

# Study on Training Methods of Intercultural Communication Abilities in Drama Education of College English Teaching\*

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**Abstract**—The communication between China and other foreign countries is getting more frequent as China's international status and national influence continue to strengthen in these days so that our society's requirements for English talents are also strict. Furthermore, it is difficult for traditional English teaching methods to meet the development of education in current college English teaching procedures. Drama education of college English teaching is approaching a new teaching goal that is to train students' comprehensive English abilities and skills. The objects of modern college English teaching process and the keys of English teaching reform may ask teachers to research recognition and implementation of drama education of English teaching, students to know basic cultural differences between China and other English speaking countries. In this way we may cultivate students' intercultural communication skills. Drama education teaching is a good method that carries out performances throughout learning and testing of English teaching in order to stimulate students' interest in learning English and improve quality of college English teaching overall. It is useful to bring up more outstanding English language talents with intercultural communication abilities.

**Keywords**—culture; intercultural communication; drama education teaching; college english; teaching mode

## I. INTRODUCTION

English is undoubtedly a language that is easy to master for students with good studying foundations in middle and high school when College English is getting crucial among college students as a compulsory course. However, for students of art, especially those who have only been trained in dancing secondary schools, English language is very tough and learning English is a hard task because their English basic knowledge is a bit poor. In 2012, Drama education of English teaching was launched by the Academic Affairs Office and the School of Foreign Languages in Northwest Minzu University, learning English accompanied by their majors greatly stimulated the interests of art students in English study and improved their English language education efficiency. Students have learned

English language and performed English dramas in such environment full of innovation and academy. At the same time, it is necessary to understand cultures of English-speaking countries, to compare differences between Chinese and English, to cultivate awareness of intercultural communication, and to improve students' capability of intercultural communication. In these ways students may effectively attain goals that are communication in English thinking and speaking ways. After they graduate from the university, students have their own stages in face of global economic development and social progress.

Language and culture are closely related. People can't learn a language well if they do not learn the culture that is associated with the relevant language. English teaching is not only to teach English language for words and grammars but also to educate the relationship between language and culture and to understand the importance of infiltration between English culture and language learning in order to avoid unsatisfactory expressions in talking to English native speakers. There are opportunities for art students to visit and perform in other countries so they had better understand more about western culture and strive to develop their English communication skills. At the same time, teachers should arrange appropriate cultural infiltration and construct basic framework of cultural teaching in drama education teaching mode that constantly reform and innovate in teaching methods to find new ways of learning English well for art students. Thus drama education of college English teaching has a long way to go.

Although intercultural communication is a relatively young discipline, research on it has also attracted attentions of scholars and educators, a lot of research results have been achieved in recent years. Teachers had better stimulate students' enthusiasm for language learning, actively adopt new teaching methods and optimize specific teaching processes in this case that may obtain the needs of students' English practical teaching and studying under cultural ideology to bring about the method of drama education. This will greatly promote the enthusiasm of students to learn English language, effectively help them to develop English thinking modes and improve students' English comprehensive abilities. The introduction of drama

\*Project: This paper is supported by a key team of drama education teaching in Northwest Minzu University.

education teaching is an innovation of English teaching process, and also a way of combining modern English teaching with the current situation of college English teaching. It is the improvement of students' comprehensive English abilities and comprehensive qualities of English. It will have a positive effect on the development of students' English communication abilities.

## II. CULTURE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Culture is a quite wide concept that may cover all activities of human civilization, such as the terms of oriental culture, Chinese culture, minority culture, etc. It can also be narrowed down for just referring to knowledge in Chinese language, for instance: people say "studying culture" means going to school, being educated and learning knowledge, or sometimes culture is referring to a kind of social activity that is different from politics, economy, and military, for example: calligraphy, painting, music and dance, opera, and other folk art activities. However, culture had better be conceptualized although it is not easy to give a full-scale definition. Many domestic and foreign scholars have defined the term of culture since ancient times:

A culture is "a text the vocabulary and grammar of which its members learn". (Fay, 1996:55)

Culture is communication. (Hall, 1990a: 94)

Culture is mental software. (Hofstede, 1997:5)

There are many definitions of culture that I cannot list them here. All in all, the definitions of culture are complex; actually people are not very clear about what culture is referring to when using the concept. So, culture can be everything. This is a simple but "tactful" explanation. In addition, Hall's definition is emphasizing a significant aspect of culture — communication. Chen Wenjuan & Yan Xiaofeng (2012) also state that the definition that meets our needs is what advanced by Hall: "Culture is communication" (2012: 81-82). Another similar idea is that culture and communication are said to be like Siamese twins. One is inseparable from the other (Cao Ruiming et al., 2011: 2).

As a main tool of human communication and a carrier of culture, language is closely related to culture. Different countries and different ethnic groups communicate in different languages, and they are constantly infiltrating cultures of nations. Language is one of the most important tools of human thinking. There are different ways of thinking for different language modes. Cao Ruiming et al. (2011) point out that intercultural communication is a universal phenomenon and is a common daily occurrence (2011: 3). Thus for learning English as a foreign language, we are living in a world that need to learn this international language well to realize communication with people from different cultures. It requires that English learners need to not only learn literal meanings of words and expressions but also to understand cultural difference in order to accomplish their intercultural communicative tasks.

At the same time, language is the most important carrier of culture, which preserves, spreads and reflects culture (Xia

Jimei, 2003: 124). Understanding British and American culture is beneficial for us to understand and use English. The purpose of foreign language teaching is to educate multilingual talents with cross-cultural communication skills. However, the current college English teaching model in China may not really improve students' intercultural communication abilities. In order to improve positive effects of college English teaching in China, enhance the interest of college students in learning English, and change a phenomenon that some students can read and write well but are not good at listening and speaking, scholars have conducted relevant discussions about it.

It is known that drama education teaching can effectively improve the quality of training intercultural communication talents in China.

## III. DRAMA EDUCATION OF COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

### A. Teaching Background

Drama education teaching is that English teachers are teaching some English dramas to be performed in order to guide emotions of college students in language learning processes, and set an effective output medium as a relevant space for English language teaching, so that language teaching integrates knowledge and skills, and students may perform English dramas that they learned in class.

The disciplines of English drama education teaching mainly include educational psychology, language teaching and other aspects. The relevant theoretical basis includes three categories: constructivism, cooperative learning and communicative teaching. This kind of teaching method abandons a teaching mode that teachers talk a lot in class and embodies a new teaching concept of taking college students as the leading factors in teaching. Foreign language learning, application, and intercultural communication are the main contents, and teachers follow the objective law of language teaching as a basic premise. It is a teaching method that integrates multiple levels of teaching modes and measures (Hu Wenzhong, 1994: 65). It may improve quality of English teaching in Chinese universities to carry out English drama education teaching method combining the majors.

### B. Practicality and Effectiveness

1) *Enthusiasm for English study*: Students are required to participate in teaching even it is a whole process of students' independent learning because drama education teaching is different from other teaching methods. This process may enhance students' enthusiasm for English learning. At the same time, the performance of drama education is not only listening, reading and reciting of traditional language teaching methods. Students also need to participate in specific rehearsals of dramas and language learning. Therefore, it has an optimizing effect to promote students' enthusiasm for English learning.

2) *Comprehensive English competence*: There is a high requirement for the students' competence to understand

English dramas' scripts, to act characters, and to speak English since the teaching method of drama education is presented and expressed in form of a drama or a play. In class, students can speak freely in group discussions to discuss Chinese and English language differences or their own examples in intercultural communication, and master English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in a relaxed and enjoyable process. This teaching method have a positive effect on the improvement of students' comprehensive English abilities, and it is also a comprehensive training and improvement of students' abilities to listen, speak, read, write and translate.

3) *Abilities of teamwork*: It is necessary for all members of a small group to work together for presenting a drama. Students are asked to cooperate and learn from each other. Teachers also need to control overall teaching procedure. It requires high cooperation ability and awareness of students. Therefore, drama education teaching is an overall improvement of students' ability to cooperate.

4) *Cultural awareness*: Since a drama is presented in English, it is very demanding for the students' abilities to grasp English language and to express the language. This requires students to think in English ways, in other words, it is a cognitive ability of English culture. It will be a whole improvement of students' cognitive ability in English cultural awareness, as well as an improvement in students' cultural differentiation and mastery.

### C. Necessity and Importance

1) *Need of language and culture*: Many university teachers in China emphasize English study and affirm importance and necessity of learning foreign cultures in English teaching. However, in the current college English teaching in China, foreign culture study is not noticed by some teachers and students. The related teaching contents seem to be simple, and the teaching methods seem to be old-fashioned. It is difficult to meet urgent needs of foreign language talents in China. Therefore, foreign language teaching in China should take culture as an important foundation of college English teaching and realize development of both culture and language in university teaching in China. Moreover, drama education teaching method can relatively meet demands of language and culture in classroom teaching. In implementation process of drama education teaching method, paying attention to common development of language and culture can achieve good quality of English teaching in Chinese universities.

2) *Cultivating cultural identities*: At present, English teaching in most universities in China only focuses on teaching of language, less concern about explanation of foreign cultures, it is difficult to obtain expected effect, and neglects cultivation of cultural identities of college students (Hu Zhuanglin, 1988: 94). Cultivation of college students' identities mainly refers to integration, analysis and thinking of college students based on certain knowledge literacy, and

gradually forms a unique cultural awareness, obtaining an understanding for the East and West cultures and knowing differences between East and West cultures. On the basis of it, students enhance their cultural connotation in more inclusive ways. Compared with traditional teaching modes, drama education teaching may cultivate cultural identities of Chinese college students on the basis of comparing differences between national culture and foreign culture in a more suitable form.

3) *Improving cross-cultural thinking skills*: Nowadays, college English teaching in China is still a kind of repetitive and passive imitation. The old-fashioned teaching methods can no longer meet training needs of foreign language talents under the guidance of the standards of culture and language (Ding Qiong, 2010: 179). Therefore, education of college students' cultural identities should not only clarify their own cultural identities, but also develop students' thinking abilities, improve their own evaluation, analysis abilities, and critical thinking. On the basis of presenting culture, drama education teaching method can enhance college students' appreciation of foreign cultures and their abilities to criticize or analyze some aspects of foreign cultures. Students can comprehend politics, geography, history, and literature by appreciation of foreign classic works, thereby enhancing students' aesthetic and appreciation abilities of foreign culture and improving levels of intercultural communication. Students imitate languages and behaviors in acting roles of classic works, and then subtly integrate them into their intercultural communication techniques.

## IV. PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

### A. Having a Difficult Development

For a long time, universities' enrollment has not set the minimum score of English, which leads to the uneven English level of students in a university. English learning abilities and levels of college students are lower overall. English drama education teaching mode is based on scripts, situations, and is taught in a way of English speaking. Because many students are poor in English grammar and spoken English, it is hard to develop drama education teaching in implementation process and unable to achieve cross-cultural communication. The fundamental purpose of English drama education teaching is to help students improve their intercultural communication skills, broaden their horizons and enhance their cultural quality. However, due to entire lag of learning of college students' English, it is difficult to carry out drama education teaching. The cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability based on drama education teaching is more difficult to be effectively implemented; even it is only asked but not acted (Gao Yihong, 2002: 27).

### B. Lacking Interests

Many college students believe that college English textbooks are too old-styled and the teaching methods are too

boring so they have a tendency to learn English passively and they have no motivation to learn English. It is also difficult to raise interests in classrooms of drama education teaching. Even some students think that they will not work with foreigners in the future, so this kind of culture and oral practice is not necessary to them. They do not support teachers' drama education teaching method and are difficult to receive the expected results; even basic teaching tasks cannot be completed. Cultivation of intercultural communication skills can only be in a form.

## V. METHODS AND IMPLEMENTATION

### A. Methods

English drama education teaching mode can greatly improve the students' abilities to learn foreign languages and independent learning. Intercultural communication includes verbal communication and non-verbal communication, in which the relationship between communication and language is closely related. Drama education teaching method to train students' intercultural communication abilities guide students to discover language differences, understand the cultural differences between the East and the West, and master verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

1) *Differences in scripts*: In drama education teaching, teachers should teach students to find differences in Chinese and English language in the scripts of plays. For example, there is a sentence in *The Million Pound Bank Note*: I will have a large glass of beer (Yang Xiaoya & Tang Linlin, 2015: 78). The meaning of "have" is to get, to obtain in English basically. But in this sentence, it should be understood as drinking beer. The word "have" is including some different definitions in different contexts of English. Taking this as an example, teachers can let students to understand various meanings of one English word. In addition, the word "will" in this sentence expresses future tense for grammar. Teachers guide students to know there are strict tenses and verb changes in English, while there are only implicit meanings of tenses, but there is no corresponding change in verbs in Chinese. Teachers try to train students' language accuracy of spoken English in processes of drama education plays, improve students' language basic abilities and their performance of language expressions, and truly show characters and improve quality of English drama education teaching.

In addition, differences also exist in pragmatic habits due to cultural habits in Chinese and English languages, so language learners had better pay attention to pragmatic differences in daily language communication to avoid misunderstandings to foreigners.

2) *Differences in role plays*: The core of English drama education teaching is role-playing. The form of pair or group discussion is also its main form of teaching activity. In class, students can create situations and perform some dramas, so that students can intuitively understand differences between Chinese and English.

For example:

Greeting: Chinese people ask, "Do you have a meal?" British often ask "Is the weather good today?" In fact, these two questions are not really asking if people have eaten the meal or how the weather is like today, but just a way to say hello to each other.

Receiving gifts: When the British and Americans receive gifts, they will directly express their love for the gifts, and open the gifts at once, appreciate the gifts and show thanks; while the Chinese are modestly refused and implicitly receive the gifts and don't open them immediately.

Praise: Westerners are praised to express "thank you" to affirm each other's praise; but Chinese people mostly lower themselves to respond to each other's praises with the ways, which are considered by them to be modest virtues.

Through performance of those situations, students can realize that China has been a big agricultural country since ancient times. At that time, people were not rich; they were more concerned about food. The maritime climate in the UK has led to a variety of weather changes throughout the day, making people pay more attention to "weather". When receiving gifts and praises, Chinese people's indirect behaviors and introversion are in a typical contrast with direct and outgoing directions of westerners. Students can understand the differences and make more comfortable intercultural communication by knowing these comparisons.

3) *Discovering differences by multimedia*: In addition to usage of languages, there are situations need to be done by non-verbal communication among people. Time concepts, expressions, eyes, gestures, postures, distances, smells can be classified as non-verbal communication. In drama education teaching, teachers can play English and American classic video clips by multimedia. They guide students to observe these western videos, observe behaviors of westerners and discover characteristics of western non-verbal communication, and then compare with characteristics of communication in China to find out the differences. For example, when westerners are queuing, the distance between people will not be very close to each other. But when Chinese line up, people are closer. Therefore, it can be known that British or Americans are more care about the comfort of body distance. At the same time, we will also find that westerners are more outgoing and cheerful, and their body languages are richer and more exaggerated than Chinese.

In teaching procedures, teachers use multimedia teaching resources, act English drama characters to improve students' English thinking abilities in drama performances for an overall improvement of their comprehensive abilities. Multimedia is used to show pictures and videos to introduce western culture, which enables students to visually observe characteristics of westerners' landscape, architecture, customs, clothing, food, housing, travel and so on. Then students may add their own understanding in the performance of play on the stage to show those features.



## B. Organization and Implementation

In order to better implement English drama education teaching process, improve the quality of this teaching method, improve students' participation in drama performance and the effect of drama education; it is necessary to actively carry out comprehensive mastery and control of English drama performances. Only in this way can we truly realize guidance and comprehensive implementation of drama education teaching process.

1) *Students' situations and interests*: The modern education and teaching process are determined by students' learning needs, especially in process of university teaching. Willingness and participation of students' learning depends entirely on the students' interests. Teachers need to fully and effectively grasp basic situations of students and carry out student-oriented teaching processes. Teachers had better try to know whether students like classical or modern plays, whether they like comedy or tragedy, whether they like traditions or networks, and realize students' conversion for choices of drama types.

2) *Selecting plays and forms*: Before selection and rehearsals of dramas, teachers can select parts of scripts of dramas according to requirements of teaching. Then, students can choose specific stage play scripts, or let students create their own scripts according to students' choices. In selection of plays, consideration should be given to introduction of classic dramas such as Shakespeare's classic plays to achieve students' understanding of cultural spirits of British Renaissance, and to improve students' awareness in English history. On the other hand, we can also consider translating and playing some Chinese traditional stories. It can not only translate Chinese into English language, but also improve cognitive depth of Chinese culture. At the same time, it also adds students' knowledge of cultural differences and mutual conversion between cultures.

Teachers provide active help and give guidance in study. For example, students can practice some famous dramas in traditional drama styles, and they are also allowed to redesign those dramas into new styles to be acted.

3) *Implementing drama rehearsal processes*: According to Ma Naqin et al. (2015), there are 3 aspects to be noticed in the processes of rehearsal dramas: being clear about each role, practice more and stressing key points (2015: 5). Teachers should actively guide students to strengthen understanding and cognition of scripts and characters to improve students' overall grasp of perform dramas and cognitive abilities of language forms. In specific dramas practicing processes, teachers enable students to carry out independent rehearsals, including dialogues, expressions, and characters acting, so that students can master forms of entire performance, and teachers actively guide the processes, especially to encourage students to divergence in new comprehensive stage formats.

4) *Presentation and competition*: Although drama education is a long time span and procedural teaching method, teachers may introduce competitive teaching methods that are competitive introduction in roles or groups in same role-plays. At the same time, teachers may develop students' awareness of respecting drama education and students' participation in drama performance, the process of teaching optimization, students' autonomy and competitiveness.

5) *Self-improvement of forms*: Teachers carry out arrangements of students in all relevant matters of drama education, and let students themselves are responsible for drama rehearsal and coordination of specific role-plays. At the same time, students strengthen self-design and improvement processes of the lines, forms, costumes, language, clothing etc. during performance of plays, and their comprehensive abilities to grasp English language and awareness of basic English knowledge have been increased by this teaching way.

## VI. CONCLUSION

It is an era of globalization, the globalization of culture provides a broader space for development of college English teaching in China, but it also requires higher standards for the language education (Wu Lei & Hu Xiaoqun, 2010: 54). It is hard to satisfy current development of education using traditional college English teaching model at present. Drama education of college English teaching has been applies to perform English dramas throughout learning English and testing of English teaching. It improves teaching qualities of college English and cultivates outstanding foreign language talents with cross-cultural abilities. There is a theoretical reference value for improving intercultural communication abilities of Chinese college students by applying drama education teaching method.

Drama education is an innovation in language teaching process, especially for college English teaching. Teachers strengthen analysis and cognition of English culture, improve contrast and integration of Chinese and English culture, improve students' participation and enthusiasm for learning, and develop students' English thinking abilities. In this way it is a key to control the performance of English plays, and it is also possible to better improve students' abilities to communicate across cultures and achieve improvement of students' comprehensive abilities in English study.

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