

An Empirical Study on the Cultivation of Cross-cultural Communicative Competence of English Major Students in Zhejiang Ocean University Based on “One Belt and One Road” Initiative

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the cultivation of cross-cultural communicative competence is believed to be very important in English teaching. The purpose of this paper is to explore the cultivation of cross-cultural communicative competence in college English teaching. To achieve this purpose, English major students from Zhejiang Ocean University are asked to fill out a questionnaire and accept an interview. The results show that many deficiencies exist. According to the problems, the author will give corresponding suggestions from different aspects.

Keywords: cross-cultural communicative competence; college English teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

Under the “One Belt and One Road” Initiative, China has more opportunities to cooperate with foreign enterprises. To achieve better cooperation, China needs more talents who master foreign languages, and possess cross-cultural communicative competence. Therefore, this leads to higher requirements for college students, especially English major students. In 2018, the Ministry of Education issued the National Standards for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Universities. For the first time, students of foreign language majors are required to improve their cross-cultural competence. In order to know the status quo in ocean universities, the author will make a survey in Zhejiang Ocean University. To make the results more convincing, quantitative research with qualitative research are both adopted. Taking the results obtained from Zhejiang Ocean University, although some courses about cross-culture have been set in college, many aspects should be improved. To comprehensively promote the cultivation of cross-cultural communicative competence in college English teaching, the author gives different suggestions to students, teachers and universities.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Policy Background

The Belt and Road Initiative, proposed by Xi Jinping in 2013, is designed to connect economies in East Asia and Europe. With the development of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has more and more opportunities to communicate with foreign countries. However, the languages, cultures and religions in the Belt and Road countries are different. To search for better cooperation, higher requirements for cross-cultural communicative competence is put forward. As an important part of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Belt, ocean universities in China are responsible to cultivate their students' cross-cultural communicative competence.

In 2000, to cater the requirements of new era, Teaching Syllabus for English Majors was approved and promulgated[1]. The syllabus is a guidance for English teaching of English major students and the theoretical basis for organizing teaching, compiling teaching materials, inspecting and evaluating the quality of teaching. It not only requires students to master the language, but also pay much attention to improve their comprehensive ability to communicate in English, including the cross-cultural communicative competence.

In 2015, College English Curriculum Requirements (Discussion Version) explicitly proposed cross-cultural competence as one of the core contents. In 2018, the Ministry of Education issued the National Standards for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Universities [2]. This is the first time in the national undergraduate teaching quality standards for foreign language majors to put forward the requirements of intercultural competence, and clear the important position of intercultural communicative competence in foreign language teaching.

2.2. Theoretical Background

Chinese and foreign experts have had different definitions to intercultural communication competence and intercultural competence so far, but it can be basically classified into three categories: intercultural communication competence is equivalent to intercultural competence, intercultural communication competence is greater than intercultural competence, intercultural communication competence is less than intercultural competence.

Lusting and Chen believe intercultural competence and intercultural communication competence are the same concept, which can substitute for each other [3].

Byram believes intercultural competence is only a part of intercultural communication competence [4]. He believes intercultural competence is composed of knowledge, attitude, skills, critical cultural awareness and so on. Chinese expert Wen Qiufang views intercultural communication competence from the perspective of intercultural oral communicative competence [5]. She believes intercultural communicative competence consist of communicative competence and intercultural competence.

The last one is that intercultural communicative competence covers intercultural communicative competence. The representatives are Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey[6], who hold the belief that intercultural communicative competence includes many elements and intercultural communicative competence is one of them.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND FINDINGS

3.1. Research Objects

The research objects are randomly selected students major in English (including English, business English and educational English) of different grades from Zhejiang Ocean University, Zhoushan, China. They have different educational backgrounds. In order to get a comprehensive view about the cross-cultural competence of English major students, some respondents have attended cross-culture course and some of them have not.

3.2. Research Methods

The subject combined quantitative research with qualitative research. Quantitative scale is the main research method and qualitative interview is complementary. Qualitative method is mainly used to help analyze and explain the questionnaire data, in order to obtain more comprehensive cross-cultural competence of self-evaluation, so as to enhance the accuracy of the results and credibility.

In research, two sets of questionnaires are used. The first one is intercultural competence self-assessment scale. It adopts the Chinese College students' Intercultural Self-assessment competence Scale designed by Fan Weiwei et al[7]. The scale includes 28 description items from four dimensions of cross-cultural knowledge, attitude, skills and awareness. The Likert scale scoring method is adopted, from 0 to 5, representing none, very weak, weak, strong and very strong.

And the second one is foreign language courses assessment scale. It is based on the dimension framework of American NSSE educational effectiveness measurement standard, with reference to the American NSSE[8] and the Chinese version of the questionnaire[9]. Through four dimensions, the scale evaluates the effect of foreign language courses: students' learning in class and students' autonomous learning after class), evaluation of the effectiveness of the teaching modes and methods, the foreign language learning environment (social and campus activities) and learning assessment (foreign language skills upgrading degree and student satisfaction). The Likert scale scoring method was also used in the scale.

3.3. Research Results and Analyses

According to the data of intercultural competence self-assessment Scale, the average of students' cross-cultural communicative attitude(the average is 4.16)and awareness(the average is 3.82) is much higher than the average of knowledge(the average is 3.06) and skills(the average is 3.27). Additionally, the average of foreign culture knowledge(the average is 2.57) is much lower than Chinese culture knowledge(the average is 3.55). As for the skills, the average of cross-cultural communicative skills is 3.37 and the average of cross-cultural cognition skills is 3.16. From the results, we can find most students think they are short of cross-cultural skills and knowledge. Therefore, teachers should help students improve these two aspects in a foreign language course.

In order to find the reasons why students in English major are short of cross-cultural skills and knowledge, we design foreign language course assessment scale. From the scale, frequency to hold foreign language activities is high (the average is 3.991). However, frequency to attend

foreign language activities is comparatively lower (the average is 2.856). Additionally, the frequency to be a volunteer in an international activity and communication with foreigners are both low. The averages are 2.604 and 2.351.

4. DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PROBLEMS

Through the questionnaires and interview, we find the current situation of cross-cultural communicative competence of English Major Students in Zhejiang Ocean University. The existing problems are sorted out according to the dimensions of the research.

Firstly, students lack initiatives. In the foreign language course assessment scale, we find students are not active enough to learn cross-cultural knowledge by themselves before or after class. In the interview, some students mentioned they would search for relevant information if they met something unfamiliar when previewing, whose purpose is just to better understand the teaching materials, but not for their own interests. Additionally, the data shows that English major students are more interested in foreign language movies and TV programs than English books. Therefore, their resources of cross-cultural knowledge are limited.

Secondly, the textbook is restrictive. On the one hand, most of textbooks used in college pay more attention to make sure students can grasp the vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Usually, the introduction of culture background is ignored. On the other hand, the textbooks are restricted to theoretical knowledge. Although some examples are used in some of them, the examples are behind the times. In the interview, some students reflect that they are not interested in theoretical knowledge and they hope teachers can show some fresh examples about foreign culture.

Thirdly, there are few courses that combine English with Chinese culture. Although the learning of foreign culture knowledge can cultivate students cross-cultural communicative competence, Chinese culture knowledge can't be ignored. In the interview, most students agree that it is essential for college students to shoulder the responsibility of spreading Chinese culture. However, some of them say it is difficult for them to spread Chinese culture in another foreign language. Therefore, a lack of courses that combine English with Chinese culture hinders student's advance of cross-cultural communicative competence.

Last but not least, students are short of chance to put into practice what they have learned in class. In class, the main teaching method is that teachers impart the knowledge to students so that the left time for students to practice is limited. After class, although students are encouraged to communicate more with foreigners, few of them will begin an active communication.

Four reasons are listed to account for the above problems. A large part of students say speaking is the most difficult one. If they have few chances to speak in class and their confidence isn't built, they won't dare to communicate in English after class. For the second reason, cross-cultural communication is not involved in the assessment criteria. Most of teachers use a final examination to give students scores, ignoring the importance of practice in a real situation. The third reason is that the activities involved in foreign language teaching and learning are not enough. Actually, some activities about foreign culture are held in campus every year. However, there are fewer activities for the communication between Chinese students in English major and international students. For society, because the limitation of area, international activities held in Zhoushan are comparatively fewer.

5. SUGGESTIONS

5.1. Suggestions for students

College students should be aware of the importance of improving intercultural communication skills in foreign language learning. On the one hand, it is necessary to digest and understand the theoretical knowledge in the books in time, and conscientiously finish the relevant homework. On the other hand, college students, especially English majors should pay more attention to the accumulation of all aspects of culture knowledge. According to the results of the questionnaire survey, college students watch foreign language programs more often than they read foreign language books. The lack of knowledge of foreign language books is not conducive to the improvement of college students' cross-cultural communication skills.

5.2. Suggestions for teachers

At present, most colleges use fixed teaching materials, and the cases in the teaching materials are relatively old. Therefore, teachers should learn more about the latest cross-cultural knowledge and lecture it as a case study combined with theoretical knowledge. If necessary, teachers can also compile the teaching materials according to the level of their students.

In order to prevent students from losing interest in the course because of boring theoretical knowledge, teachers can actively use a variety of teaching equipment. On the one hand, it can mobilize the enthusiasm of students. On the other hand, it also vividly displays knowledge in the textbook.

Teacher is a lifelong learning profession, and teachers should update their educational concepts, continuously optimize teaching design and assignments, and maximize the value of limited time. In traditional classroom teaching, teachers pay too much attention to grammar and

vocabulary but ignore the importance of cross-cultural teaching. Cross-cultural teaching is not only to understand theoretical knowledge, but more importantly, learn how to practice. Despite the limited class time, teachers should ask their students to practice in the class as much as possible, such as case analysis, situational dialogues, etc. If there is no enough time, teachers can leave it after class as homework. After class, students are encouraged to participate in kinds of cross-cultural activities, and the quantities that they attend activities are included in the assessment system.

5.3. Suggestions for universities

The university has the responsibility to actively organize foreign language activities to create a good atmosphere for students, and increase the number of exchange activities between English majors and international students to build a bridge for cross-cultural communication.

The university should attach importance to the cultivation of cross-cultural communicative competence and continuously improve the cross-cultural curriculum system, which not only broadens the breadth of cross-cultural courses, but also expands the depth. For example, courses related to foreign languages and Chinese culture can be added so that when students learn more about foreign culture, they can also tell Chinese stories and spread Chinese voices. In addition, the universities can also set cross-cultural courses with marine characteristics to cultivate compound talents.

6. CONCLUSION

“One Belt and One Road” Initiative is an important development strategy in China, and cross-cultural communicative competence of college students affect the strategy. To further facilitate the construction of the “One Belt and One Road” Initiative, China needs to cultivate more outstanding foreign language talents to act as a communicative bridge which is inseparable from the support of students, teachers, university and society.

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