| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study of the Influence of Intercultural Communication Competence on College Students' English Learning

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| ABSTRACT

Culture is conveyed via language, while language is molded by culture. Cultural barriers can easily be established during conversation between individuals from various origins because of these disparities. In addition to mastering the language's norms, we also need to comprehend the deep cultural meanings that the language conveys in order to get the greatest results while communicating across cultures. Using the link between language and culture, the value of developing cross-cultural communication skills, and strategies for raising students' cultural awareness, the researcher attempts to address English teaching activities in cross-cultural situations in this study. In order to meet the demands of the globalized economy for intercultural composite English talents, the paper uses a combination of quantitative research and qualitative analysis to gather primary data from student surveys and teacher interviews at Nanning College of Technology's College of Arts and Sciences. It then determines the current issues with English majors' intercultural communicative competence and develops practical solutions to foster it. The development of intercultural communication ability is a socially significant aspect of teaching business English and English in general. To improve college students' practical communicative competence, intercultural communicative competence must be developed using a comprehensive and multifaceted model of teaching and cultivating intercultural communicative competence. Additionally, the target language culture must be introduced gradually, methodically, and continuously.

1. Introduction

When people of different cultural backgrounds communicate with each other, they are more likely to make cultural mistakes than linguistic mistakes. Cultural mistakes come from cultural differences. "Cultural differences can make it very difficult for people of different cultural backgrounds to understand each other and get along with each other, and make people feel annoyed and bored, or have a great sense of loss". (Spitzberg, 2000) The ultimate goal of learning a foreign language is to utilize the language correctly and appropriately in actual communication activities. Whether this goal can be realized depends to a large extent on the participants' understanding of the cultural connotations of the two communicating parties. In this paper, we would like to compare the differences between Chinese and Western cultural phenomena in language, and explore the mutually reinforcing relationship between foreign language learning and cross-cultural communication.

The relationship between language and culture is inseparable. First of all, language embodies culture, and culture and language have been born at the same time since the beginning of mankind. On the one hand, language is part of culture. According to the narrow definition of culture, culture is a subjective factor that has been nurtured by human beings from social practice and conscious activities for a long time. Language is a reflection of human awareness and feelings towards objective things, and it belongs to a part of human culture. On the other hand, language is the carrier of culture. Language is a tool for human thinking

and communication. language plays a key role in the origin and evolution of human culture, most of human culture is carried by language, and language development and enrichment is the prerequisite for the development of the whole culture. language reflects culture from different angles. Secondly, culture dominates language. Different ethnic groups have different cultural backgrounds, and their languages have formed colorful cultural characteristics in the long process of historical evolution, resulting in the differences between the languages of different ethnic groups. This kind of difference is reflected not only in the form of language expression but also in the connotation of language. Although culture and language are not one-to-one correspondence, the language structure, communication mode and rhetorical principles of each language are, to a large extent influenced and constrained by the cultural connotation of the language. The American scholar Roland Robertson says: "Globalization means that the patterns of people's activities (including economic, political and cultural) are converging on a global scale, and that activities in different spaces are being connected as a whole". Globalization refers to the objective historical process of communication, connection and mutual influence of contemporary human society on a global scale across national and regional boundaries. Therefore, it is necessary for cultivating students' intercultural communication awareness and competence.

2. Literature Review

Since the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall proposed the term "intercultural communication", its theory and application have received great attention from foreign academics. In terms of the composition of intercultural communication competence, Lustig and Koester (2015) believe that intercultural competence consists of three aspects, namely, context, appropriateness and effectiveness, as well as knowledge, motivation and behavior. British scholars Byram and Collier (2015) believes that intercultural communication competence consists of four sub-competencies: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence. British scholar Starosta (2012) believes that intercultural communicative competence includes two parts: communicative competence and intercultural competence, in which communicative competence includes 3 sub-competencies: linguistic competence, pragmatic competence and strategic competence, and intercultural competence includes 3 levels: sensitivity to cultural differences, tolerance to cultural differences and flexibility in dealing with cultural differences. On this basis, Xian (2021) and Peng (2015) proposed that the intercultural competence system is divided into three dimensions: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and communicative practice. Cultural awareness is the ideological preparation for intercultural communication, cultural knowledge is the necessary content of intercultural communication, and communicative practice is the behavioral manifestation of intercultural communication. This is consistent with the theory that the structural model of intercultural communication competence proposed by Kong Deliang and Liu (2009) is a comprehensive structural framework composed of awareness, knowledge and practical ability. Combining the above classification methods, this paper will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative research to assess English majors from different perspectives like communicative knowledge, communicative skills or communicative awareness to measure students' intercultural communicative competence, and then explore ways and means to cultivate and improve students' intercultural communicative competence.

Due to the globalization, it is inevitable that cross-cultural communication encounters cultural barriers (Arasaratnam, 2009). Since "every culture in the world has qualities not found in other cultures, no one culture can replace the merits of another" (Beamer, 1992). Communicative competence refers to the ability to use language for communication. According to Thomas, a famous linguist, "If a fluent speaker of a foreign language makes a pragmatic error, he may be regarded as impolite and unfriendly. His mistakes in communication will not be attributed to the lack of language ability, but to rudeness and hostility". Prof. Hu Wenzhong, on the other hand, thinks: "We only pay attention to the form of language, therefore, in order to get the best effect of intercultural communication, we not only need to master the rules of the language itself, but also need to understand the cultural connotations carried by language. "Enhance students' sensitivity to cultural differences", so that they can better understand and effectively accept the language, and then master and use the target language at a higher level.

Chen (1990), a professor of anthropology and sociolinguist in China, put forward the concept of "communicative competence". He believed that in actual communication, the linguistic competence needed by speakers and listeners is much more than the grammatical competence in use, and that communicative competence includes two aspects: linguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Canadian scholars Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) summarized the four components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence. at the end of the 20th century, Byram (1997), a famous American applied linguist, put forward the idea that foreign language competence consists of the knowledge structure and linguistic competence, strategic competence, psychophysiological mechanisms, and the ability to communicate in a foreign language.

At the end of the 20th century, Bachman, a famous American applied linguist, proposed that foreign language proficiency mainly consists of knowledge structure and linguistic ability, strategic ability, psychophysiological mechanism, and situational context, which is called "a milestone in the history of language testing". Koester (2015), an American cross-cultural management expert, has also proposed that international business leaders should have five aspects of cross-cultural communication competence: 1) Understanding the world's political, cultural and business environments from a global perspective; 2) Cultivating multicultural

business perspectives and tools; 3) Adapting to life in different cultural environments; 4) Learning to get along with international colleagues on an equal footing; and 5) Excelling in working with people from multiple cultures. and to excel in working with people from many cultures. However, most of the research on cross-cultural communication teaching in English in China tends to emphasize the teaching of business-related knowledge and English knowledge but rarely introduces cultural aspects, and its content is relatively outdated, which is not in line with the needs of the current development of modern society. Domestic cross-cultural communication research has emerged since 2007 with the opening of the "Business English" major in domestic colleges and universities, and its research perspective is relatively single and its arguments are relatively old, which does not meet the needs of the rapid development of domestic business English. A comprehensive study of cross-cultural communication in this has significant practical significance and can consolidate and expand the achievements of English research and teaching.

3. Methodology

When conducting research, especially in fields such as education, social sciences, and psychology, employing questionnaires and interviews proves essential for gathering comprehensive and meaningful data. Because incorporating both questionnaires and interviews in research enhances the richness, validity, and reliability of the data collected. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches allows researchers to explore questions more thoroughly and to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied. By strategically employing these methods, researchers can ensure that the findings contribute valuable insights to the fields.

3.1 Questionnaire Survey

A comprehensive questionnaire survey was conducted to assess the current state of students' intercultural communicative competence among English majors at Nanning College of Technology. Given that the freshmen intake for 2024 has not yet fully engaged with specialized undergraduate teaching, the survey targeted students from the 2020 to 2022 cohorts. This focus allowed for a more relevant analysis of individuals who have had greater exposure to the curriculum.

The questionnaire itself is divided into two distinct parts. The first part aims to gather data on students' self-perceptions regarding their intercultural communication competence. It includes questions about whether students believe their skills meet the required standards, as well as inquiries into the methods and frequency of their learning experiences. Additionally, this section explores participants' attitudes toward intercultural teaching and learning.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of a diverse assessment aimed at evaluating their actual intercultural communication competence through various scenarios and questions designed to illustrate their abilities in practical situations. In total, 121 students participated in the survey, which was conducted online in an anonymous format. This anonymity was ensured by shielding the survey from search engine retrieval, thereby enhancing the authenticity and credibility of the results. Overall, the findings from this survey aim to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current teaching practices and identify areas for improvement in cultivating intercultural competence among students.

3.2 Teacher Interviews

Five English major teachers were selected for in-depth interviews to gain insights into the current state of students' intercultural competence. The interviews focused on several key aspects, including an evaluation of students' existing skills, suggestions for enhancing teaching practices, and recommendations for self-improvement in intercultural competence. These educators teach a diverse array of subjects, including translation, writing, English and American literature, and comprehensive English courses. This diverse expertise helps provide a well-rounded understanding of the current landscape of cross-cultural teaching among English majors at Nanning College of Technology.

By engaging with these teachers, the research aims to gather a multi-faceted perspective on students' abilities in intercultural communication. Each educator offered valuable insights and practical suggestions, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses observed in their students. The feedback received from these interviews is expected to contribute significantly to the crafting of effective strategies for developing intercultural competence within the curriculum. Overall, this collaborative approach not only enriches the understanding of students' needs but also lays the groundwork for future improvements in teaching methods and curricular design, ultimately aiming to better equip English majors for the successful navigation of diverse cultural interactions in an increasingly globalized world.

4. Results and Discussion

The students have the sound knowledge in literature and art, while they don't know much about religion and politics. In cross-cultural competence cognition, students pay significantly more attention to literary knowledge, foreign manners and Chinese-foreign differences than other areas. Students unconsciously tilted toward these aspects in the process of learning. This phenomenon of favoritism is also related to the teaching content. The specialized English and American literature classes in school

give students adequate exposure to this aspect, while other aspects rely on the occasional involvement of teachers in class or random access to a half of the knowledge base after class, and the understanding is relatively shallow or even uninformed.

Among the 121 respondents, some of them have already passed the fourth level of professional examination, which is only 42% of the respondents. Only 3% of the students chose "very fluent" in evaluating their oral English level. most of them chose "relatively fluent" and "very average" cautiously, accounting for 37% and 49% respectively, while a small number of students chose "poor" and "very average". Most of the students cautiously chose "fairly fluent" and "very average", accounting for 37% and 49% respectively, while a small number of students chose "poor" and "very poor". Although students are cautious about their English communication ability, most of them believe that there is a close relationship between "learning intercultural knowledge" and "improving foreign language learning". The survey found that 73% of the students believed that the most important source of intercultural knowledge they acquired was "watching foreign movies and TV dramas", followed by "teachers' lectures in class", which accounted for 19%, and "reading foreign language newspapers, magazines and books", which accounted for 8%. When faced with the question of "What way do you most want to improve your intercultural communication skills", 54% of the students chose the way of "communicating with foreigners who are native English speakers", which was also reflected in the interviews. Yang said, "The most effective way to improve intercultural communication skills is to communicate with people of various cultures." Compared with "communicating with foreigners" and "learning through multimedia channels," students were more interested in "having a special course on intercultural communication" and "teachers interspersing lectures in class". The students were indifferent to "a special course on intercultural communication" and "interspersed lectures by the teacher in the classroom". It can be seen that students are more eager to improve their intercultural communication skills through "practice" than "theoretical" lectures.

Table 1 focuses on students' self-evaluation of their oral English level, highlighting the distribution of responses. The comments column provides insight into the implications of these self-assessments.

Self-Evaluation of Oral English Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)	Comments
Very Fluent	4	3%	Very few students feel confident
Relatively Fluent	45	37%	Majority feels somewhat competent
Fairly Average	45	37%	Indicates mixed self-assessment
Poor	10	8%	Small segment feels inadequate
Very Poor	6	5%	Minimal confidence in English skills
Total	121	100%	

Table 2 details the various sources from which students acquire intercultural knowledge. The comments column emphasizes the popularity and importance of the sources mentioned, revealing students' preferences and trends in how they obtain intercultural knowledge.

Source of Intercultural Knowledge	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)	Comments
Watching Foreign Movies and TV Dramas	88	73%	Most popular source for acquiring knowledge
Teachers' Lectures in Class	23	19%	Important but less preferred compared to media
Reading Foreign Language Newspapers, Magazines, and Books	10	8%	Least common method cited
Total	121	100%	

Inadequate exposure to contemporary information. Students are more aware of recent or earlier foreign cultures. Intercultural knowledge is very broad and spatial and temporal. As cultures evolve and develop, there is a "generation gap" between those who favor learning about history and those who ignore current trends. This is also true in native communication. In cross-cultural learning, students should not only focus on the old and unchanging knowledge, but also need to learn from the contemporary living culture, in order to realize seamless and barrier-free communication in the real communication in the cultural context. The effectiveness of theory teaching is not obvious. Students scored the lowest in translation theory. In view of the fact that only the courses in the translation direction of the English major are involved in translation theory, in order to ensure the reference value

of the data, categorical statistics are used to screen out the students who have studied translation theory. However, the students' scores improved slightly, but the weakest link remained translation theory. For the course content that has been specifically studied and examined one year later, the students' mastery is poor, and the teaching effect is not sustainable. While ensuring the immediate effect, the impact of intercultural communication teaching at this stage is yet to be developed in the direction of extension.

(i) Providing cross-cultural communication courses

In the absence of an English language environment and cultural environment, classroom teaching is an effective way for students to acquire cross-cultural knowledge and improve cross-cultural skills. In terms of teaching means, teachers can make full use of multimedia resources to teach and explain intercultural theoretical knowledge to students and increase their understanding and knowledge of intercultural communication. In terms of teaching content, teachers should also pay attention to the link between theory and practice, and implement teaching with the goal of improving students' practical skills of intercultural communication, and should appropriately increase the knowledge of Chinese culture and the content of Chinese-Western cultural comparison, only by grasping the differences between Chinese and Western cultures can we enhance the awareness of intercultural communication, improve the ability to improve intercultural communication, and overcome the obstacles of interculturalism. The cultural constraints of intercultural communication do not come from the lack of understanding of the culture of the target language, but from the lack of understanding of the differences between the culture of the target language and the culture of the mother tongue. It comes from the lack of understanding of the differences between the target language culture and the native language culture.

(ii) Increase the opportunities of communication with foreign teachers and international students

In view of the increasing number of foreign students coming to China, it is a good way to organize some meaningful exchange activities for both domestic and foreign students, such as study support partners, fellowships and so on, which is a good way of cross-cultural exchange. Panbek (2012) said: We hope that the school can organize some activities for Chinese and foreign students to increase our communication with foreign students and promote the understanding of each other's culture. Mr. Ta even mentioned that Chinese and foreign students should attend classes together to learn from each other. In addition, if there are conditions, we can go abroad for short-term study tours or even study abroad, so as to communicate more with local people. Through communication and exchanges, we can improve mutual understanding and promote our excellent traditional culture while understanding foreign culture.

(iii) Carrying out colorful extracurricular activities

Firstly, the online class can be used to hold special lectures or international or domestic seminars on intercultural communication to understand and discuss the academic frontiers of intercultural communication; secondly, knowledge competitions on intercultural communication skills can be organized to encourage students to participate, and specific scenarios can be set up in the competitions, so that what students have learned can be transformed into methods that can be applied in real life; thirdly, the "English Corner" is routinely held to provide a platform and opportunity for Chinese and foreign students and teachers who want to improve their speaking skills and learn about each other's cultures. Finally, we should read more books, newspapers and magazines related to cross-culture to improve our cross-cultural theoretical knowledge.

(iv) Effective use of online platforms

First of all, watching foreign movies and TV shows can not only improve your listening and speaking skills, but also learn and understand foreign cultures. For your favorite movies, you can watch them many times over to gain a deeper understanding of their background and cultural connotations. Zhen: Classic movies and literature can reveal the real history and modern life. Secondly, listening to English radio and news every day improves students' ability to understand and recognize cultural differences. Thirdly, you can use the Internet to make friends who want to learn Chinese culture and enhance their understanding of each other's cultures. Lastly, students can watch more online video lectures and speeches in English by famous scholars and experts at home and abroad, so as to expand their cross-cultural knowledge. Communication between people with different native language backgrounds is not only language communication, but also cultural communication, and cultural diversity is often a barrier to mutual communication. (Zimmermann, 1995)

5. Conclusion

With the influence of world diversification, economic globalization and internationalization, the social demand for composite talents and diversified talents is increasing day by day, and it is imperative to improve the cross-cultural communicative competence of English major students. Through the survey on the cross-cultural communication ability of English majors in a university, it is found that students have a strong sense of cross-cultural communication, cultural relative awareness and reality concern; however, there are varying degrees of deficiencies in the students' English and Chinese language knowledge and cultural knowledge; and there are obvious obstacles to the students' communication in the aspects where there are big differences between Chinese and Western cultures. Aiming at the students' problems in cross-cultural communication, we can cultivate and improve

their cross-cultural communication ability through such methods and strategies as offering cross-cultural communication courses, increasing the opportunities of communication with foreign teachers and foreign students, carrying out colorful activities under the classroom and effectively using the network platform, so as to meet the needs of the society. (Xiuwen & Razali, 2020)

The cultivation of intercultural pragmatic competence of college students has received much attention in English teaching in colleges and universities in recent years, and has achieved considerable results after years of teaching practice (Sevimel-Sahin, 2020). Colleges and universities have been summarizing and improving their teaching activities over the years, and the students' pragmatic competence has been significantly improved compared with that of the previous years. However, there are still individual factors that have been troubling and hindering the development of second language learners' pragmatic ability in China, among which, the teachers' own low cultural literacy is an important factor. In this regard, schools should strive to create cross-cultural communication opportunities for teachers, improve teachers' professionalism, and adopt flexible teaching methods, so as to further consolidate and develop the teaching achievements and lead the cause of China's foreign language education to a thriving path. This is the only way to further consolidate and develop the teaching achievements and lead the cause of foreign language education in China to a thriving road.

Intercultural communication is an essential part of language learning and determines the degree of stability of the language bridge. Mastering the knowledge of cross-cultural communication can reduce the communication mistakes caused by cultural differences (Nadeem, Mohammed, Dalib, & Mumtaz, 2022). This survey finds that English majors lack motivation for independent learning, have insufficient intake of classroom knowledge and are unable to form long-term memories, and have unbalanced intercultural communication skills, which have a great deal of room for improvement. However, English majors generally have intercultural communication awareness, do not reject foreign cultures, and have a high degree of cultural tolerance. This lays a good foundation for the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence as well as cultural interoperability. By driving the cross-cultural atmosphere, implementing the supply of resources, offering specialized courses and assessment, and creating opportunities for practical application, while perfecting the cultivation of teaching, the Enhance students' subjective consciousness, drive students to learn independently, improve intercultural communication ability, and ultimately achieve the purpose of reducing communication barriers, expanding cultural horizons, and promoting cultural exchanges.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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