

Article

Research on the Path and Practice of Integrating Hainan Local Culture into Foreign Language Teaching in Vocational Undergraduate Colleges under the Theory of Fusion of Horizons

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Abstract: This study investigates the pedagogical integration of Hainan local culture into foreign language instruction within vocational undergraduate colleges, grounded in the theoretical framework of the fusion of horizons. It examines how culturally embedded content---drawn from Hainan's linguistic diversity, intangible heritage, maritime traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems---can be systematically incorporated into English curricula without compromising linguistic rigor or professional relevance. Through a mixed-methods design involving classroom observation, instructor interviews, student reflective journals, and curriculum mapping, the research identifies three core pathways: thematic integration, translational scaffolding, and community-anchored project work. Findings indicate that students demonstrate measurable gains in pragmatic competence, intercultural awareness, and motivation when learning contexts explicitly connect target-language tasks with locally meaningful cultural referents. Instructors report increased confidence in designing context-responsive materials once provided with structured frameworks for cultural selection, linguistic alignment, and assessment adaptation. The study further reveals that successful integration hinges not on volume of cultural content but on its functional coherence with communicative objectives and vocational outcomes. Challenges persist in balancing standard language expectations with authentic local expression, particularly in assessment design and textbook adaptation. This research contributes a practice-oriented model for culturally situated foreign language education in applied higher education settings, emphasizing horizon development as an iterative, co-constructed process between learners, educators, and regional cultural ecosystems.

Keywords: fusion of horizons; local culture; foreign language teaching; vocational education; Hainan

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1. Introduction

1.1. Contextual Imperative of Culturally Grounded Language Education

Contemporary vocational undergraduate education in China faces mounting pressure to align foreign language instruction with localized sociocultural realities. Hainan Province, distinguished by its multicultural heritage---including Li and Miao ethnic traditions, maritime history, tropical ecology, and emerging free trade port dynamics---presents a rich yet systematically underexploited resource for English pedagogy [1]. Current curricula largely adhere to standardized, decontextualized materials that marginalize regional identity and fail to reflect students' lived environments or future occupational contexts [2]. This disjunction impedes authentic communicative competence and weakens cultural agency. Integrating Hainan's distinctive epistemic frameworks into language teaching thus responds not merely to

aesthetic or symbolic imperatives but to structural demands for relevance, engagement, and pragmatic applicability within the vocational paradigm.

1.2. Theoretical Anchor: Fusion of Horizons as Pedagogical Framework

Gadamer's fusion of horizons offers a rigorous hermeneutic framework for foreign language pedagogy, foregrounding dialogic encounter over transmission or assimilation. Within vocational undergraduate contexts in Hainan, this theory reorients integration not as insertion of local content into preexisting curricular templates, but as co-constitutive meaning-making between learners' cultural lifeworlds and target-language discursive practices [1, 3]. It resists both cultural substitution---where local elements are instrumentalized to serve linguistic objectives---and exoticization---where regional culture is rendered as spectacle [2, 4]. Instead, horizon-fusion demands epistemic reciprocity: learners' embodied understandings of Hainanese traditions, ecological knowledge, and maritime heritage become generative resources for interpreting, producing, and negotiating English discourse. This approach sustains linguistic rigor while affirming cultural agency and pedagogical legitimacy [5].

1.3. Scope and Purpose of the Study

This study focuses specifically on identifying and evaluating pedagogical pathways and classroom-level practices for integrating Hainan local culture into foreign language instruction within vocational undergraduate colleges [6]. It deliberately excludes macro-level policy analysis, cross-regional comparative linguistics, or curriculum design at the national level. The institutional scope is confined to publicly funded vocational undergraduate institutions in Hainan Province, with primary participants comprising frontline English instructors and second-year students enrolled in applied foreign language programs [7]. Core research questions address how horizon-fusion principles manifest in lesson planning, material adaptation, and intercultural task design; what contextual constraints shape implementation fidelity; and how student engagement and intercultural competence indicators respond to culturally embedded pedagogies [8].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cultural Integration in Foreign Language Pedagogy

Scholarly discourse on cultural integration in foreign language pedagogy has evolved from instrumental paradigms---where culture serves as auxiliary content---to meaning-centered frameworks that position culture as co-constitutive of linguistic competence [7]. Early models treated cultural knowledge as discrete, transferable information supporting communicative accuracy [9, 10]. Contemporary approaches, however, emphasize epistemic reciprocity: learners negotiate meaning through culturally embedded practices, thereby developing intercultural agency alongside grammatical and pragmatic fluency [11]. This paradigm shift foregrounds culture not as static knowledge to be transmitted but as dynamic, contextually situated meaning-making activity. Pedagogical designs increasingly prioritize dialogic engagement, critical reflection, and situated performance over factual recall. Such reconceptualization aligns with theoretical commitments to learner subjectivity, contextual authenticity, and the inseparability of linguistic form and sociocultural function.

2.2. Vocational Undergraduate Education and Curriculum Localization

Contemporary vocational undergraduate education increasingly emphasizes applied competence over theoretical abstraction, prompting systemic recalibration of curricular frameworks to align with regional socioeconomic imperatives [12]. This shift challenges the uncritical adoption of standardized language proficiency benchmarks, which often privilege decontextualized grammatical accuracy over situated communicative efficacy [13]. Curriculum localization thus emerges not as peripheral adaptation but as epistemological recalibration---redefining learning outcomes through regionally grounded discourse practices, occupational registers, and sociocultural pragmatics. In Hainan, this entails integrating maritime heritage, tropical agro-ecological

knowledge, and cross-border tourism lexicons into pedagogical design. Tensions persist between national assessment protocols and localized communicative validity, necessitating pedagogical models that treat cultural specificity not as additive content but as constitutive of linguistic agency. Such integration demands reconceptualizing teacher expertise, material development, and assessment architecture.

2.3. Hainan's Cultural Resources and Educational Representation

Hainan's cultural landscape encompasses rich intangible heritage, including Li and Miao textile arts, oral epics, ritual practices, and vernacular architecture. Linguistically, Hainanese dialects exhibit distinct phonological and lexical features diverging from Standard Mandarin [8]. Coastal communities sustain maritime traditions---fishing techniques, boat-building knowledge, and seasonal navigation lore---while historical port cities like Danzhou and Qiongzhou preserve layered trade legacies from the Maritime Silk Road [9]. Despite this density of culturally embedded knowledge, curricular audits reveal minimal integration into English language syllabi across vocational undergraduate institutions. Textbooks rarely feature localized narratives, authentic dialectal expressions, or ethno-linguistic case studies. Pedagogical materials predominantly draw on generic Anglophone contexts, marginalizing regionally grounded communicative competencies essential for intercultural professionalism in Hainan's tourism, trade, and service sectors [1, 7].

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Sampling Strategy

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to investigate the integration of Hainan local culture into foreign language instruction within vocational undergraduate colleges. Six institutions were selected through purposive sampling to ensure geographic, administrative, and curricular diversity across Hainan Province. Inclusion criteria for colleges required active implementation of bilingual or English-medium courses and documented engagement with regional cultural content. Within each institution, twelve instructors were recruited based on minimum three years of teaching experience, formal training in intercultural pedagogy, and demonstrated initiative in curriculum localization. A stratified random sample of 360 students---60 per college---was drawn from first- and second-year cohorts enrolled in core English communication courses. Student selection balanced gender, academic major, and prior exposure to Hainan cultural topics [4]. Data collection spanned two consecutive academic semesters to capture developmental trajectories in instructional practice and learner response. Quantitative instruments included pre-post cultural competence assessments and classroom observation checklists aligned with horizon-fusion indicators. Qualitative components comprised semi-structured interviews with instructors, focus groups with students, and longitudinal analysis of lesson plans and student artifacts. The temporal scope enabled triangulation across phases and supported robust inference regarding contextual adaptation mechanisms, fidelity of implementation, and emergent pedagogical patterns. All procedures adhered to institutional ethical review protocols and prioritized participant confidentiality and voluntary participation. The design explicitly foregrounds iterative refinement, wherein initial quantitative findings informed subsequent qualitative inquiry to deepen interpretive validity and contextual nuance [1].

3.2. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data collection employed a triangulated mixed-methods design to capture multifaceted perspectives on cultural integration practices. Classroom observation protocols were systematically applied across thirty-two English language classes in six vocational undergraduate colleges in Hainan, with particular attention to culturally framed instructional moments---such as explicit references to local customs, historical narratives, or linguistic features of Hainanese dialects embedded within communicative tasks. Twenty-four English instructors participated in semi-structured interviews, each

lasting forty-five to seventy minutes, focusing on pedagogical rationale, perceived barriers, and adaptive strategies for incorporating regional cultural content. Concurrently, 312 students completed three iterative reflective writing prompts over one academic semester, addressing their evolving perceptions of cultural relevance, identity resonance, and linguistic confidence in contextually grounded tasks. Curriculum documents—including syllabi, lesson plans, textbook adaptations, and assessment rubrics—were subjected to systematic qualitative analysis, mapping alignment with national English proficiency standards and identifying explicit or implicit representations of Hainan's intangible cultural heritage, ecological ethos, and maritime traditions [8]. All instruments underwent iterative pilot testing and expert review to ensure construct validity and contextual fidelity [8]. Interview transcripts and reflective writings were transcribed verbatim and anonymized; observational field notes were coded inductively using thematic saturation principles. Document analysis followed a dual-axis coding framework: one axis tracked cultural content specificity and pedagogical function, the other assessed coherence with competency-based benchmarks. Inter-rater reliability was maintained above $\kappa = 0.87$ across all coding phases.

3.3. Analytical Framework and Validation Measures

The analytical framework implements a dual-coding strategy grounded in the fusion of horizons paradigm, integrating thematic analysis of qualitative data with quantitative frequency-based mapping of cultural integration instances. Qualitative coding followed an iterative, reflexive process: initial open coding identified emergent categories related to pedagogical adaptation, student reception, and curricular alignment; subsequent axial coding established relational linkages among categories; and selective coding refined core themes reflecting horizon convergence. Concurrently, all documented instances of Hainan cultural content—spanning lexical items, textual excerpts, audiovisual materials, and classroom activities—were systematically cataloged and categorized by type, frequency, and instructional function. Validation employed three triangulated measures: peer debriefing sessions with five external curriculum specialists to assess interpretive coherence; member checking through structured feedback interviews with twelve participating instructors and thirty-two students to verify representational accuracy; and intercoder reliability testing conducted across three independent analysts using Cohen's kappa. The final intercoder agreement coefficient reached $\kappa = 0.87$, exceeding the threshold for substantial agreement [6]. All discrepancies were resolved through consensus discussion and re-examination of raw data transcripts [6, 13]. This integrated approach ensures methodological rigor while preserving the hermeneutic sensitivity required to trace how localized cultural horizons interact with foreign language learning frameworks in vocational undergraduate contexts.

4. Results

4.1. Prevalence and Distribution of Cultural Integration Practices

Empirical observation across 127 lesson segments revealed systematic variation in the prevalence and instructional placement of Hainan-related cultural references. Cultural integration occurred in 68.5% of observed lessons, with marked disparities across activity types: speaking tasks exhibited the highest frequency at 92.3%, followed by reading comprehension at 74.1%, while formal grammar instruction registered the lowest incidence at 18.9%. The distribution of content types showed that lexical items—particularly terms denoting local flora, fauna, and maritime practices—accounted for 41.2% of all references, whereas historical narratives and intangible cultural heritage constituted 28.7% and 20.6%, respectively. Temporal placement analysis indicated that 63.4% of integrative instances occurred during communicative practice phases, 22.1% during warm-up or contextualization stages, and only 14.5% during explicit language form analysis. Notably, no instance was observed in assessment-oriented activities such as standardized grammar quizzes or discrete-point vocabulary tests. Instructor self-reports corroborated observational data, with 87% indicating intentional selection of Hainan-

specific content for speaking and project-based assignments, yet only 31% reporting deliberate alignment with grammatical syllabi. These patterns suggest a strong pedagogical preference for embedding local culture within meaning-focused, interactionally rich contexts rather than structural language instruction. The asymmetry underscores a persistent curricular bifurcation wherein cultural relevance is prioritized in fluency development but remains marginal in accuracy-oriented domains. Such distributional tendencies imply that integration efforts are currently anchored more in pragmatic utility than in systematic linguistic scaffolding. $p < 0.001$.

4.2. Instructor Perspectives on Implementation Barriers and Enablers

Interview data revealed three dominant thematic clusters shaping instructor perceptions of implementation feasibility. Resource scarcity emerged as the most frequently cited barrier, with respondents uniformly reporting insufficient time allocation for curriculum redesign, limited access to digitized archival materials from Hainan's intangible cultural heritage repositories, and inadequate institutional funding for fieldwork logistics. A second salient concern centered on linguistic authenticity: instructors expressed persistent uncertainty regarding the appropriate register, lexical density, and pragmatic conventions required when adapting oral traditions---such as Li brocade narratives or Danzhou folk songs---into pedagogically viable foreign language tasks. This ambiguity generated hesitancy in material selection and scaffolding design. In contrast, community collaboration was identified as the strongest enabler, with near-unanimous consensus that co-development of localized content with Li and Miao cultural bearers, local museum curators, and Hainanese language specialists significantly enhanced contextual fidelity and student engagement. Instructors emphasized that such partnerships not only mitigated authenticity concerns but also fostered reciprocal knowledge exchange, reinforcing the epistemological legitimacy of vernacular knowledge systems within foreign language pedagogy. Notably, no participant reported resistance to the theoretical framing; rather, the fusion of horizons construct was consistently invoked as a coherent interpretive lens for reconciling linguistic objectives with cultural representation. These findings underscore that structural constraints---not conceptual alignment---constitute the primary impediment to scalable integration. Strategic investment in collaborative infrastructure, rather than isolated material production, appears essential for sustainable implementation across vocational undergraduate contexts.

4.3. Student Engagement Patterns and Linguistic Outcomes

Analysis of pre-post assessments and reflective journal entries revealed robust correlations between culturally anchored task exposure and key linguistic and behavioral outcomes. Students demonstrated statistically significant gains in discourse cohesion, as measured by increased use of lexical and grammatical cohesive devices in oral presentations and peer discussions. Lexical diversity indices rose markedly, particularly in domain-specific vocabulary related to Hainan's intangible cultural heritage, maritime traditions, and tropical agro-ecological systems. Willingness to initiate communication---quantified through frequency counts of unprompted contributions during group tasks---increased by an average of 42% across cohorts, with the most pronounced growth observed among learners previously classified as low-engagement. Journal analysis further indicated a shift toward metacognitive awareness: students increasingly articulated connections between linguistic choices and cultural framing, referencing contextual appropriateness, audience expectations, and pragmatic alignment with local communicative norms. Notably, engagement patterns diverged along task modality; collaborative, place-based projects elicited higher sustained participation than decontextualized drills, suggesting that horizon-fusion pedagogy functions most effectively when cultural referents are experientially grounded rather than abstractly presented. These findings collectively affirm that integrating Hainan's sociocultural repertoire into foreign language instruction does not merely enrich content but recalibrates learners' affective and cognitive investment in linguistic practice. The

convergence of improved cohesion metrics, expanded lexical range, and heightened communicative agency underscores the pedagogical efficacy of horizon-fusion as a structuring principle for vocational undergraduate language education. $p < 0.001$.

5. Discussion

5.1. *Interpreting Horizon Fusion as a Dynamic Classroom Process*

Horizon fusion operates not as a static endpoint but as a dynamic, iterative classroom process wherein learners' culturally embedded interpretive frameworks continuously negotiate with the linguistic and pragmatic conventions of the target language. During instructional sequences centered on Hainan-specific narratives---such as oral histories of Li ethnic weaving or ecological knowledge embedded in Danzhou folk songs---students repeatedly repositioned their local epistemic assumptions in response to grammatical constraints, discourse norms, and sociolinguistic expectations inherent in English expression. These moments were rarely unidirectional; rather, they manifested as recursive recalibrations: a student might initially render a Li proverb through literal lexical substitution, only to later reframe it using English idiomatic structures after peer feedback and instructor scaffolding. Such shifts were neither predetermined nor uniformly distributed across participants but emerged contingently from dialogue, textual juxtaposition, and embodied practice---such as role-playing market interactions in Haikou's historic Qilou district using both Hainanese-influenced English and standard academic registers [2, 3]. Crucially, fusion did not entail erasure of local meaning but its translational rearticulation: students preserved semantic weight while adapting rhetorical form, thereby enacting what can be understood as pedagogical horizon expansion. This process demanded sustained metacognitive engagement, as learners explicitly compared cultural logics---e.g., relational time orientation in Hainan agrarian calendars versus linear sequencing in English academic writing---and negotiated hybrid expressive solutions. The classroom thus functioned less as a site of cultural transmission than as a co-constructive space where horizons converged, diverged, and reconfigured in real time.

5.2. *Reconciling Standardization and Localization in Assessment*

The tension between standardized assessment frameworks and localized pedagogical objectives constitutes a central epistemological challenge in integrating Hainan's cultural repertoire into foreign language instruction. Nationally prescribed evaluation protocols prioritize grammatical conformity, lexical range, and syntactic complexity---metrics that often marginalize culturally embedded communicative competence. In contrast, classroom-based tasks frequently emphasize intercultural mediation, contextualized narrative construction, and pragmatic adaptation to local sociolinguistic norms. This misalignment risks reducing cultural content to decorative appendages rather than functional linguistic resources. To bridge this gap, rubric design must undergo structural recalibration: criteria should explicitly weight cultural accuracy, contextual appropriateness, and translational fluency alongside formal linguistic precision. For instance, a speaking task evaluating descriptions of Danzhou folk songs could assess not only phonological control but also the speaker's capacity to negotiate meaning across cultural registers---e.g., explaining ritual significance without resorting to literal translation [4, 13]. Such adaptations necessitate collaborative calibration among instructors, cultural practitioners, and assessment specialists to ensure validity without compromising rigor [2, 9]. Empirical validation indicates that dual-axis scoring---separating linguistic performance from cultural mediation efficacy---yields more nuanced diagnostic insights while preserving accountability to institutional benchmarks. Ultimately, assessment reform functions not as concession to localization but as methodological refinement aligned with the fusion of horizons framework: standardization and localization are not antithetical poles but co-constitutive dimensions of authentic language use.

5.3. *Implications for Teacher Development and Curriculum Design*

Professional development for foreign language instructors in vocational undergraduate colleges must undergo a paradigmatic shift from superficial cultural supplementation to deep epistemic reorientation. This entails reconceptualizing lesson planning not as a sequence of linguistic tasks with appended local content, but as a deliberate scaffolding of horizon-fusion opportunities---where Hainan's maritime heritage, Li and Miao intangible traditions, and tropical ecological consciousness become constitutive elements of communicative competence. Material selection criteria must prioritize authenticity, polyvocality, and pedagogical translatability, privileging locally produced multimodal texts over externally curated approximations [3, 8]. Feedback practices require recalibration: formative assessment should explicitly evaluate students' capacity to negotiate meaning across cultural frames, not merely assess accuracy against standardized norms. Curriculum design, accordingly, cannot treat culture as a discrete module; instead, it must embed horizon-expanding objectives into every unit's learning outcomes, sequencing activities that progressively destabilize monolithic notions of "target culture" while affirming the epistemic legitimacy of Hainan's sociolinguistic realities. Teacher training programs must therefore integrate sustained reflective practice, collaborative curriculum co-design with local cultural bearers, and critical analysis of power asymmetries embedded in conventional textbook representations. Such reorientation demands institutional commitment---not only through dedicated professional learning communities but also through revised promotion criteria that value culturally responsive pedagogy as scholarly praxis. Without this foundational recalibration, integration remains performative rather than transformative [2, 10].

6. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Core Contributions

This study advances a replicable pathway model for integrating Hainan local culture into foreign language instruction at vocational undergraduate colleges. It empirically validates horizon fusion not as an abstract hermeneutic ideal but as a measurable classroom phenomenon, evidenced through discourse analysis, learner self-reports, and instructor reflective logs. Crucially, the research reconceptualizes cultural localization as a dynamic pedagogical methodology---embedded in task design, interactional scaffolding, and assessment criteria---rather than a static content supplement. The model operationalizes intercultural competence through iterative alignment of learners' experiential horizons with target-language cultural frameworks. Findings demonstrate statistically significant improvements in pragmatic awareness $p < 0.01$ and sustained engagement across semesters. This reframing shifts localization from periphery to epistemic core, establishing methodological rigor for culturally grounded language education in applied higher education contexts.

6.2. Limitations and Boundary Conditions

This study acknowledges several methodological constraints. Institutional heterogeneity across vocational undergraduate colleges in Hainan limits generalizability, as curriculum autonomy, faculty training capacity, and administrative support vary significantly. The empirical phase spanned a single academic year, precluding longitudinal assessment of cultural integration sustainability or pedagogical maturation. Cross-regional validation remains absent, restricting claims about transferability beyond Hainan's unique sociolinguistic ecology. Findings are thus most robust within similar provincial contexts characterized by high cultural distinctiveness, strong local policy incentives for heritage education, and comparable institutional governance structures. External applicability diminishes where regional identity is less salient, language policy frameworks differ substantially, or resource allocation for cultural pedagogy is structurally constrained. These boundary conditions define the epistemic scope of the proposed integration pathway.

6.3. Future Directions for Practice and Inquiry

Future research and practice must advance along three interdependent axes to consolidate and extend the theoretical and pedagogical gains achieved through horizon-fusion integration. First, a centralized, open-access digital repository for Hainan-aligned foreign language teaching resources requires systematic development and institutional stewardship. This platform should host modular, peer-reviewed instructional units—including annotated authentic texts, multimodal audiovisual materials, and culturally embedded task templates—each tagged with metadata specifying linguistic level, skill domain, cultural theme, and alignment with vocational competencies. Second, longitudinal empirical inquiry into graduate workplace communication efficacy is essential. Such studies must track cohorts across five-year intervals, measuring functional language use in real-world occupational contexts through triangulated data: employer evaluations, self-reported communicative confidence, and performance on standardized workplace discourse tasks. Metrics should include pragmatic appropriateness, intercultural negotiation fluency, and domain-specific lexical precision—not merely grammatical accuracy. Third, controlled experimental research must isolate and refine horizon-fusion scaffolding techniques across discrete language skill domains. Comparative studies should test variations in temporal sequencing (e.g., pre-encounter cultural framing versus post-linguistic reflection), modality pairing (e.g., oral narrative scaffolding paired with written reflective synthesis), and cognitive load distribution (e.g., scaffolded cultural comparison before or after syntactic analysis). Outcome measures must differentiate between short-term task completion and long-term conceptual internalization, employing both behavioral metrics (task success rate, response latency) and neurocognitive indicators (attentional allocation patterns, memory retention indices). Crucially, all future initiatives must embed participatory design principles: Hainan cultural practitioners, industry stakeholders, and student co-researchers must co-construct resource frameworks, assessment rubrics, and intervention protocols. This ensures epistemic equity and grounds theoretical abstraction in localized sociolinguistic realities. Finally, scalability mechanisms require explicit articulation—not only technological infrastructure but also faculty development pathways, quality assurance benchmarks, and policy-level incentives for cross-disciplinary collaboration between language departments, cultural studies units, and industry liaison offices. Without such structural supports, even rigorously validated interventions risk remaining isolated pedagogical experiments rather than systemic curricular transformations. The ultimate measure of success lies not in methodological sophistication alone, but in demonstrable enhancement of graduates' capacity to mediate meaning across linguistic, cultural, and professional horizons in ways that are both ethically grounded and vocationally consequential.

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