

# From Theory Based to Practical Competence Based

## --Course Design Framework for Intercultural Communication

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**Key words:** Intercultural communication, course, non-English majors.

**Abstract.** With the swift development of technology and economy, intercultural communication and cooperation has become increasing frequent. College students as the main reserves of socialist modernization drivers of China, the intercultural communication competence should be the basic requirement for them. Thus the intercultural communication course has attracted the attention of more and more colleges and universities. However, the course and the course design for intercultural communication is still in its initial stage, especially in China. In view of the problems mentioned above, on the basis of literature review, a practical and innovative way is put forward in the paper. It is proved that this model of teaching is a reference for intercultural communication course enriches and develops the ways of teaching this course.

### Introduction

Intercultural communication course is an integrated product which contains anthropology, psychology, linguistic, sociology and so on. The foundational theory is proposed by Edward T.Hall. With the economic and science highly development, the exchange in politics and economy with other countries has become more and more frequent. Chinese students and graduates have more changes to communicate and work with foreigners than ever before, then culture barriers have become an emergency problem in communication. Therefore, the importance of intercultural communication arouses a lot of scholars and teachers attention.

In China, English course is a compulsory course for all of the students in colleges and universities. But the traditional English course mainly focuses on language study and language competence is unqualified for the teaching and learning. Culture and language cannot be deprived from each other, we learn a target language we should learn it's cultural; when we learn English for communication then culture knowledge is the basic element. Nowadays, most of the Chinese students study English with a clear purpose for communication, for this reason the intercultural communication course focuses not only language itself but also the culture and communication will become a main course for more and more English learners.

### The exploring stage and experiments

Intercultural communication course is a newly thing for most colleges and universities which appears recently. For most colleges and universities this course mainly focuses on the theory study, the lack of vivid and abundant cases has become a common issue for most of the teachers who teach this course. Apart from that, the alienation of theory from practice leads to the hardship in inspiring students' interesting. Then the research and experiment on the improvement for this course have three stages.

Table 1 Three stage comparing

	Teacher	Contents	Way of teaching	Practical training	Effects
Stage 1	Chinese teacher	Theories Cases	Task-based Lecture	Interview Cultural video	Hard to inspire students interests Students can't understand the theory well.
Stage 2	Chinese teacher Foreign teacher	Theories Language Cases Practical skills	Task-based Lecture	Cultural video	Students have great interests in this course. Students can't understand the theory well.
Stage 3	Chinese teacher Foreign teacher	Practical Knowledge Language Cases Theories	Task-based Lecture Co-teach	Interview Cultural video Internship program	Students have great interests in this course. Students can understand the theory well.

From the above table, we can discover that stage 3 is the most successful stages compare to the other two stages. In stage one, like most of the other teachers who teaches this course, theory is the basic and mainly contents in teaching, which weakens the students' interests; by the way, a lot of students still have poor understanding in theory. In conclusion, theory-based textbook, and theory-based teaching model, are the mainly reasons for this. Then in stage 2, we take language study and practical skills as part of the teaching contents, so we changed the textbook and hired two foreign teachers to teach this course. Via the students' evaluation of teaching, we discovered that the students who study in foreign teachers classes have great interest in study this course, the foreign teachers' firsthand experiences and way of teaching gave students a lot of implications in real communication. Then we tested again, and another problem appeared, most of the students who study in foreign teachers' class have problems in understanding the theory, and most of them can not fulfill the course activity well. In stage 3, the adoption of the co-teach method and the re-position of the teaching model resolve all the problems have mentioned above. First of all, practical communication ability has become the chief teaching aims. Chinese teacher and foreign teacher choose suitable chapters for them to have class with students, in this way each students can have two teachers in different ways. Thus students can get more practical skills and experiences from the experiential model of study and the comparison of the different ways of teaching from both Chinese and foreign teachers.

### The Framework Overview

From the above experiments and research, the design framework has become more and more clear.

**Teaching Aims:** The teachers are expecting to help students who study this course.

1. Get familiar with the main theories
2. Enhance English language ability and communication ability
3. Form cross culture sense and susceptibility
4. Grasp the main skills and knowledge of how to handle some intercultural conflicts and intercultural communication cases

## 5. Master some general culture knowledge

### Teaching Contents and Methodology:

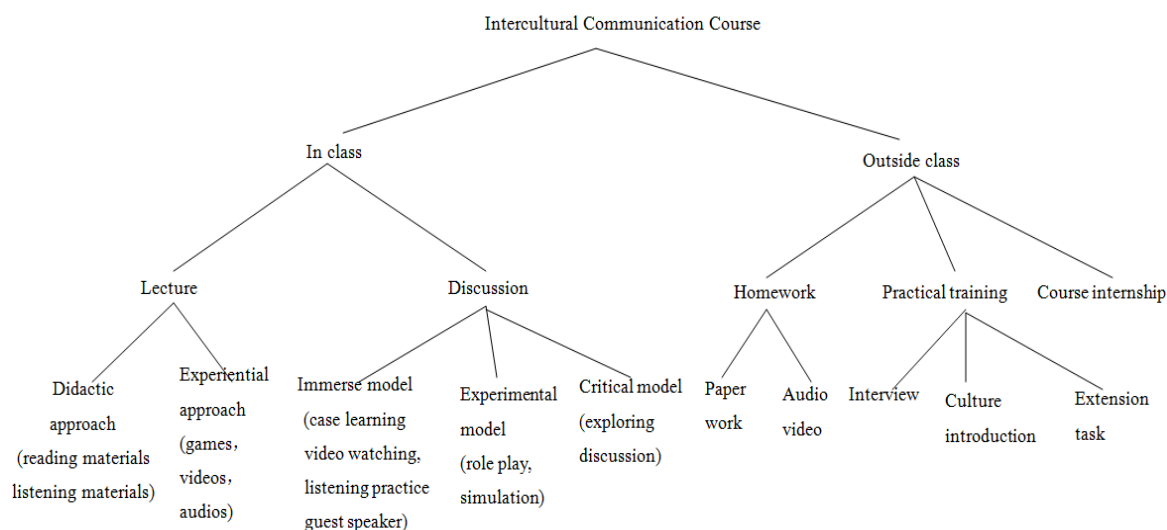


Fig. 1 Course design framework

From Fig 1, we can get a clear picture of the teaching contents and methodology for this course. Each week students have 160-min for class, 80-min for lectures 80-min for discussion. Lecture refers to the teachers are expected to elaborate and explain the theory for the students, this kind of classes are more teacher-centered. But so as to inspire the students' interest, we can use both didactic approach and experiential approach, to let the students understand the theory from reading, listening materials and so on. In discussion class, students can have more chances to have more practical practice; they can learn more cases in order to apply what they have learnt in lecture class. Then we design three models, immerse model, the model intend to help students contact more cases and more real communication scene; experimental model, the model hoping to let the students get involved in the real communication; critical model, the model for students and teachers to make some exploring discussion, thereby enhance the students communication awareness.

Apart from the class, students still can have more time to study this course outside class, other than the traditional English class, the home work and assignments for this course are verity. There are two types of homework paper work and non-paper work. Paper work including case analysis, definition matching, comments and so on; Non-paper work including video, audio, presentation, role play and so on. Practical training is a part for students to enhance their practical skills in real communication. For instance, they can take a video for an interview with a foreigner, or make a video to introduce a Chinese traditional custom in English, or reproduce some real cases in communication to prove the theories and so on. To increase students' motivation, we design a special part –course internship, it means the students who study this course can do some short internship. For example, we choose some outstanding students to work as volunteers in some large-scale intercultural activities organized by school, and we also try to find more chances to let the students join in some big international events as so to practice their communication ability.

### The teaching materials

According to Zhang Hong-ling, there is no very good English textbook take intercultural communication competence as object in China. (P277) Aside from this, intercultural communication course as one of the courses for course cluster, the optional books are even less. Thus we edit a handout by the teaching group, there are 14 chapters, there are four parts for each chapter, Module 1--Theories study, Module 2--Case study, Module 3--Skills, Module 4--Extensive

reading. Instructors should select a theory (or set of theories which are compatible) that is supported by research and with which they feel comfortable to guide their course. The theory selected not only provides the conceptual framework for the course, it provides the framework for improving communication skills.(William B, Stealla & Richard,1991,P.275) Then we select the basic theories for this course, and some reading materials so as to enhance the students communication skills. And the handouts are for non-English majors so the students reading and learning ability should be taken into consideration.

### **The assessment and evaluation of this course**

As just now mentioned above, the main teaching aim for this course is to enhance students intercultural communication competence, therefore, the assessment policy is defined as follow:

40% paper test

20% practical training

20% daily performance

For most of the courses in Chinese universities and colleges paper test weight heavily in final test score, while this course as a course emphasis on practical competence, so we reduce the percentage to 40%. Then we can have 20% for practical training, this part is an important part for this course, we design some term projects for students to finish with other group members.

### **Summary**

The traditional English course based on language competence is more and more difficult to meet the needs for the college students and the social developments. Thus intercultural communication as a synthetic subject will become more and more important in college English teaching, whereas in China this course is still in its pioneer stage, the lack of the mature and systematic course framework, and experienced teacher, pragmatic textbook are the fundamental problems. The transition from theory based to practical competence based can be taken as an outburst for this course, this course was a very unpopular course among the students, but now the number of the students who choose this course almost triple the number form the very beginning.

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