

Study on the Paths to Improve the Intercultural Competence of Foreign Language Teachers in Colleges and Universities under the Background of Globalization

Weiye Zhang

Nanjing Normal University Taizhou College, Taizhou 225300, Jiangsu, China
20201013@nntc.edu.cn

Abstract: *Globalization has spurred college English education to pivot towards cultivating intercultural communicative competence, making it essential for teachers to enhance their intercultural teaching acumen. Currently, college English teachers face multiple intercultural-competence flaws, such as insufficient educational awareness, subpar communicative skills, a lack of unified curriculum content planning, and restricted research capabilities. To address these, improvement paths like academic immersion for awareness building, knowledge integration to refine the training system, and continuous learning to boost teaching proficiency can be pursued, which will aid teachers in improving intercultural competence and fostering intercultural teaching in college English.*

Keywords: Globalization, College English education, Intercultural competence, Improvement paths.

1. Introduction

With the rapid advancement of globalization, the bonds among countries have tightened considerably, and the velocity and scope of personnel mobility, information dissemination, and cultural interchange have experienced a remarkable upsurge. In the contemporary globalized era, students equipped with intercultural competence are better positioned to integrate into the international arena and engage in global competition, which demands that they not only possess a requisite amount of English language knowledge but also fortify their intercultural communication concepts and master relevant skills, thereby ensuring continuous advancement in their future professional pursuits [1]. College English education must also align with this trend, as it is no longer circumscribed by the cultivation of language skills alone but places greater emphasis on nurturing intercultural communicative competence. Students are required to not only command language knowledge but also foster an understanding and respect for diverse cultural backgrounds, along with the capacity to communicate effectively within a multicultural milieu. As the primary implementers of intercultural communication teaching in higher education institutions, college teachers should not overlook the enhancement of their own intercultural teaching capabilities while cultivating students' communicative proficiency, and only in this way can they truly achieve a mutually reinforcing dynamic between teaching and learning.

2. The Connotation of Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence, also referred to as intercultural communicative competence, is most notably defined in the academic realm by the American scholar Byram. According to Byram [2], intercultural competence is the capacity to communicate regarding specific cultural content within a particular time and place. As research on intercultural

competence has proliferated in China, numerous significant achievements have been attained. At present, scholars hold diverse views on the intercultural competence of college foreign language teachers. The teaching reference framework for intercultural competence proposed by Professor Zhang Hongling [3] has been accorded extensive recognition. This framework constructs a three-dimensional (cognitive understanding, emotional attitude, and behavioral skills) and nine-element ability structure, furnishing a viable foundation for foreign language teachers to engage in intercultural competence teaching practices. Professor Jin Limin [4] posits that intercultural competence is a comprehensive capability, principally encompassing three dimensions: knowledge, ability, and disposition. In terms of knowledge, it chiefly pertains to the command of elements such as vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and writing, along with an understanding of cultural contexts, etiquette and traditions, and cultural knowledge like history and religion. Intercultural knowledge serves as the bedrock and is the most crucial factor. Regarding ability, it mainly comprises listening, speaking, reading, translation, social interaction, and cultural cognitive capabilities. Disposition implies the curiosity to actively explore other cultures and the inclusiveness to respect the cultural customs of other nations. These three aspects jointly form the essence of intercultural competence, and none can be dispensed with. The essence of intercultural communication lies in understanding and respecting cultural differences and facilitating effective communication among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Through intercultural communication, individuals not only acquire a certain comprehension of the customs of different cultures, respect and adapt to these customs during communication, but can also fathom the values, thought patterns, and behavioral norms of different cultures. This enables them to avert misunderstandings and conflicts stemming from cultural disparities, enhance their intercultural sensitivity and adaptability, and contribute to building trust and promoting cooperation in the communication process.

3. Current Situation and Existing Problems of the Intercultural Competence of College English Teachers

In the era of internationalization, characterized by the prevalence of information and economic globalization, and with the continuous growth of global cooperation, university teachers' deficiency in intercultural education awareness becomes a conspicuous issue. Propelled by this global trend, it is an absolute necessity for teachers to possess an international outlook, seizing opportunities and braving challenges while nurturing college students who are attuned to the demands of the contemporary era. Only in this manner can our nation maintain its competitiveness and remain unbeaten in the global arena of international competition [5]. Regrettably, some universities fail to give due prominence to intercultural competence. They lack well-designed cultivation plans, and there are no explicit and specific requirements regarding the intercultural competence of foreign language teachers. Currently, in Chinese universities, be they those in developed regions or local institutions, the principal task of foreign language teachers is to foster students' fundamental language skills, including pronunciation, grammar, and syntax, with the aim of enabling students to successfully pass proficiency tests such as the College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 (for non-English majors) and the Test for English Majors Band 4 and Band 8 (for English majors) [6]. It is commonly acknowledged that a solid foundation in basic language skills is crucial for students to surmount these examinations. To achieve this end, the teaching plans often implement a teacher-centered approach in classroom instruction, relegating students to the role of passive recipients. Such teaching objectives, methods, and strategies have led to a significant number of students losing their enthusiasm and motivation for language learning. Students become disinterested in class and are deprived of the chance to develop their language-creating capabilities. Teachers seldom have the opportunity to assess the level of students' intercultural communication skills. Even when intercultural knowledge is introduced in class, it is often treated as secondary. Owing to teachers' own inadequate intercultural competence and a limited understanding of the international perspective, it is arduous to integrate the study of diverse cultural backgrounds into classroom teaching. This inevitably results in students' insufficient learning in intercultural communicative competence. Teachers typically introduce relevant content to students based on their personal understanding and experiences, making it challenging to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence effectively.

The intercultural communicative competence of foreign language teachers in universities is relatively weak, and there is a dearth of relevant training. For years, the teaching mindset of some foreign language teachers in universities has been predominantly centered around exam-oriented education [7]. One of the root causes of the feeble intercultural education awareness lies in the insufficient emphasis placed on cultivating the intercultural communicative competence of these teachers. Teachers possess meager background knowledge in intercultural communication, lack in-depth understanding of the histories and cultures of different countries, and are deficient in sensitivity and adaptability to

cultural differences. Naturally, this renders the intercultural competence of university teachers subpar. In the classroom, they are unable to adequately cultivate students' intercultural competence and lack the acumen and observational skills regarding the target language culture, making it difficult to satisfy the requirements for cultivating college students' intercultural competence in the international context. Moreover, there is a lack of corresponding support for enhancing the intercultural competence of foreign language teachers in universities. There is relatively scant investment in funds, and the study of relevant theoretical knowledge is insufficiently systematic. All these factors contribute significantly to the weak intercultural communicative competence of foreign language teachers in universities.

Regarding the curriculum content for cultivating the intercultural communicative competence of foreign language teachers in local universities, there is no unified plan. In domestic universities, especially local ones, numerous institutions aspire to keep abreast of the times and enhance the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence. Nevertheless, due to the absence of a unified arrangement in the teaching syllabus, teachers determine the teaching content according to their individual needs. In the absence of a coordinated curriculum content plan, students' study of intercultural knowledge lacks systematicity, foresight, and scientific rigor.

The scientific research capabilities of foreign language teachers in universities are rather limited. Professor Hu Wenzhong [8] from Beijing Foreign Studies University previously pointed out that although the teaching and research of intercultural communication in China have witnessed substantial development in scale, with a rapid increase in the number of articles and publications, there remain relatively large shortcomings in research depth and methodology. Theoretical exploration and construction are even more conspicuously lacking. In truth, compared with Western countries, the benchmark of intercultural education in China still draws on the research achievements of foreign intercultural education, and the scientific research level in this domain lags behind. Due to the lack of cultivation in intercultural competence, some foreign language teachers in universities have limited exposure to issues in the field of intercultural communication, resulting in fewer research achievements in this area. Even when research is conducted, the methods are relatively monotonous, and there are significant deficiencies in research depth and breadth. Some foreign language teachers in universities find it difficult to readily apply multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research methods and relevant cutting-edge concepts in their classrooms. Consequently, it is challenging to meet the demands for cultivating students' intercultural competence in the current international environment.

4. Paths to Improve the Intercultural Competence of College English Teachers

4.1 Academic Immersion: Fortifying the Cultivation of Teachers' Intercultural Awareness

The Outline of National Medium- and Long-Term Program for Education Reform and Development stipulates that, in

consonance with the nation's economic and social opening-up imperatives, an abundant supply of international talents must be nurtured. These talents should be equipped with a global perspective, a profound understanding of international norms, and the capacity to engage in international affairs and competitions. Particularly within the contemporary Belt and Road Initiative context, international talents are expected to possess robust basic language proficiencies and exceptional intercultural communicative capabilities, which are indispensable for social progress in the new era.

Consequently, college teachers are urged to discard their traditional language-teaching paradigms. They should heighten their self-development acumen, proactively engage in intercultural knowledge acquisition, refresh their teaching curricula and methodologies, widen their knowledge vistas, eschew passive and evasive stances in teaching practice, reinforce their humanistic accomplishments, arm themselves with systematic theoretical frameworks, and translate these into practical applications to augment the efficacy of intercultural education [9].

By regularly organizing intercultural competence training programs and inviting seasoned experts and researchers to conduct lectures and seminars, the cultural consciousness and knowledge reservoir of college foreign-language teachers can be significantly enhanced. This will enable them to fully appreciate the rich tapestry of world cultures, foster a pluralistic mindset, cultivate cultural empathy, expand their multicultural outlook, jettison fixed-cultural stereotypes, develop an international perspective, and heighten the sensitivity of their intercultural communication awareness.

4.2 Knowledge Consolidation: Optimizing Teachers' Intercultural Training System

Professional subject-based training stands as an essential conduit for promoting teachers' growth. In light of the understanding of intercultural competence expounded in this study, the training of teachers' intercultural competence is executed along two dimensions: the cultivation of teachers' individual intercultural capabilities and the enhancement of their intercultural teaching proficiencies.

The core teacher contingent of the project should be handpicked to spearhead participation in intercultural-themed training, where they can systematically delve into the theories and research methodologies of intercultural communication. Teachers engaged in intercultural communication instruction at colleges and universities should be encouraged to partake in international seminars. Building upon the learning of relevant cutting-edge theories, they can integrate scientific research approaches with classroom practice, thereby enriching both language instruction and cultural education.

Through exchanges with teaching faculties from diverse institutions, college teachers can rejuvenate their teaching ideologies, enrich their intercultural communication knowledge systems, and elevate their scientific research acumen.

4.3 Continuous Learning: Elevating Teachers' Intercultural Teaching Competence

The augmentation of teachers' intercultural competence is an unceasing journey that necessitates continuous learning and development within their actual work settings [10]. Teachers should be organized to actively partake in a gamut of intercultural academic exchange activities, thereby broadening their cultural horizons. Seminar formats can be diversified, incorporating lectures, keynote addresses, case-based analyses, examinations of typical scenarios, group discussions, and role-playing exercises.

Via these seminars, a teacher team dedicated to intercultural teaching-staff construction can be purposefully assembled. Teachers involved in related scientific research, teaching, and competitions can be brought together to study, explore, debate, and reflect on novel knowledge, concepts, and methods in intercultural communication. They can then deliberate on how to translate these into real-world teaching applications, thereby fostering students' intercultural competence.

To comprehensively enhance China's international communication prowess and facilitate the global dissemination of splendid traditional Chinese culture, the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, in collaboration with the China Foreign Language Strategic Research Center, jointly launched the National Intercultural Competence Test. Developed by the team of Professor Peng Renzhong, a preeminent figure in intercultural teaching and research in China, this test introduced the CAK model of intercultural competence and the associated Intercultural Competence Test. The test questions are closely attuned to real-life scenarios, featuring authentic cases that span diverse life, study, and work domains, such as classroom-based group collaborations, business negotiations, and professional exchanges [11]. This empowers test-takers to enhance their abilities to thrive in multicultural environments.

Consequently, it is of paramount significance to encourage a large number of foreign-language teachers to familiarize themselves with the Intercultural Competence Test, shatter ingrained thinking patterns, and heighten their intercultural sensitivity, as this will substantially contribute to improving teachers' intercultural competence.

5. Conclusion

In the context of the ongoing and deepening educational reforms, the quality of college English teaching has been steadily on the upswing, with incorporating an intercultural dimension into teaching emerging as a pivotal element and a central focus within the realm of college English instruction. To endow college students with a well-developed intercultural awareness through their engagement with English courses, teachers need to prioritize self-directed learning and proactively involve themselves in a diverse array of academic exchange events to enhance their own intercultural acumen. Simultaneously, institutions of higher education should also furnish English teachers with favorable opportunities for further study and establish a scientific and highly effective talent-cultivation mechanism, thus laying a solid groundwork for the advancement of the intercultural communicative capabilities of college English teachers.

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Author Profile

Weiyei Zhang received her master's degree MTI from Nanjing Normal University in 2020. As a lecturer, she is now teaching and tutoring undergraduates at the School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Nanjing Normal University Taizhou College. Her major research field is intercultural communication.