

Research on strategies for developing intercultural communicative competence for English majors

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Abstract: Nowadays, the world needs high-quality talents with multicultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. English majors have advantages in language. They should adapt to the needs of the times and contribute to the practice of Chinese culture going out and the community of human destiny. It is important for both teachers and English majors to master strategies for intercultural communication. The paper takes foreign language teachers and English majors as the research objects. Quantitative and qualitative methods are adopted to investigate the current level of English majors' intercultural communicative competence and the problems encountered in cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence. Based on the results of the survey, it analyzes and puts forward strategies to improve the intercultural communicative competence of English majors. The results of this paper are instructive for teachers to optimize intercultural communicative teaching and develop intercultural communicative competence for English majors and provide new ideas and methods for future research in related fields.

Key words: English majors; intercultural communicative competence; strategy research

1 Introduction

The high level of information technology in the 21st century has facilitated communication among countries, and intercultural communication has become more frequent. However, people from different countries often have misunderstandings or conflicts in the process of communication because of different cultural backgrounds. To better conduct communication activities, we must pay attention to the cultivation of ICC (intercultural communication competence). ICC is an important ability for students to face the world, and foreign language learning is helpful for students to improve their ICC. In the new era, cultivating high-quality talents with multicultural awareness and ICC is an important goal of foreign language learning.

In intercultural communication, the most basic thing is language communication. English majors have certain advantages in language when developing ICC. However, in the learning process, they pay more attention to the improvement of language ability and neglect the cultivation of intercultural communication and other aspects of ability. Looking at the present and future development trends of our country, we need to cultivate international English talents who are rich in knowledge and can think creatively and use communicative culture. In 2000, the Ministry of Education approved the implementation of the English Syllabus for English Majors in Higher Education, which began to focus on

cultivating students' ability to use language comprehensively and interactively. Therefore, English majors are in urgent need of improving their ICC. This study focuses on the general situation of English majors, finds out the problems in students' learning English and improving their intercultural communication ability, proposes practical and effective strategies to solve the problems, promotes the improvement of English majors' intercultural communication ability, and meets the demand of society for international English talents in the new situation.

2 Literature review

The term ICC comes from the development of the discipline of intercultural communication studies. Intercultural communication studies originated in the United States in the 1950s. At that time, the United States was known as the melting pot, and cross-cultural exchanges had taken place. Moreover, the globalization of the economy has promoted global exchange and cooperation, which has led to the birth of intercultural communication.

2.1 Overseas research of ICC

Scholars generally consider the 1970s as the founding phase of intercultural communication studies. By the 1990s, many countries had higher language proficiency requirements for communicators. For example, the United States promulgated *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* in 1996 [1].

2.2 Domestic research of ICC

It was roughly in the 1980s that China became aware of issues related to intercultural communication studies. In the 1980s, there were many articles discussing cultural differences in academic journals, and communicative teaching was promoted in foreign language teaching, which made people realize that culture was essential in foreign language teaching. Since the mid-1980s, universities in China have started to set up intercultural communication courses one after another.

3 Intercultural communication competence

Many people think that intercultural communication is to learn a foreign culture, and the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence is to learn a foreign language well. However, this is not intercultural communication. Intercultural communicative competence is a complex concept, which contains many elements and covers a wide range. According to Byram's ICC model, intercultural communication should be a two-way interaction between native culture and foreign culture based on foreign language.

3.1 Definition of ICC

"Cross-cultural communication includes inter-national, inter-cultural, inter-ethnic, and inter-communal interactions." [2]. Intercultural communicative competence refers to the communicator in specific communicative occasions, in line with the social rules, behavior mode, and value system, has effective and appropriate communicative behavior ability.

3.2 Composition of ICC

Chen Guoming [3] proposed "a model of global competence" in the study of intercultural communicative competence. He believed that global communicative competence includes four aspects: global mindset, mapping culture, unfolding the self, and aligning. (see figure 1)

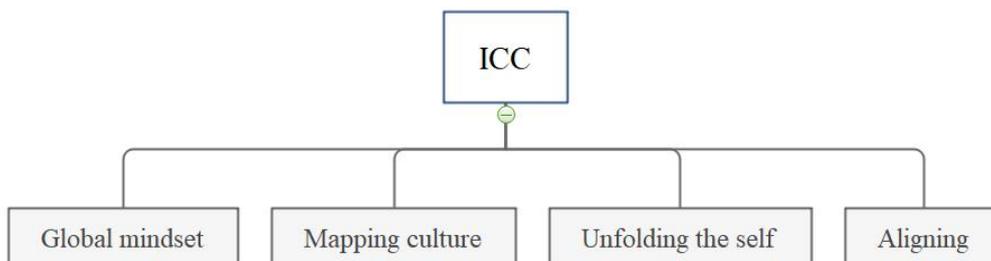


Figure 1. Chen Guoming's model of ICC.

4 The research design

The purpose of this study is to understand students' intercultural communicative competence, as well as the teaching methods used by teachers in improving students' intercultural communicative competence and the methods used by students in improving their intercultural communicative competence.

4.1 Research question

The research questions are divided into two: one is the current level of intercultural communicative competence of English majors, and the other is what problems will be encountered in the cultivation of students' intercultural communicative competence, how we should deal with these problems, and what strategies can be adopted in the cultivation of English majors' intercultural communication.

4.2 Research objects

The participants of the questionnaire are college English majors. Five English teachers and five English majors were interviewed to get their views on intercultural communicative competence directly and clearly. Questionnaires are distributed to college English majors to obtain data on intercultural communicative competence.

4.3 Research methods

When choosing research methods, quantitative research methods are used to compare English majors' cross-cultural pragmatic competence, strategic competence, and cross-cultural knowledge. By collecting data and analyzing the data, a reasonable conclusion is drawn. At the same time, qualitative research methods are used to interview teachers and students, analyze the answers, and obtain information about students' intercultural competence from teachers' teaching experience and students' learning experiences.

4.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire mainly investigates the current level of intercultural communication, and the ability to deal with people with different cultural backgrounds. See Appendix 1 for the specific content.

4.3.2 Interview

As a qualitative research method, the interview can provide intuitive and reliable information.

5 Analysis and discussion

This part will analyze and discuss the questionnaire and interview results. By analyzing and discussing the answers of teachers and students, this paper defines the intercultural communicative competence of English majors and finds out the problems existing in the intercultural communication of English majors.

5.1 The result of the questionnaire

A total of 150 questionnaires were sent out, 102 were returned, and 48 were invalid. From the results of the questionnaire survey, it can be found that most English majors have no experience of going abroad. This means that most students may lack the practice of intercultural communication. (see figure 2)

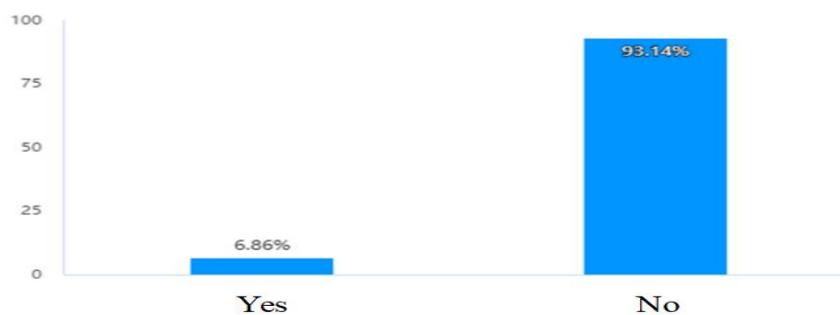


Figure 2. The results of questionnaire - "Have you ever been abroad?".

Most students still have difficulties in listening and speaking. The lack of listening and speaking ability is also one of the difficulties in intercultural communication. (see figures 3 and 4).

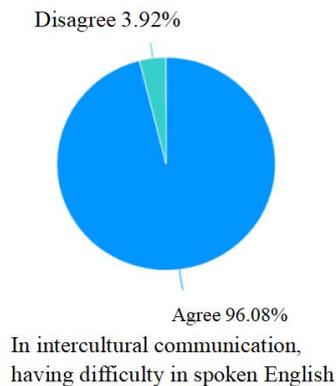


Figure 3. Data analysis.

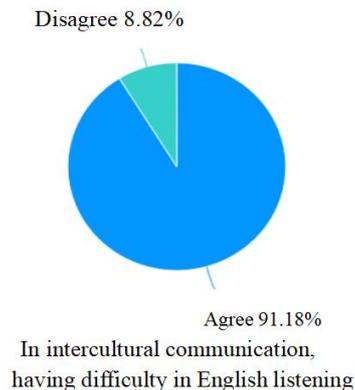


Figure 4. Data analysis.

Most students still have difficulties in expressing what they want to express due to a lack of vocabulary. (see figures 5 and 6).

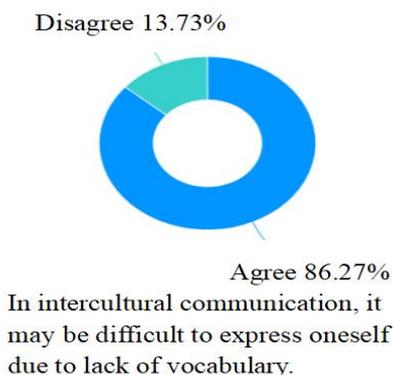


Figure 5. Data analysis

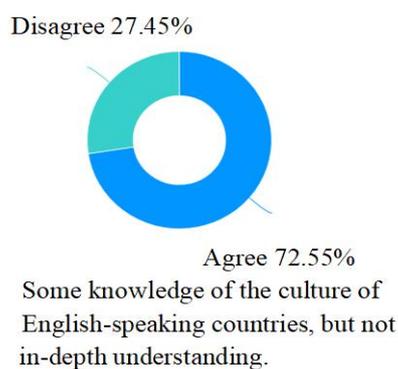


Figure 6. Data analysis

The above are part of the data of the questionnaire, all of which indicate that English majors still have many barriers in the process of cross-cultural communication, which need to be actively dealt with.

5.2 The result of the interview

Teachers generally believe that in order to improve students' intercultural communicative competence, the subtle influence of teachers in the classroom and the setting of systematic intercultural courses should be carried out simultaneously. In terms of improving students' intercultural communicative competence, teachers mention the following points: (see figure 7).

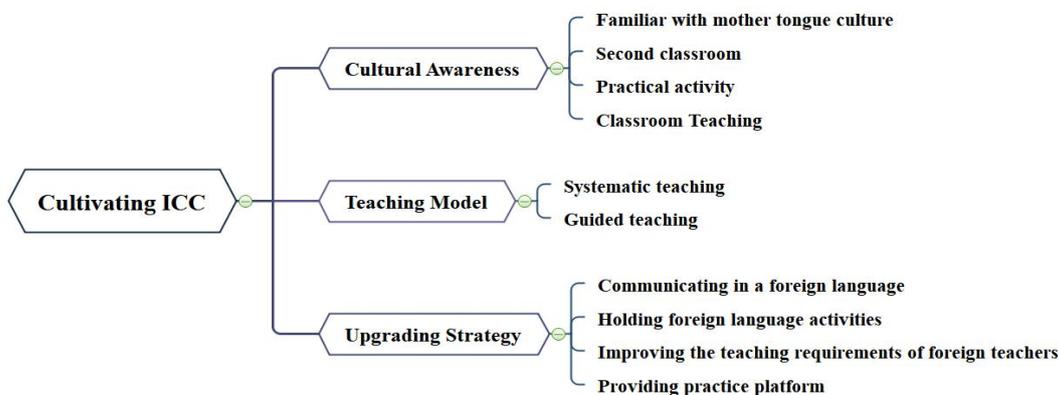


Figure 7. Teacher interview.

English majors hold a positive attitude towards the cultivation of intercultural competence. They put forward the difficulties encountered in improving ICC and also put forward some methods to improve ICC. They believe that cultivating ICC has the following advantages. (see figure 8)

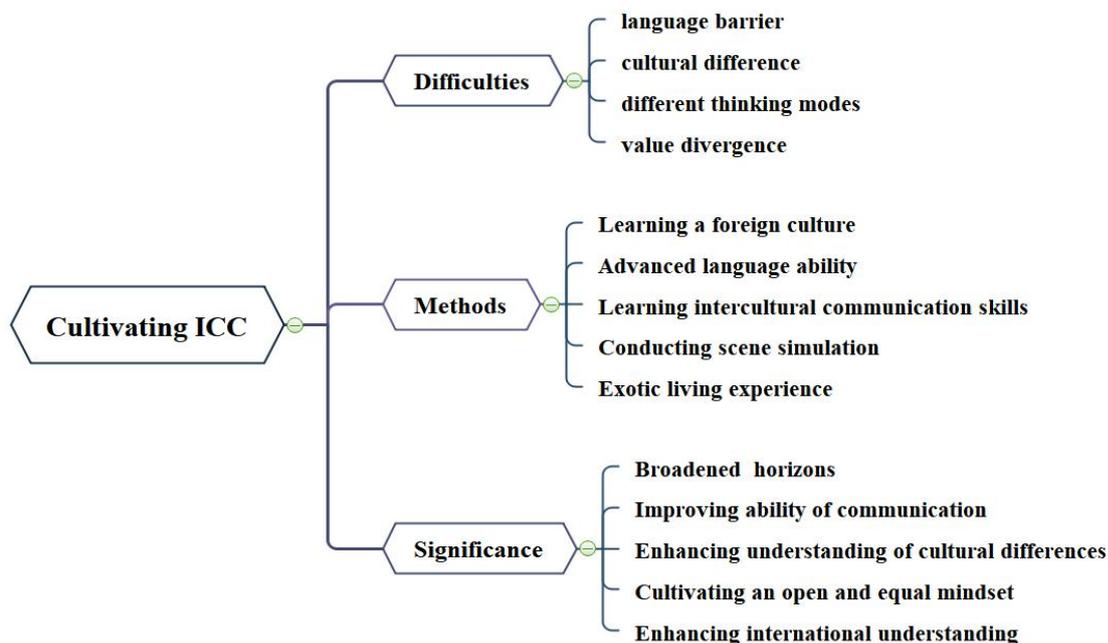


Figure 8. Student interview.

6 Research results

From the survey results, it can be seen that students' learning has included content related to intercultural communication. Teachers also spare no effort to teach students about intercultural communication. However, most students still have language barriers, such as incomprehension and inability to speak. Therefore, the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence has little effect.

6.1 Existing ICC of English majors

At present, the intercultural communication level of most English majors still stays at the stage where they can communicate basically, but there are still many obstacles. The main obstacles are cultural barriers in language, differences in ways of thinking, differences in communication styles, differences in values, and ethnocentrism.

During communication, the language used by the communicator should be fluent and objective. It is important to avoid cultural taboos, which can be perceived as unfriendly by the other party. However, at present, most English majors have only basic communication skills with foreigners. They do not understand each other's cultural background, customs, and habits do not understand, and in the face of such obstacles, students do not have the skills and ability to deal with them.

6.2 Difficulties in ICC for English majors

Most English majors lack the practice of cross-cultural communication. And students are accustomed to judging their abilities through their grades. Most English majors' listening and speaking ability can already support intercultural communication, but most students are not confident in their language ability, resulting in tension, anxiety, and other emotions, and causing blank brains and short aphasia. Some students do not dare to speak because they are not familiar with each other's cultural taboos, living habits, ways of thinking, values, etc. Based on this, I believe that the cultivation of students' intercultural communicative competence should focus on cultural familiarity, confidence, and courage.

7 Strategies for cultivating English majors' ICC

From the above analysis, we conclude that to improve their intercultural communicative competence, students should pay attention to culture and their confidence and courage. In intercultural communication, teachers also should also pay attention to cultivating students' ability to understand and respect foreign cultures and cultivating their ability to effectively deal with different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, it is also necessary to cultivate students' courage for intercultural communication, and the combination of the two will improve English majors' intercultural communication ability.

7.1 Teaching of culture

"Intercultural communication, no matter what forms it takes, must bear a cultural imprint". [4]. Culture shock is one of the obstacles in intercultural communication. In the process of teaching, one of our teaching objectives and tasks is to enrich students' social and cultural knowledge and cultivate students' sensitivity to cultural differences. In cultivating students' cultural awareness, the following ways can be adopted.

7.1.1 Providing cultural information in teaching

For example, in the process of teaching, teachers can make full use of textbooks, tap cultural information, and combine multimedia to convey cultural knowledge to students. Teachers can introduce the geographical location, customs, religious beliefs, literary works, and history of English-speaking countries to students according to different text contents.

7.1.2 Providing cases in teaching

In teaching, the events of cultural conflicts between China and the West are described, and then students are organized to discuss the causes of cultural conflicts and their coping styles to promote students to actively think about the cultural differences between the two sides. Case analysis can enable students to avoid such conflicts in intercultural communication, or enables students to perceive the occurrence of conflicts in time and take remedial measures.

7.1.3 Encouraging reading and broadening knowledge

In the process of reading, students can learn about Chinese and Western cultures. For example, students can understand the current politics, historical culture, and fashion trends of Chinese and foreign countries by reading newspapers, literary works, and magazines. All these contribute to the accumulation of students' cultural background knowledge. Students can also expand their knowledge by watching classic movies and videos.

7.1.4 Training cultural sensitivity

"The cultivation of ICC is closely related to the understanding of the relationship between communication, language and culture" [5]. English majors can also first learn about our own national culture, which is more acceptable to us, to understand the characteristics of culture, and to understand other cultures. In the process of fully learning the national culture, students can train the improvement of cultural sensitivity. In the face of other cultures, high cultural sensitivity can help students find cultural differences faster. Students can improve their understanding of Chinese and foreign cultures in the comparison of cultural differences and develop a positive cross-cultural attitude.

7.2 Cultivating communicative confidence and courage

In the process of intercultural communication, most students subconsciously deny their ability to use language and cannot speak bravely in communication. Students may always be afraid of an intercultural communication because of non-standard pronunciation, incorrect grammar, and non-native expressions. However, without intercultural communication activities, intercultural communication ability is also limited to theoretical knowledge. Therefore, it is very important to have confidence and courage in intercultural communication. In cultivating English majors' confidence and courage in intercultural communication, the following ways can be adopted.

7.2.1 Interactive contact

Through the results of the survey, we found that students have less intercultural communication activities. But "cross-cultural teaching is an education that integrates initiative and interaction" [6]. Therefore, teaching should be combined with the corresponding practice to maximize the effect. In the process of practice, students can also exercise their language ability and improve their communication skills. At the same time, it can also increase their confidence in communication activities.

7.2.2 Actively participating in English activities

Participating in English activities, such as debating contests, speech contests, dubbing contests, and so on, can help students to exercise their English expression ability and courage. Participating in English clubs, such as English corner, can also help students improve their English communicative competence and communicative courage.

7.2.3 Simulating communication forms

Simulating the form of communication in daily life in English teaching is also a way to improve students' communicative competence. Students often use foreign languages to simulate daily communication in class and life, and further familiar with the communication mode, which helps students reduce the fear of using English communication, and their ability to communicate will gradually improve.

7.2.4 Traveling abroad and making foreign friends

If conditions permit, traveling abroad is also one of the strategies to improve intercultural communicative competence. Traveling abroad will inevitably carry out intercultural communication activities. Under the influence of their purposes, we will be more urgent to understand the local culture and customs. Similarly, intercultural communication will be carried out consciously or unconsciously in the play. If travel is not possible, we can also communicate with foreigners through developed network platforms, make friends with them, increase the practice of communication, and improve our cross-cultural communication ability.

8 Conclusion

English teaching has undergone a transformation from knowledge-based teaching to skill-based teaching, highlighting the essential characteristics of language as a social communication tool. The purpose of English teaching is to cultivate students' ability to use English as a communicative tool. Through investigation and interviews, this paper finds that the intercultural communicative competence of English majors is at the middle and lower levels. They can communicate, but there is still a big lack of confidence and courage in culture and communication. From the perspective of teaching, English teaching has added relevant courses to cultivate intercultural communicative competence, but students do not pay enough attention to it, and students only learn theoretical knowledge and lack practical exercise, intercultural communicative competence still cannot improve. Therefore, this paper provides some strategies to cultivate English majors' cultural knowledge and enhance their confidence and courage in communication, to improve their intercultural communicative competence. The cultivation of English majors' intercultural communicative competence requires not only students' efforts but also teachers' efforts. This shows that it is very important for English learners and teachers to change their learning and teaching methods. Therefore, how to effectively improve the intercultural communicative competence of English majors is a field worthy of study.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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