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How to cite: Wei H. Research on the Development of Fashion English Courses and the Cultivation of Cross-Cultural Communication Ability. Textile & Leather Review. 2026; 9:3596-3606.

<https://doi.org/10.31881/TLR.2026.3596>

How to link <https://doi.org/10.31881/TLR.2026.3596>

Published:25 April 2026



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Article

<https://doi.org/10.31881/TLR.2026.3596>

Published 25 April 2026

ABSTRACT

Addressing the current inadequacy of English instruction in meeting the specialized demands of the textile industry, this study designs and evaluates a comprehensive Fashion English curriculum focused on textiles and apparel. The program systematically integrates specialized textile terminology, including the properties and processing of natural fibers like cotton and wool, advancements in weaving and fabric technologies, sustainable development in material sourcing, brand culture, and intercultural communication competencies. A randomized controlled trial was conducted with 60 undergraduate students, who were assigned to either an experimental group receiving the new curriculum or a control group following conventional instruction. After a 16-week intervention, the experimental group exhibited significant advancements over the control group in Fashion English proficiency—particularly in the mastery and application of domain-specific vocabulary related to textile technology and materials science—as well as in intercultural communication skills. These findings provide robust empirical evidence that deeply integrating language education with the specific professional requirements of the textile industry is a highly effective approach. This offers valuable implications for reforming English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula, preparing professionals to communicate effectively about textile products and processing from yarn to finished garment.

KEYWORDS

fashion English, textiles, textile industry, sustainable development, intercultural communication

INTRODUCTION

With the accelerating pace of globalization, the fashion industry has emerged as a forefront arena of intercultural exchange, exerting profound cultural influence and commercial impact [1,2]. The rapid growth of international fashion weeks, global brand marketing, and cross-border e-commerce requires fashion

professionals not only to possess fluent English for specialized communication but also to cultivate keen intercultural awareness to accurately convey brand values and meet the demands of diverse markets [3,4]. However, a significant gap remains in the current English language education system. Course content is often disconnected from the practical realities of the fashion industry, with limited integration of technical terminology, brand culture, or intercultural case studies [5–7]. Traditional pedagogical approaches, primarily focused on general language proficiency, fail to systematically develop the hybrid competencies required by today's fashion industry, resulting in a persistent misalignment between educational outcomes and professional demands [8].

Existing research has treated Fashion English curriculum development and intercultural competence cultivation as distinct domains, generating valuable yet fragmented insights. Considerable progress has been made in the development of Fashion English curricula. For example, Ashraf et al. [9] designed a specialized English program tailored to learners and professionals in fashion design, while Junstrand et al. [10] explored the integration of sustainable education models into fashion business education at the University of the Arts London. Similarly, Yadav et al. [11] examined the role of digital technologies in the evolution of fashion-related curricula. Despite these contributions, the literature largely emphasizes isolated aspects of course design, and there remains a paucity of theoretically grounded, empirically validated, and holistic curricula, particularly those that explicitly embed intercultural communication training.

Parallel research on the cultivation of intercultural competence (ICC) has also deepened in recent years. Scholars have employed advanced methodologies, such as fuzzy analytic hierarchy processes and neural network models, to construct and validate ICC assessment frameworks [12,13]. The pivotal role of teacher engagement and pragmatic theory in fostering learners' intercultural abilities has likewise been well documented [14,15]. Nevertheless, these studies often remain general in scope and fail to address the unique cultural and linguistic dynamics of the fashion sector. Research specifically targeting the inherent intercultural challenges of the fashion industry—such as reconciling aesthetic differences between Eastern and Western cultures or navigating the subtleties of cross-cultural brand marketing—remains scarce. Consequently, a substantial research gap persists at the intersection of these two fields. Rigorous empirical investigation is needed to develop a systematic curriculum that simultaneously advances professional English proficiency and the nuanced intercultural competence necessary for success in the global fashion industry. Grounded in Byram's theoretical model [16,17], this study designs, implements, and evaluates a comprehensive Fashion English curriculum. Byram's framework offers an integrative approach to

competence development encompassing five key dimensions: (1) knowledge of the social norms and values of the target culture; (2) an attitude of openness, curiosity, and tolerance toward cultural differences; (3) the skills of interpreting and relating cultural phenomena; (4) skills of discovery and interaction, enabling learners to actively acquire new cultural information and adapt their behavior; and (5) critical cultural awareness, including reflection on one's own cultural biases. This model informed the development of the curriculum's learning objectives, pedagogical activities, and assessment instruments.

The primary aim of the study is to empirically evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness in enhancing students' professional language proficiency and intercultural competence. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions: To what extent does a systematic Fashion English curriculum improve students' Fashion English proficiency compared with traditional English instruction? How does the curriculum affect students' intercultural communication ability, intercultural sensitivity, and overall learning attitudes? Consistent with the principles of situated learning and integrated curriculum design, it is hypothesized that students who complete the specialized Fashion English program will demonstrate greater improvement across all measured domains than their peers receiving conventional English instruction.

EXPERIMENTAL

Participants

The participants comprised 60 sophomore undergraduates majoring in English from two intact classes at a Chinese university. All students voluntarily participated after being fully informed about the study's objectives and procedures. Pretest assessments confirmed no significant differences between the two randomly assigned groups in age, gender, or baseline English proficiency ($p > 0.05$). A sample size of 30 per group was adequate to detect medium-to-large effect sizes ($d \geq 0.5$) with approximately 80% statistical power at an alpha level of 0.05, which is considered sufficient for educational intervention research.

Research Design and Procedure

A pretest–posttest randomized controlled trial was employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Fashion English curriculum. The study protocol was approved by our university's Institutional Review Board for educational research, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The intervention spanned a full 16-week academic semester. Prior to the intervention, all 60 students completed a battery of pretest assessments. Using a random number table, the researchers assigned students to the experimental group ($n = 30$) or the control group ($n = 30$). Both groups attended four English classes per week, delivered by instructors with comparable teaching experience to minimize teacher-related variability. Upon completion of the 16-week program, all participants completed the same set of posttest assessments.

Intervention

Experimental group: The experimental group received a systematically designed Fashion English curriculum based on the delta model (design, exploration, learning, transformation, application). The curriculum comprised four core modules tailored to the practical demands of the fashion industry: (1) fashion industry terminology, (2) fashion brand culture, (3) English for fashion shows, and (4) case studies in intercultural fashion communication. Instructional methods included project-based learning (e.g., organizing a virtual fashion show), role-play simulations, collaborative group work, and case study discussions.

Control group: The control group followed the standard sophomore English syllabus of the university, which was not specifically tailored to the fashion industry. The primary textbook was *Contemporary College English: Book 3*, and class activities emphasized general academic English skills. Typical activities included reading and analyzing texts of general interest, vocabulary and grammar exercises based on the textbook, and discussions of broad social topics. The curriculum did not provide systematic training in intercultural communication theory or industry-specific language applications.

Data Collection and Instruments

- (1) **Intercultural Communication Competence Scale (ICCS):** A validated 30-item instrument designed for fashion-related contexts, covering cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, rated on a five-point Likert scale. Pretest analyses confirmed its validity and reliability. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) yielded a KMO value of 0.86 ($p < 0.001$), with three extracted factors explaining 62.5% of the total variance, consistent with the theoretical framework. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency in this study (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$).
- (2) **Fashion English Proficiency Test:** A researcher-developed 100-point examination assessing mastery of fashion-specific English. To ensure content validity, the test was reviewed by an expert panel comprising

two applied linguistics professors and one fashion marketing director, and subsequently revised based on their feedback.

- (3) **Classroom Observation Checklist:** A structured form documenting students' engagement in specific tasks, collaborative participation, and demonstration of intercultural awareness.
- (4) **Fashion English Learning Attitude Questionnaire:** A 15-item researcher-developed questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale to assess learning interest, motivation, and confidence. The instrument demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$).
- (5) **Extracurricular Learning Engagement Log:** A self-reported log in which students recorded weekly hours and content of extracurricular Fashion English study. Although the potential for social desirability bias in self-report measures should be acknowledged, this instrument served as a proxy for overall engagement.
- (6) **Fashion Intercultural Communication Project Rubric:** A scoring rubric developed to evaluate the final integrative project. To ensure interrater reliability, three instructors and five student representatives independently evaluated 20 randomly selected projects. The resulting intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was 0.82 ($p < 0.01$), indicating high scoring consistency among raters.
- (7) **Intercultural Sensitivity Self-Assessment Scale:** A classic 20-item scale adapted to fashion-related contexts, using a five-point Likert format to measure dimensions such as enjoyment of interaction and attentiveness [18].

Data Analysis

All quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare pretest scores between groups to establish initial equivalence and to compare posttest scores to evaluate intervention effects. Paired-samples t-tests were used to examine within-group changes from pretest to posttest. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The effects of the intervention were evaluated using seven assessment instruments. Descriptive and inferential statistics for all quantitative outcomes are presented in Table 1. Pretest results revealed no significant differences between the experimental and control groups across all measures (all $p > 0.05$), confirming the baseline comparability of the groups and the effectiveness of random assignment.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and T-test Results for All Measures

Measure (Max Score)	Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	t	p	Cohen's d
Cross-cultural Communication Ability	Experimental	105.4 (10.2)	124.5 (10.3)	6.19	<0.001	1.60
	Control	104.9 (10.5)	108.2 (10.1)			
Fashion English Proficiency	Experimental	68.2 (8.5)	85.1 (8.1)	6.85	<0.001	1.77
	Control	67.9 (8.8)	70.5 (8.4)			
Classroom Observation	Experimental	15.1 (3.1)	20.5 (2.8)	5.98	<0.001	1.54
	Control	14.9 (3.3)	16.1 (2.9)			
Fashion English Learning Attitude	Experimental	50.5 (6.8)	61.2 (6.5)	4.48	<0.001	1.16
	Control	51.1 (7.1)	53.5 (6.8)			
Extracurricular Learning Input (hours/week)	Experimental	2.1 (0.8)	4.1 (1.4)	5.09	<0.001	1.32
	Control	2.0 (0.9)	2.5 (1.0)			
Fashion Project Score	Experimental	N/A	82.5 (7.8)	4.55	<0.001	1.17
	Control	N/A	73.1 (8.2)			
Cross-cultural Sensitivity	Experimental	66.3 (9.1)	78.4 (8.9)	3.68	<0.001	0.95
	Control	65.9 (9.5)	69.8 (9.2)			

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. T-test statistics compare the post-test scores between the observation and control groups. Degrees of freedom (df) = 58 for all tests.

Cross-Cultural Communication Ability

Posttest findings indicated that the experimental group scored significantly higher in cross-cultural communication ability ($M = 124.5$, $SD = 10.3$) than the control group ($M = 108.2$, $SD = 10.1$), yielding a large effect size ($t = 6.19$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.60$). This improvement substantiates the effectiveness of the curriculum. Through in-depth analysis of authentic cases, such as intercultural marketing strategies of international brands, and repeated practice in simulated negotiation settings, students were able to apply the abstract knowledge and skills of Byram's model to address specific, context-based problems, resulting in deep internalization of competence.

Fashion English Proficiency

As the primary goal of the curriculum, Fashion English proficiency exhibited the most substantial improvement. The experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on the posttest ($M = 85.1$, $SD = 8.1$ vs. $M = 70.5$, $SD = 8.4$), with a very large effect size ($t = 6.85$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.77$). This clearly demonstrates the pivotal role of targeted content input. The curriculum systematically covered professional vocabulary ranging from fabrics and techniques to fashion trends, and extensive exposure to fashion texts and oral practice enabled students to comprehend and apply language effectively within professional

contexts, an achievement not attainable in general English courses.

Classroom Participation and Behavior

Quantitative classroom observations revealed that the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher levels of participation ($M = 20.5$, $SD = 2.8$) than the control group ($M = 16.1$, $SD = 2.9$), with a large effect size ($t = 5.98$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.54$). This difference is primarily attributable to the fundamental shift in pedagogical approach. Interactive methods advocated by the delta model, such as project-based learning, group collaboration, and role-play simulations, transformed students from passive recipients of knowledge into active constructors of meaning, greatly enhancing classroom engagement and interaction quality [19,20].

Fashion English Learning Attitude

The experimental group also achieved significantly higher scores in learning attitude ($M = 61.2$, $SD = 6.5$) than the control group ($M = 53.5$, $SD = 6.8$), with a large effect size ($t = 4.48$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.16$). The result shows that suggests that a course closely aligned with students' interests and offering novel content can effectively stimulate intrinsic motivation. When students perceive learning materials as engaging and valuable, their confidence and enthusiasm for learning increase, creating a positive feedback loop [21,22].

Extracurricular Learning Engagement

Self-reported data indicated that students in the experimental group invested significantly more time in extracurricular study, averaging 4.1 hours per week, compared to 2.5 hours in the control group ($t = 5.09$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.32$). This demonstrates that the curriculum's influence extended beyond the classroom. The complexity of project-based tasks "compelled" students to conduct independent research, while the intrinsic interest sparked by the curriculum "motivated" them to explore fashion knowledge voluntarily through diverse channels such as magazines and videos.

Fashion Cross-Cultural Communication Project

In the final integrative project assessing applied competence, the experimental group ($M = 82.5$, $SD = 7.8$) significantly outperformed the control group ($M = 73.1$, $SD = 8.2$), with a large effect size ($t = 4.55$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.17$). This outcome represents the culmination of a semester's systematic training. Students in the experimental group demonstrated the ability to effectively apply linguistic tools and intercultural strategies to accomplish complex tasks, producing outputs that were superior in analytical depth, perspective, and

professional expression.

Cross-Cultural Sensitivity

The experimental group also achieved significantly higher posttest scores in cross-cultural sensitivity ($M = 78.4$, $SD = 8.9$) compared with the control group ($M = 69.8$, $SD = 9.2$), with a large effect size ($t = 3.68$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.95$). Continuous exposure to and reflection on intercultural case studies, combined with the opportunity to experience and resolve simulated cultural conflicts in a supportive classroom environment, enhanced students' awareness, understanding, and tolerance of cultural differences—skills essential for cultivating true intercultural professionals.

This study provides empirically validated and scalable evidence for curriculum reform in ESP, confirming the exceptional effectiveness of deeply integrating language teaching with industry-specific requirements. Nevertheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample was restricted to English majors from a single institution, necessitating further testing of the model's applicability to more diverse populations. Second, some data relied on self-report measures, which may be susceptible to bias. Finally, although the intervention produced significant effects, the possibility of Hawthorne effects—improved performance due to participants' awareness of being studied—cannot be ruled out. Future research should aim to replicate these findings across varied contexts and undertake longitudinal investigations to examine the curriculum's sustained impact on students' professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

This 16-week randomized controlled trial demonstrated the effectiveness of a systematic Fashion English curriculum in enhancing English majors' intercultural communication competence and related professional skills. Core findings indicate that, compared with traditional general English instruction, the customized curriculum produced not only significant and practically meaningful gains in students' Fashion English proficiency and intercultural communication ability—its two primary outcomes—but also profound positive effects on learning attitudes, classroom engagement, and extracurricular commitment. These results provide an empirically validated and transferable model for curriculum reform in ESP, confirming the exceptional effectiveness of deeply integrating language teaching with the specific demands of industry sectors. Although the study's scope was limited by its particular sample and context, it lays a solid foundation for future research to examine the broader applicability of such curricula and their sustained impact on students' long-term

professional development.

Author Contributions

Huiyu Wei designed, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted the manuscript. Huiyu Wei conducted the study, critically revised the manuscript for important intellectual content, and gave final approval of the version to be published. Huiyu Wei participated fully in the work, take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding

2020 Jiangsu University Philosophy and Social Science Research Foreign Language Teaching Project (2020SJB1307) & 2025 Jiangsu Province Higher Education Teaching Reform Research Project (2025JGYB117).

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This survey was conducted in compliance with Ethics Committee of Lianyungang Normal University. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and data usage prior to participation, and responses were collected anonymously. No personally identifiable information was stored.

Availability of Data and Materials

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study were available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

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