stage primary-school learners. During on-site tours of medieval castles and examinations of surviving relics, students gain insights into medieval British social structures and everyday life for ordinary people.

The English-literature module assigns tasks including narrative-poetry composition and dramatised historical-story sharing, encouraging students to create literary works themed on castle heritage and deliver public presentations. In the civic-education segment, discussions focus on cultural-heritage conservation and civic social responsibility. Students are prompted to deliberate on heritage-protection solutions and intergenerational inheritance to foster a sense of accountability. Multiple pedagogical forms including on-site observation, immersive experience, group discussion and outcome demonstration are adopted to help students establish links with history and apply classroom-acquired knowledge in authentic contexts.

2.3. Comparative analysis of the three national study-tour programmes

All three study-tour programmes regard student-competence advancement and literacy cultivation as core curriculum objectives, yet they feature distinct priority orientations.

The Chinese Dunhuang-themed study-tour programme prioritises contextual implementation of cultural-heritage content and textbook knowledge. Leveraging on-site study-tour experiences, it deepens students' understanding of regional Dunhuang culture, builds their capacity to analyse real-world issues by synthesising content from the three unified textbooks, and places high value on cultivating cultural confidence and cultural responsibility.

The U.S. PBL-oriented study-tour project puts critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities at the forefront. Guided by inquiry-based learning throughout the curriculum, it motivates students to flexibly apply textbook knowledge of history, language arts and civic studies, with primary emphasis on developing critical-thinking literacy.

The British castle-heritage study-tour programme focuses on enriching students' cultural experiences and advancing all-round literacy. Through abundant castle-centred practical activities, it develops students' capacity to translate knowledge into practice and nurtures their awareness of cultural-heritage conservation and civic responsibility.

Brief comparative observation reveals that objective design in Chinese study-tour programmes leans toward the integrated application of textbook knowledge and local cultural heritage. By contrast, U.S. and British study-tour programmes attach greater importance to individual students' core-competency development and the growth of comprehensive capabilities across varied contexts [4].

3 Internal mechanisms through which study-tours enhance students' competence in applying unified textbooks

Drawing on constructivism, situated-learning theory and core-competency-oriented education theories, together with cross-case evidence, study-tour activities improve student proficiency in using the three unified textbooks via four pathways: situational construction, task-driven engagement, interactive inquiry and reflective internalisation [5].

3.1. Situational construction mechanism: Building bridges between textbook knowledge and the real world

Applying transferred knowledge first requires appropriate learning contexts. Study-tour programmes create perceptible on-site learning environments that correlate abstract knowledge points from the three sets of textbooks with real-world scenarios, offering practical opportunities for students to deploy acquired

knowledge [6]. All three analysed cases attach great importance to constructing learning contexts: the Chinese programme draws on Dunhuang cultural relics and landscapes; the U.S. project utilises historical-site archives within national historical parks; the British programme relies on castle-heritage resources. Immersed in authentic settings, isolated textbook concepts and principles are no longer confined to printed pages. Instead, they correspond directly with observable phenomena and concrete problems, helping students grasp knowledge connotations and understand applicable contexts for what they have learned.

3.2. Task-driven mechanism: Motivating students to deploy textbook knowledge proactively

The Dunhuang study-tour includes ancient-document research, heritage-site field visits and cultural-heritage-themed seminars; the U.S. project features site investigations, archival research and thematic debates; the British programme comprises castle tours, hands-on experiential exercises and role-playing assignments [7]. Clear-targeted and well-structured tasks push students to draw on textbook knowledge for analysis and problem-solving. While completing assigned work, students must voluntarily revisit textbook content, synthesise multi-source information and formulate problem-solving strategies, thereby strengthening knowledge-transfer competence, interdisciplinary-integration capacity and practical-innovation skills. For instance, in the U.S. history-focused PBL project, students integrate history-textbook content about the American Revolutionary War, civic-education knowledge on civil rights and language-arts guidelines for report-writing to conduct interdisciplinary inquiries and develop competencies for tackling complex real-world challenges.

3.3. Interactive-inquiry mechanism: Deepening students' comprehension and application of textbook knowledge

Diversified interaction constitutes an essential condition for knowledge internalisation. Study-tour activities foster collaborative-inquiry learning environments via group work, teacher-student communication and expert consultation, which deepen students' understanding of textbook content. Each case adopts distinct interactive carriers: the Chinese programme relies heavily on group discussions and expert lectures; the U.S. project prioritises group collaboration and thematic debates; the British programme frequently uses group sharing and role-playing. During interactive processes, students articulate personal viewpoints, absorb peers' perspectives and jointly address learning challenges. Within the Dunhuang study-tour, student groups collaboratively unpack the historical background and artistic value of Dunhuang culture by synthesising knowledge from Chinese-Language, History, and Morality-and-the-Rule-of-Law textbooks to cultivate interdisciplinary thinking. In the British castle-heritage programme, role-playing activities reconstruct medieval-era daily life. Students synthesise textbook content from history, literature and civic-education subjects to achieve comprehensive knowledge application and foster practical-innovation literacy.

3.4. Reflective-internalisation mechanism: Consolidating competence in applying textbook knowledge

Reflective review forms an indispensable component of complete learning cycles. Through outcome presentations, experience-sharing sessions and assessment feedback, study-tour programmes guide students to review full learning processes and adjust themselves against learning outputs, further advancing their textbook-application competence [8]. All three programmes value reflective-literacy cultivation, albeit through

different implementation approaches. The Chinese study-tour mainly leverages outcome presentations and learning reflections; the U.S. project uses inquiry reports and reflective evaluation; the British programme combines performance demonstrations and experience-sharing for reflective purposes. Students recap their full study-tour journey, summarise gains, identify obstacles encountered, detect deficiencies in their deployment of textbook knowledge and restructure personal knowledge frameworks to achieve competence growth. Upon concluding the Dunhuang study-tour, students write reflective reports reviewing their strengths and weaknesses in mobilising knowledge from the three unified textbooks, and identify directions for subsequent learning improvement. Through reflective assessment in the U.S. PBL project, students recap inquiry-practice experiences and simultaneously enhance knowledge-application proficiency and critical-thinking capacities.

4. Optimising study-tour implementation by drawing on international experience to improve students' competence in applying unified textbooks

Based on cross-national case comparisons and practical-curriculum pedagogical requirements, this paper proposes optimisation strategies for study-tour education to advance students' competence in applying the three unified textbooks from four dimensions: curriculum objectives, curriculum content, implementation pathways and assessment systems.

4.1. Orienting curriculum objectives toward core competencies and strengthening training for textbook-application competence

4.1.1. Integrating global-vision and cross-cultural-awareness cultivation

Study-tour curriculum objectives may appropriately incorporate requirements for global vision and cross-cultural understanding to transcend narrow local-cognition boundaries. Drawing on U.S. and British practical experience, objectives for cross-cultural communication and international understanding should be embedded within curriculum design. Study-tour activities can guide students to perceive cultural diversity and societal development across different nations and facilitate mutual learning among varied educational practices [9]. Where conditions permit, cross-cultural collaborative tasks may be designed: students may form joint learning groups with overseas peers to compare cultural-heritage-conservation practices worldwide. Such arrangements enable students to deploy knowledge acquired from unified textbooks within cross-cultural contexts, expand boundaries for knowledge application and enhance comprehensive literacy.

4.1.2. Refining tiered cultivation objectives for textbook-application competence

This paper decomposes textbook-application competence for the three unified textbooks into four concrete dimensions with observable cultivation indicators: first, knowledge transfer: the capacity to apply textbook-acquired knowledge to unfamiliar contexts and tackle new problems; second, interdisciplinary integration: the ability to synthesise multi-subject textbook knowledge to address complex practical tasks; third, contextualised application: analysing and resolving real-world problems with textbook knowledge within authentic scenarios; fourth, practical innovation: generating new observational perspectives and problem-solving approaches on the basis of knowledge application. When setting study-tour objectives, expected learning attainment levels should be specified surrounding these four dimensions.

4.1.3. Balancing cultural-heritage inheritance and holistic competence development

Building on experience from the Dunhuang study-tour project, curriculum objectives ought to reconcile local-cultural-heritage inheritance with student-competence growth. Local cultural-resource development should be aligned with competence-building for practical deployment of the three unified textbooks. For traditional-culture-themed study-tours, inquiry tasks should be explicitly formulated corresponding to content in Chinese-Language, History, and Morality-and-the-Rule-of-Law textbooks. Task-driven pedagogy encourages students to utilise textbook knowledge to analyse traditional culture's historical backgrounds, artistic features and contemporary value, so as to simultaneously foster cultural-identity awareness and textbook-application competence.

4.2. Constructing a curriculum-content system featuring in-depth integration between textbook knowledge and practical scenarios

4.2.1. Realising targeted transformation of unified-textbook knowledge points to guarantee content systematicness

Study-tour content design must closely align with the unified textbooks for Chinese Language, Morality and the Rule of Law, and History. Core knowledge points and key-difficult content extracted from textbooks ought to be translated into actionable study-tour tasks to ensure coherent and complete learning content. Drawing on the "knowledge-point-context-task" design logic adopted in the Dunhuang study-tour, one or multiple textbook knowledge points correspond to each study-tour task. Task completion processes compel students to mobilise textbook knowledge for inquiry and reflection. Taking red-culture-themed study-tours as an example, content including red-themed literary texts from Chinese-Language textbooks, major revolutionary-event accounts from History textbooks and spiritual-inheritance themes from Morality-and-the-Rule-of-Law textbooks can be integrated. Tasks such as canonical-text reading, red-site field visits and discussions on contemporary spirits can be deployed to guide students to interpret the historical value and practical significance of red culture through textbook resources.

4.2.2. Promoting interdisciplinary-content integration to improve comprehensive knowledge-application competence

Subject boundaries should be broken down to advance integrated deployment of knowledge across the three textbooks and enhance students' interdisciplinary literacy. Learning from U.S. PBL projects and British castle-heritage study-tour practices, interdisciplinary inquiry tasks should be developed to push students to draw on multi-subject knowledge to resolve complex real-world problems [10]. For an ancient-city-investigation study-tour, content may synthesise ancient-city-related prose from Chinese-Language textbooks, urban-evolution narratives from History textbooks and cultural-heritage-conservation themes from Morality-and-the-Rule-of-Law textbooks. Tasks including historical-document research, field investigations and heritage-protection-scheme formulation can be assigned. Students synthesise multi-subject textbook knowledge to interpret the cultural value of ancient cities and conceive feasible heritage-protection proposals.

4.3. Absorbing international educational concepts and enhancing global adaptability of curriculum content

Mature international study-tour practices from the United States and the United Kingdom can inform

curriculum-content design. First, adopt project-based-learning concepts from U.S. practices to formulate inquiry-oriented study-tour tasks and foster students' autonomous-inquiry and problem-solving capabilities. Second, incorporate British outdoor-education thinking to expand experiential study-tour assignments that enable students to engage with cultural connotations through direct on-site exposure. Third, reference international inquiry-teaching paradigms to improve students' interdisciplinary textbook-application competence against international educational benchmarks. For cultural-heritage-themed study-tours, for instance, concepts from UNESCO heritage-conservation frameworks can be introduced. Students may combine content from domestic unified textbooks to analyse practical dilemmas in heritage conservation and independently devise potential countermeasures.

5. Conclusions

Grounded in constructivism, situated-learning theory and core-competency-oriented education theories, this research selects study-tour cases from China, the United States and the United Kingdom. Adopting case comparison, policy-document analysis and in-depth interviews, it analyses pathways through which study-tour activities advance students' practical deployment of the three unified textbooks and draws the following conclusions.

First, study-tour programmes in China, the United States and the United Kingdom exhibit distinguishing features in curriculum objectives, content logic, implementation pathways and assessment systems. Nevertheless, all follow the learning logic of "textbook knowledge-practical context-competence transformation" and can foster students' textbook-application competence. Domestic Chinese programmes emphasise training that combines cultural-heritage resources with textbook knowledge; U.S. projects prioritise cultivation of critical-thinking and problem-solving capabilities; British programmes attach greater weight to cultural-experience enrichment and holistic-literacy development.

Second, study-tour activities enhance students' textbook-application competence via four mechanisms: situational construction, task-driven learning, interactive inquiry and reflective internalisation. Situational construction establishes connections between textbook knowledge and real-world contexts; task-driven learning motivates students to actively apply textbook knowledge; interactive inquiry deepens student comprehension of textbook content; reflective internalisation consolidates overall proficiency in flexibly deploying textbook knowledge.

Third, for practical-curriculum development, four dimensions can be addressed to strengthen textbook-application competence within study-tour education: establish curriculum objectives guided by core-competency frameworks and refine requirements for textbook-application-competence cultivation; build curriculum-content systems that link textbook knowledge points to practical contexts; optimise implementation pathways by integrating independent inquiry and collaborative learning; develop multi-stakeholder-participatory assessment systems that value both learning processes and learning outcomes.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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