

Current Situation and Improving Strategies for Intercultural Teaching of English Majors in Ethnic Regions*

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Abstract—Based on the data collected from the questionnaire, test and interview distributed at Inner Mongolia Normal University, Inner Mongolia National University, Chifeng University and Hulunbeier University, the writer has probed into the current situation of Mongolian English students' intercultural communicative competence, their awareness and attitudes towards intercultural teaching and their intercultural knowledge and skills. Besides, the writer puts forward suggestions to improve intercultural teaching for English majors in ethnic regions in terms of developing students' intercultural communicative competence.

Keywords: *intercultural teaching, English majors, ethnic regions*

I. INTRODUCTION

With the acceleration of the world economic integration, intercultural activities are greatly increasing. Cultivating the students' intercultural communicative competence and improving the quality of intercultural teaching have attracted much attention.

According to the teaching syllabus for the college English majors, English teaching should help students understand the differences between Chinese and western cultures and try to develop their remarkable abilities in communication, interchange and international cooperation. But unfortunately, the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence of English majors has been neglected in current teaching.

The researcher made a survey from the view of students to understand the current situation of Mongolian English students' intercultural communicative competence, their awareness, attitudes towards intercultural teaching and their intercultural knowledge and skills.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Objects

100 Mongolian English majors with different family background involved in this research come from different areas of Inner Mongolia. They are from Grade Three and Grade Four in Inner Mongolia Normal University, Inner Mongolia National University, Chifeng University and Hulunbeier University.

B. Instrument

Questionnaire, test and interview.

C. Procedure

Firstly, we got some relevant information by using the method of literature investigation and visiting the teaching specialists and frontline teachers. Secondly, we interviewed some students and designing the questionnaire and test. Thirdly, we made statistical analysis based on questionnaire, test and interview.

III. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

All the students were asked to fill out questionnaires and take a test, besides 15 of them were interviewed.

A. Questionnaire

The researcher offered the questionnaires included 20 questions about the level of Mongolian English majors' intercultural communicative competence as well as 15 questions about their awareness and attitudes towards intercultural teaching.

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TABLE I. STATISTICS OF STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

No	Correct Choices	Correct Selection Rate	Maximum Selection in Wrong Choices	Maximum Selection Rate in Wrong Choices
1	A	91%	D	5%
2	B	92%	A	4%
3	D	95%	C	2%
4	A	42%	D	30%
5	C	35%	A	46%
6	D	38%	B	41%
7	B	43%	C	32%
8	A	46%	C	22%
9	A	86%	B	7%
10	C	91%	D	4%
11	D	81%	C	9%
12	B	29%	D	61%
13	D	71%	A	15%
14	C	36%	B	42%
15	C	61%	D	16%
16	A	28%	C	62%
17	D	38%	A	42%
18	C	89%	A	6%
19	A	2%	B	45%
20	B	31%	C	25%

From "Table I", it can be seen that the highest accuracy rates are the first three questions. They are about table manner, basic greeting and farewell. In recent times, some TV programmes, movies and video shows can provide us some relevant information. This is similar to No. 9, 86% students choose A (Thank you) when hearing "You have made a wonderful speech", 7% students choose B (Oh, no, it is not good). This shows that the majority of students in intercultural communication are less affected by the Chinese language communication style. No.5 and No.6 deal with "address". It's quite clear that the error rate is greater than the correct rate. Teacher and student can't be used as a salutation in English, but Chinese can. Americans can call their elders by their given names, but Chinese never. It shows that students unconsciously transfer Chinese culture into English. No.4, No.7, No.8 and No.12 relate to idioms, proverbs and slangs. The accuracy is a little low. The students are not good at them, esp. No.12 "What does 'every dog has its day' mean?" only 29% students make the right choice for B (A time of good fortune comes at last once to everyone). 61% students choose D (Every dog will die at last). Due to different culture, Chinese regard dog as an inferior animal, idioms relate to dog are usually negative; Americans believe dog is a faithful friend, so dogs can be used to describe people. Here students are influenced by Chinese culture deeply. No.10, No.11 and No.13 are about privacy, euphemism and verbal taboo. 91% students make a correct answer to No.10 (It's impolite to ask about American women's age). In Mongolian world, women's age is also forbidden. To No.11 (Which of the following numbers is most unlucky in western countries?), 81% students choose the right answer. To No.13 (Which is the polite name for blacks?), 71% students choose D (African Americans) instead of A (black people). It indicates that with the development of globalization, more and more Chinese have

accepted the western concepts about privacy, euphemism and verbal taboo, esp. young generation. Influenced by Chinese custom, 42 students choose B (fruit) for No.14 (What should we take to visit a patient in hospital?) No.15, No.16 and No.17 are about intercultural knowledge including history, geography and literature. It's proved that the accuracy rate is not high. The last three are about body language. Statistics show that students fail in nonverbal communication except No.18 (OK gesture). The lowest accuracy is No. 19 (What does the pose of "boo" stand for in America?) only 2% students get the correct answer A (Be quiet); 45% students choose B (Dislike sb. and drum him out) according to the Chinese way. Data analysis shows that the students' intercultural communicative competence is very low. Constructive suggestions to deal with this problem should be put forward.

TABLE II. STATISTICS OF STUDENTS' AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS INTERCULTURAL TEACHING

	1	2	3	4	5
A	27%	22%	39%	12%	20%
B	42%	46%	18%	12%	15%
C	20%	18%	30%	41%	39%
D	11%	14%	13%	35%	26%
6	7	8	9	10	
A	25%	11%	42%	9%	37%
B	53%	27%	39%	18%	25%
C	14%	51%	18%	45%	35%
D	8%	11%	1%	28%	3%
11	12	13	14	15	
A	21%	11%	33%	19%	22%
B	15%	22%	34%	50%	39%
C	36%	45%	23%	28%	28%
D	28%	22%	10%	3%	11%

^a. (A= strongly agree; B= agree; C= disagree; D=strongly disagree)

In "Table II", No.1, 69% students believe that culture plays an important role in learning English, 31% students hold a contrary opinion. No.2, 68% students insist that literature and culture courses are conducive to the formation of intercultural awareness, 32% students don't agree. No.3, 57% students hold that it is not easy to master the cultural knowledge of English speaking countries in class, 43% students disagree. No.4, 24% students think it's not necessary to learn about the cultural knowledge of English speaking countries, as there are few involved in their exams, 76% students take the opposite opinion. No.5, 35% students pay attention to cultural phenomena in English learning, 65% students don't. No.6, 78% students are willing to communicate with people from English speaking countries, but they do not know how to avoid misunderstandings, 22% students are not. No. 7, 38% students agree that teachers' intercultural knowledge plays a decisive role in cultivating students' intercultural competence, 62% students don't agree. No.8, 81% students indicate they won't accept Westerners' values when they communicate with them, 19% students will accept. No.9, 27% students are good at observing cultural differences when communicating with people of different cultures, 73% are not. No.10, 62% students hold that their teaching materials used now haven't enough cultural

knowledge about English speaking countries, 38% students don't agree. No.11, 36% students suggest they can learn English culture through TV, movies and the Internet, 64% students are against. No.12, 33% students can actively communicate with people from different cultures, 67% students can't. No.13, 67% students think that learning English well can improve employment opportunities, 33% students take the opposite opinion. No.14, 69% students insist that it is necessary for teachers to introduce western cultures in class, 31% students take the opposite opinion. No.15, 61% students believe that intercultural teaching is one of the effective ways to improve students' English level, 39% students take the opposite opinion.

In a word, most of the students agree that culture is very important for language learning and they also have a strong desire to learn cultural knowledge of English speaking countries. But unfortunately, they seldom pay attention to cultural phenomena in English learning. Although they are willing to communicate with people from English speaking countries, they have no abilities to deal with intercultural communication freely. Their attitudes towards intercultural teaching are positive. They hope more information on culture of English speaking countries in their textbooks and more intercultural knowledge given by their teachers in class. Teachers in ethnic regions should change their teaching modes according to the current situation, and increase intercultural knowledge so as to improve students' intercultural communicative competence.

B. Test

The researcher offered 20 multiple choice questions (20x5'=100') about intercultural communicative knowledge and skills.

TABLE III. STATISTICS OF STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TEST

Score	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
25	2	2.0	2.0
30	5	5.0	7.0
35	4	4.0	11.0
40	6	6.0	17.0
45	10	10.0	27.0
50	16	16.0	43.0
55	12	12.0	55.0
60	11	11.0	66.0
65	10	10.0	76.0
70	7	7.0	83.0
75	3	3.0	86.0
80	8	8.0	94.0
85	5	5.0	99.0
90	1	1.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	

"Table III" shows clearly that the students are short of intercultural communicative knowledge and skills. The highest score is 90, accounting for 1 percent of the total. The lowest score is 25, accounting for 2 percent of the total. Over 60 points account for 45%. Those under 60 points accounts

for 55%. The largest proportion is between 45 points and 65 points. Measures must be taken to solve this problem.

C. Interview

In order to make the survey reliable, the researcher interviewed 15 students to further find out the level of Mongolian English students' intercultural communicative competence, the current situation and problems existing in intercultural teaching in ethnic regions as well as the real ideas and suggestions about current intercultural teaching of the students. The following questions are provided.

- When communicating with people from English speaking countries, can you talk with them naturally and smoothly? If not? Why?
- Are you satisfied with the current intercultural teaching in your class? Why or why not?
- What kind of teaching method do you think is useful to improve intercultural teaching?

All the students expressed that they couldn't talk with people from English speaking countries naturally and smoothly not only because of English language knowledge, but also the interruption of communication caused by lack of intercultural knowledge. 14 students are not satisfied with the current intercultural teaching in their class. They think they lack intercultural communicative atmosphere. Their teachers are so concerned with cultivation of linguistic competence and skills in examination that they offer little information about interculture. The English, Chinese and their native language thinking models are different. This brings difficulties to their learning. The students put forward the following ways to improve intercultural teaching: combining the teaching material with the British and American culture to make a comparison; holding regular lectures on special topics; making a combination of classroom teaching, discussion and extracurricular activities; encouraging the students to learn English culture through TV, movies and the Internet.

IV. WAYS TO IMPROVE INTERCULTURAL TEACHING FOR ENGLISH MAJORS IN ETHNIC REGIONS

A. Improving teachers' intercultural literacy

Foreign language teaching is not only language teaching, but also intercultural language teaching. Intercultural language teachers should have a great deal of intercultural knowledge, strong intercultural awareness and competence. They can fully understand the significance of intercultural teaching and master the basic intercultural teaching methods. In the process of teaching, they should integrate language and culture and develop students' intercultural communicative competence. However, due to the following reasons, most teachers still adopt traditional teaching concepts and teaching methods in language teaching in ethnic regions currently. First, many universities evaluate teachers in terms of the passing rate of TEM4 and TEM8. Therefore, teacher pays much attention to cultivating

students' linguistic competence and skills in examination instead of offering more intercultural knowledge and skills. Second, teachers lack the correct understanding of intercultural teaching. Third, there is a shortage of qualified teachers for intercultural communication in ethnic regions. Till now, there are few teachers who have overseas travel experience or learning experience, and most of them lack the experience of English teaching in intercultural communication. And the last, the study of intercultural teaching starts late and develops slowly in China. Although we have made great achievements in the academic guidance of intercultural communication, the systematic and scientific theory is still in the initial stage. So, very little experience can be used by English teachers in teaching. We must take some measures to meet the situation. First of all, it is improving teachers' understanding of intercultural communication. Only by fully understanding the importance of intercultural teaching can teachers handle the relationship between language teaching and culture teaching. This can help them change the traditional teaching concept and modes and pay much attention to cultivating students' intercultural competence. Secondly, it is improving teachers' professional skills. Teacher plays a dominant role in teaching activities, and has an irreplaceable influence on the students' ideologies and abilities. So teachers need to know the importance of improving their cultural qualities. They need to increase their cultural background knowledge about English speaking countries. Universities should provide teachers with a variety of opportunities to learn intercultural knowledge, e.g.: intercultural communication training, cultural lectures, academic exchanges, seminars, overseas investigation. These can improve teachers' intercultural awareness and intercultural sensitivities. Only teachers themselves have good intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence can they cultivate qualified students.

B. Improving the teaching mode

Intercultural communication is closely related to English teaching. Traditional teaching only focuses on the teaching of language knowledge, which is not conducive to cultivating students' intercultural awareness. This teaching mode must be changed. Teachers can expand and supplement some intercultural knowledge involved in teaching. The following ways can be adopted. First, it is using contrast teaching. Teachers are required to analyze the cultural information in teaching, and summarize the important similarities and differences between Chinese and western cultures and then lead the students to understand the similarities and differences between Chinese and western cultures in thinking modes and values. In this way, students will have a deep understanding of multi-culture. Second, it is combining culture teaching with task-based teaching. Students lack initiative and enthusiasm in the process of passively accepting knowledge under the traditional teaching mode, while task-based teaching can change the situation. Task-based teaching can motivate students to learn actively. Combining culture teaching with task-based teaching can make students learn English and culture actively and

meanwhile improve their intercultural communicative competence. Third, it is integrating traditional teaching into intercultural knowledge teaching. Culture is the core of language teaching. The cultivation of cultural awareness cannot be separated from language teaching. Cultivating students' cultural awareness is the promotion of their language abilities. In the process of training students' abilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing, teachers should introduce cultural differences in listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, discourse analysis, literary works appreciation and so on. It can not only promote the students' communicative abilities, but also help them develop their humanistic qualities, form a multi-dimensional thinking mode and become an intercultural person. Fourth, it is improving intercultural communicative practice. Universities should provide students with opportunities to study abroad, or sign relevant agreements with foreign companies to provide practical experience for students. Students should take part in various intercultural communicative activities, experience cultural differences, and use the knowledge they have learned to deal with the problems in intercultural communication flexibly. This way can further improve their intercultural communicative competence.

C. Improving the teaching materials

Teaching material is an important basis for teaching activities. It specifies the content and objectives of teaching activities. In current times, most of the teaching materials used in ethnic regions are to train students' abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. Thus the English language and intercultural communication are separated artificially. Students' intercultural communicative competence can not be developed. Teaching materials must be improved. English language learning should be combined with intercultural communication. The best teaching materials should include the multi-culture of the combination of natural science and the humanities, eg: politics, economy, culture, education, science and technology about English speaking countries. English news can be adopted because of its timeliness, universality, conspicuousness and interestingness. Students have a strong interest and sensitivity to new things and they are willing to discuss the international events. English news can be a good channel for connecting textbooks and reality, classroom teaching and extracurricular activities. It has unique linguistic style and stylistic features which reflects the culture of the times. Teachers can use audio and video to introduce the English news, and try to encourage students to express their ideas. This will not only shorten the distance between English learning and application, but also change the pattern from the examination language learning mode to the practical language learning mode. The Belt and Road Initiative requires us to spread Chinese culture and minority culture to the countries along. So it is urgent to develop some English teaching materials about native culture. Intercultural communication is the interaction of different cultures, and translators must be proficient in two or more cultures. Mastering only one culture and one language is impossible

for intercultural communication. We need to teach students to express Chinese culture and their native culture in English. Increasing knowledge of Chinese culture, minority culture and the comparative knowledge of Chinese and western cultures so as to improve the students' intercultural communicative competence and cultural capacity. Only when the teaching material is combined with the students' real language environment can we develop their abilities to correctly use the context to convey cultural information.

D. Creating an atmosphere of intercultural communication

It is necessary to create a language environment for students to improve their intercultural communicative competence. Firstly, it is to develop various classroom activities to build intercultural communicative situation. Teachers can design imitated context of situation to develop students' language abilities and understanding of multi-culture in classroom teaching. Secondly, it is to develop all kinds of extracurricular activities to create an atmosphere of intercultural communication. English Corner can provide students with opportunities to communicate with foreigners directly. It is the best place for students to improve their oral English. Teachers should encourage students to speak English bravely and overcome their psychological difficulties. English Speaking Contest, English Song Competition and English Drama Performance can make students get practical exercise in the atmosphere of intercultural communication. Best western television shows can bring students into the real cultural context to enjoy their culture. Regular screenings of classic films or documentaries for students can mobilize their learning enthusiasm and initiative, and make them understand the cultural differences between China and western countries. This can help them improve their intercultural awareness. Thirdly, it is to improve the cultural teaching facilities and building multimedia teaching facilities. With the help of the Internet, let students get in touch with the mass media and experience the English language and culture.

V. CONCLUSION

According to the data analysis, Mongolian English students' intercultural communicative competence is very low. Their awareness, attitudes towards intercultural teaching are positive. Though they lack intercultural knowledge and skills, they are interested in the culture of English speaking countries and are willing to take part in all kinds of intercultural activities. They also enjoy communicating with people from English speaking countries. These positive attitudes will undoubtedly lay a solid foundation for improving their intercultural communicative competence. In order to meet the needs of social development, English teachers in ethnic regions should take the cultivation of students' intercultural communicative competence as the main task in their future teaching.

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