



Global Competence of Chinese College Students: Status Quo, Influencing Factors, and Development Path

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Abstract. Against the global context and the urgent demand for talents with global competence, this study explores the improvement path of global competence of Chinese college students. As a literature review, it first clarifies the core connotation of global competence (centered on knowledge, skills, and attitudes, with extended classifications such as OECD's four-dimensional model). It then analyzes the current situation of Chinese college students. Their global competence is generally at a medium level, with shortcomings in in-depth understanding of international rules, intercultural communication skills, and initiative to participate in global issues. Significant differences exist between students from different universities and majors. Next, this study identifies influencing factors, including internal factors (personal interest and motivation, foreign language ability, learning ability, and thinking mode) and external factors (family background, school education, and social environment), among which school education is the most critical. Finally, it proposes a multi-dimensional improvement path involving students, schools, and families. This study enriches the theoretical system of global competence and provides practical guidance for universities to cultivate globally competent talents.

Keywords: Chinese undergraduates; global competence; influencing factors; development path

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In a global context, countries around the world are deeply interconnected in politics, economy, culture, and technology. Meanwhile, global issues such as climate change, public health crises, and energy shortages continue to worsen, and addressing these challenges requires talents with a global perspective and intercultural communication capabilities [1]. Global competence generally emphasizes the ability to understand cultural differences, engage in intercultural interactions, and respond to global issues (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [2]. OECD defines this concept in four dimensions: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values [2].

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Research on global competence began in the late 1980s, focusing on exploring its connotation and significance. Research institutions are mostly concentrated in British and American universities [3]. A research upsurge emerged in 2018 due to the PISA assessment. OECD and Harvard University jointly released the PISA Global Competence Framework and incorporated "global competence" into the 2018 PISA assessment, which further promoted relevant research [3].

College students are the main force participating in international affairs and global competitions in the future, and their level of global competence is not only related to personal career development and international competitiveness but also profoundly impacts long-term global development [4][5]. However, Chinese college students generally show insufficient global competence, such as a narrow global perspective, insufficient intercultural communication skills, and limited understanding of international rules and global issues [3].

Against this background, the present study aims to examine the status quo, influencing factors, and development pathway of Chinese undergraduates' global competence. It contributes to the current literature and educational practice with a systematic synthesis. The following section introduces the theoretical and practical significance.

1.2 Significance

By combining the characteristics of Chinese college students and educational reality, it deeply explores the connotation, factors, and cultivation mechanism of global competence, providing new perspectives and ideas for academic research in this field. At the same time, it helps promote the development of related disciplines such as intercultural education and international education. For universities, this study provides important guidance. It helps universities clarify talent cultivation goals and directions, optimize curriculum design and teaching methods, strengthen international exchanges and cooperation, and improve talent cultivation quality, thereby cultivating more globally competent talents [5]. For college students themselves, it helps improve their comprehensive quality and international competitiveness, expand their career development space, better adapt to the development needs in a global context, and demonstrate the demeanor of Chinese youth on the international stage.

2 Methodology

This study adopts a literature review study. The researcher searched research articles in Web of Science (WOS, SSCI core database) and CNKI (CSSCI database) for high-quality research articles, with two key terms "global competence" and "Chinese students" for WOS database and "global competence" and "college student" for CNKI. WOS returns 124 research articles, and CNKI concordances 10 articles. We screened these articles by reading the Abstract and Participants sections in each article. Inclusion criteria include: 1) empirical research, 2) Chinese undergraduates as participants.

Research Questions

1. What is the status quo of Chinese college students' global competence?

2. What factors influence Chinese college students' global competence?
3. How can Chinese college students' global competence be improved?

3 Status Quo of Global Competence of Chinese College Students

Global competence of Chinese college students is generally at a medium level, with obvious shortcomings in three dimensions: knowledge, skills, and attitudes [3]. In terms of knowledge, some students have a basic understanding of global politics, economy, and culture, but they lack in-depth knowledge of international rules and global hot issues. For example, most students only have a superficial understanding of international trade rules, such as the WTO dispute settlement mechanism, and global climate governance agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, but cannot accurately grasp core details [5].

As for skills, their intercultural communication ability is a prominent shortcoming. When communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, most students find it difficult to accurately understand the other party's cultural customs (e.g., etiquettes in Western countries) and expression habits (e.g., direct vs. implicit communication styles), leading to frequent misunderstandings. In addition, their foreign language application ability needs to be improved, especially in professional fields, as many students cannot use foreign languages to conduct in-depth discussions on professional issues or write formal academic documents [3].

Regarding attitudes, some students are willing to participate in international affairs, but they lack the initiative to pay attention to and participate in global issues. For example, few students take the initiative to follow international news through authoritative foreign media or participate in global public welfare activities. At the same time, they show various tolerance and respect for different cultures. Some students hold cultural biases, believing that their own cultural concepts are "superior," and are unwilling to understand or accept cultural differences [5].

In addition, there are obvious differences in global competence among students from different universities and majors. Students from key universities and foreign-related majors (e.g., international trade, foreign languages) generally have higher global competence. This is because key universities have more international exchange resources and better international teaching environments, and foreign-related majors integrate international content into daily teaching [3]. In contrast, students from ordinary universities and non-foreign-related majors (e.g., some traditional engineering majors) have relatively weak global competence due to limited resources and teaching orientation.

4 Influencing Factors of Global Competence of Chinese College Students

4.1 Internal Factors

Personal Interest and Motivation. Interest and motivation are fundamental for active

engagement with global competence-related content. These two factors determine whether learners approach international knowledge as a voluntary pursuit or a passive task. Tan [3] found in a study of 500 university students that active learners (with clear international goals) demonstrated 37% higher scores on global competence assessments (e.g., intercultural problem-solving, global issue awareness) than passive peers over one year.

Foreign Language Ability. Foreign language proficiency (especially English, the dominant language of international communication) is a prerequisite for accessing global resources and participating in intercultural interactions. It directly determines the breadth and depth of a learner's engagement with the global community. Ren and Xia [5] and Tan [3] independently confirmed that university students with intermediate-to-advanced foreign language proficiency were much more likely to participate in international exchange programs or global collaborative projects than those with lower proficiency.

Learning Ability and Thinking Mode. Global competence requires learners to process complex, interconnected global issues (e.g., climate change, global inequality) and adapt to diverse cultural contexts, skills that depend heavily on learning ability and thinking modes. Leng et al. [6] surveyed 300 undergraduate students majoring in international studies and found that autonomous, critical/innovative thinkers were 42% more likely to produce high-quality research on global issues (e.g., policy briefs, case studies) than rote learners, as judged by international academic panels.

4.2 External Factors

Family Background. Family background affects students' access to international resources. Families with good economic conditions and overseas experience can provide students with more opportunities to contact international culture, such as supporting them to participate in overseas summer camps, study abroad exchange programs, or interact with foreign friends [3]. In addition, families that pay attention to global issues will guide students to discuss international hot topics from an early age, helping them form a global perspective. On the contrary, families with limited economic conditions and no overseas experience cannot provide such resources, so students from these families are disadvantaged in the cultivation of global competence.

School Education. Schools are the primary institutions responsible for systematically cultivating global competence. However, the quality and design of school education vary widely, leading to significant differences in learner outcomes. Ren and Xia [5] and Tan [3] noted that graduates of the Southwest Jiaotong University-Leeds Joint School had a higher employment rate in multinational companies than graduates of traditional engineering programs, claiming their strong global competence as a key advantage.

Social Environment. The social environment affects the atmosphere of global competence cultivation. At present, the promotion and popularization of global competence in Chinese society are insufficient. Many enterprises and institutions do not pay enough attention to global competence in recruitment, but only focus on professional skills, which leads to low motivation to improve their global competence [3]. In addition, high-quality international exchange platforms and resources (e.g., international voluntary service projects, international youth forums) are relatively limited and unevenly distributed, and most are concentrated in first-tier cities, making it difficult for students in second- and third-tier cities to access, which restricts the overall improvement of Chinese college students' global competence.

5 Development Pathways of Chinese College Students' Global Competence

Based on the current situation of Chinese college students' global competence, its influencing factors, and the experiences of developed countries, this study proposes a multi-dimensional improvement path involving students, schools, families, and society.

5.1 Student-Level Initiatives

Students should take the initiative to enhance their global competence through self-driven learning and practice. First, they can cultivate interest in global issues by following authoritative international media (e.g., The New York Times and the BBC) and participating in student organizations focused on international exchange (e.g., Model United Nations clubs) [7]. Setting clear international development goals, such as studying abroad for graduate studies or working in international organizations, can also provide sustained motivation for improving global competence [3]. Second, students need to strengthen foreign language skills. For instance, they can join language exchange groups to practice oral communication with international students, or read academic papers written in the target language in their fields of study to improve professional foreign language competence. For example, engineering students can read journals like *Nature* to understand the latest global technological developments [5]. Third, students should develop critical thinking and autonomous learning abilities. They can participate in online courses on global issues and engage in discussions with peers to analyze issues from multiple perspectives, avoiding a one-sided understanding of global events.

5.2 School-Level Reforms

Schools play a core role in systematic global competence cultivation and need to optimize education models from curriculum design, teaching methods, international exchange, and faculty development. The following are some possible strategies that schools can adopt to improve students' global competence.

Optimizing the curriculum system. Schools may integrate global competence into professional education and general education, for example, adding "International Trade Rules" to the curriculum of international trade majors and "Intercultural Communication" to the general education requirements for all students. Schools can develop interdisciplinary courses like "Global Environmental Governance" that combine environmental science, law, and economics to train students' comprehensive problem-solving abilities.

Innovating teaching methods. Schools can replace traditional lecture-based teaching with interactive methods such as case teaching and intercultural group projects. For instance, instructors can assign students to simulate marketing campaigns for a Chinese brand entering the European market, requiring them to consider cultural differences in consumer behavior or use online collaborative platforms (e.g., Zoom and Microsoft Teams) to carry out joint online courses with foreign universities, allowing students to collaborate with overseas peers on academic projects [6].

Strengthening international exchange and cooperation. Schools may expand high-quality international exchange programs, such as partnerships with top universities worldwide, and offer more long-term exchange opportunities (e.g., one-semester or one-year study abroad) instead of short-term tours. It is also helpful to collaborate with international organizations and multinational companies to establish internship bases, to provide internships for majors that require international learning experiences. Also, universities may actively recruit international students and organize cultural exchange activities (e.g., "Chinese-Foreign Cultural Night") to create a multicultural campus environment.

Improving faculty development. Universities may recruit teachers with international experience (e.g., overseas teaching or research experience) and provide training on global competence teaching for existing faculty, for example, organizing workshops on intercultural teaching methods to help teachers design courses that integrate global elements [5].

5.3 Family-Level Support

Families should provide a supportive environment for students to develop global competence. First, they may change traditional educational concepts, recognizing the importance of global competence for students' future development and encouraging them to pay attention to international affairs. For example, families can discuss global hot topics with students during family gatherings to cultivate their global awareness [3]. Second, parents should provide necessary resource support: within financial capacity, funding students to participate in international summer camps or language training programs. Helping students collect information on international exchange opportunities, such as sharing study abroad application guides or internship recruitment information from international organizations. Third, colleges should guide students to develop cultural tolerance, encouraging them to interact with international students or learn about foreign cultures through documentaries and helping them avoid cultural biases and respect diversity.

5.4 Social-Level Collaboration

Society should create a favorable atmosphere and provide resources to support the improvement of college students' global competence. First, society should strengthen public promotion, such as using media platforms (e.g., social media and educational channels) to popularize the concept and importance of global competence, changing the perception that "only foreign-related majors need global competence." Second, enterprises and institutions should adjust recruitment standards to increase the weight of global competence indicators (e.g., intercultural work experience and foreign language proficiency) in recruitment, and set up special recruitment programs for students with international experience (e.g., overseas internships) to motivate students to improve their global competence [3]. Third, social resources should be integrated: government departments (e.g., the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) can build a national platform for international exchange resources, integrating information on overseas internships, volunteer projects, and academic forums, and making it accessible to students across the country. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can collaborate with universities to launch international public welfare projects, such as organizing students to participate in global poverty alleviation initiatives, providing more practical opportunities for global competence development [8].

6 Conclusions

The global competence of Chinese college students is generally at a medium level, with obvious deficiencies in three dimensions: knowledge (insufficient in-depth understanding of international rules), skills (weak intercultural communication ability), and attitude (lack of initiative to participate in global issues). Additionally, there are significant differences between students from different universities and majors: key universities and foreign-related majors have higher levels of global competence than ordinary universities and non-foreign-related majors [3][9]. The global competence of Chinese college students is affected by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include personal interest and motivation, foreign language ability, and learning ability/thinking mode; external factors include family background, school education, and social environment. Among these, school education is the most critical factor, as it directly determines the systematic cultivation of students' global competence [3].

Improving Chinese college students' global competence requires multi-stakeholder collaboration: students should take the initiative to learn and practice; schools need to reform curriculum and teaching methods; families should provide support and guidance, and society should create a favorable atmosphere and integrate resources. Only through such a collaborative effort can a comprehensive and effective improvement system be formed [3][9].

The articles in this study mainly focus on universities in first-tier and second-tier cities (e.g., Beijing, Shanghai, and Chengdu), with fewer samples from third-tier and fourth-tier cities. This may lead to an overestimation of the overall level of Chinese college students' global competence, as students in less developed regions may have more limited access to international resources. Future research should include univer-

sities in third-tier and fourth-tier cities, as well as vocational colleges, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the global competence of Chinese college students across different regions and school types.

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